

No religious dimension?

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In an [interview](#) with Oxford professor Michael Willis about Tunisia, Radio Free Europe correspondent Hossein Aryan noted that "there has not been a religious dimension to the unrest" in the Middle East. This is quickly becoming the conventional wisdom.

The media report that protests throughout the Arab world are "remarkably secular," "nonideological" and "free of sectarian influence." It's time to get our terms straight. What people mean when they say "no religious dimension" is that religious *conflict* is not playing a role in the events. "Religious," in media language, is shorthand for "religious extremism."

Yet several of [these photos](#) of the protests in Egypt show protestors praying together, which suggests that there may well be religious dimensions to the drama. The more interesting--and accurate--question is not "why is religion taking a back seat?" but "what are the religious dimensions to these political protests?" If [conventional wisdoms of all kinds](#) are being challenged by the events in Egypt, let's allow the idea that "religion" means extremism and violence to be another idea that falls.