

**Between Religion and the State:  
Religious Bureaucracy and the Production of Islamic Sermons in Turkey**

James Gibbon  
Princeton University

Government involvement in religion is a global phenomenon, and while new cross-national datasets have allowed scholars to study its impact on a range of outcomes, we still know little about the practices of agencies charged with administering religious affairs. My research sheds light on the inner workings of a religious bureaucracy in order to show how government oversight shapes the creation of religious knowledge and how boundaries between religion and politics are negotiated within a democratic state. I explore the case of Islamic sermon production in Turkey, where the avowedly secular government oversees virtually all public religious matters, from the training of imams to the management of more than 79,000 mosques. Clerics at the Directorate of Religious Affairs (DRA) also prepare the weekly sermons that are read nationwide during Friday prayers, with topics ranging from personal hygiene to human rights. I ask: How has state regulation shaped the religious content transmitted weekly to nearly 20 million Muslims? How do clerics employed by the state reconcile tension between bureaucratic directives and theological commitments when they craft Friday sermons? Drawing on sermon texts spanning eight decades, documents from government archives, interviews with religious officials, and rare ethnographic data from within the DRA, my work explains how trademarks of contemporary Turkish Islam – Golden Rule ethics and the avoidance of politics – have been institutionalized over time and how the DRA has evolved to become a champion of public religion.