Why Comparative Politics Should Take Religion (More) Seriously

Anna Grzymala-Busse

Department of Political Science, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109; email: abusse@umich.edu

Abstract

The study of religion holds great promise for the study of identity, institutional origins, the state, and the strategies of institutional actors in comparative politics. Doctrinal differences translate into distinct patterns of state institutions, economic performance, and policy preferences. Religious attachments affect voting and popular mobilization. Churches can become powerful institutional players that lobby, influence policy, and form effective coalitions with both secular and denominational partners. Finally, natural religious monopolies and (conversely) resolutely secular countries show how churches have played a central role in the struggle of nations and states. The relationship is thus mutual: religion influences political attitudes and institutions, and politics affects religious practice and political activity.
INTRODUCTION

Comparative politics, and especially the study of institutional origins and organizational actors, has much to gain from a serious consideration of faith, doctrine, and religious hierarchies. First, for scholars of ethnicity and identity, religion presents new analytical challenges. Unlike other attributes, many religious identities are not fungible, or easily altered, and conversion costs do not simply follow from the distance traveled. Even small doctrinal differences can become insurmountable, making religious identities uniquely costly to change. Second, in the development of institutions and policy, these doctrinal differences translate into distinct configurations of secular institutions. Organized religion also exerts an outsized influence on policy making: although the vast majority of even very religious electorates want churches to stay out of politics, churches in many democracies influence policy in domains ranging from abortion to education to the welfare state.1 Third, scholars of the state can learn about the conditions under which state action depresses religiosity or generates strong religious attachments, allowing natural monopolies to arise. Examining the role of religion also invites us to disaggregate the nation-state: at various times, the state has opposed the nation, and the latter found a powerful ally in religious leaders and organizations.

This review article seeks to show why comparative politics needs to take religion more seriously. To do so, it first focuses on the political importance of religious identity and doctrine. It then examines the impact of religious hierarchies and doctrine on politics, in areas as varied as voting, welfare-state configurations, and public policy. Finally, it examines how politics affects religion, as well as the resulting political economy of religion, reviewed brilliantly in this journal by Gill (2001). This literature has both brought rigor and overturned conventional wisdom in precisely specifying how competition, rather than state support, can generate a vibrant religious scene.

Throughout this discussion, religion is defined as a public and collective belief system that structures the relationship of the individual to the divine and the supernatural. It often implies particular practices and behavioral constraints, a moral code, and a division between the sacred and the secular. These attributes both reinforce the belief in the divine and distinguish one religion from another. Because it is public and collective, religion and its claims continually come up against politics, and vice versa. Because it is a belief system that cannot be disconfirmed, the claims of religion on politics can be absolute and irrefutable (but also open to symbolic, as opposed to material, concessions; see Atran et al. 2007). Several other distinctions are analytically salient: between religion as an identity and as an ideology, among the different measures of religiosity (participation, faith, affiliation) and its intensity, and above all, among different doctrines, or specific professed beliefs about the sacred. Because much of the comparative literature has focused on Christianity and politics, this review only briefly mentions works on Islam and other religions. It also focuses on comparative politics; for a recent review of religion in global politics, see Philpott (2009).

THE POWER OF RELIGION?

To examine the mutual constitution of religion and politics, we first need to take religion seriously. First, how is religion different from other identities, such as ethnicity, class, or nation? Are these simply fungible, or is there something unique about religion? Second, if religion matters, how and

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1Surveys of 57 European and Latin American countries show that an average of 71% respondents did not want religious authorities to influence politics, 78% did not want influence on the vote, and 71% did not want influence on the governments. The lowest percentage of respondents within any one country was 51% (Grzymala-Busse 2010, World Values Surveys 1999–2004, and the International Social Survey Programme, 1999–2009).
when do religious doctrines make a difference? Political science has viewed religious identities and doctrines as labels, functionally fungible but holding little substantive content of interest to scholarship. As a result, numbers and distance have mattered more than content: we care more about the prevalence of a given identity or religion, and assume that conversion costs are in direct proportion to the distance traveled from the original identity or set of beliefs. Social scientists have either empirically ignored or undertheorized the differences between and within Islam, Catholicism, Protestant Christianity, Judaism, etc.—yet it is often these doctrinal differences that matter the most, not only to the adherents and practitioners of these religions, but to the causal impact religion has on politics.

Religion as a Unique Identity?

If religion can serve as both ideology and identity, are its claims unique? For many scholars, especially those working in the fields of ethnicity and ethnic politics, they are not. Prominent analyses of ethnicity view religion as one dimension of ethnic cleavages, which can fall along lines of race, religion, language, caste, tribe, etc. (Chandra 2004, Posner 2005, Bellin 2008). In these accounts, the import of identity lies not in the “passions it inspires or the traditions it embodies” but in the “information it conveys about the expected behavior of other political actors” (Posner 2005, p. 104). Posner goes perhaps the farthest here, arguing that “all of the identities in a person’s repertoire are equally important components of who they understand themselves to be” (2005, p. 138). The emphasis is on both religion as one of many potential criteria for membership in ethnic groups (see Chandra 2012) and the analytical and empirical fungibility of these attributes. Language, tribe, religion, or race can all be “activated,” and none are intrinsically more compelling than others in this perspective.

What could make religion different from other markers of identity? It is not its communal nature, its ability to define interests, or its conferral of meaning on human endeavor: ethnicity, nation, and language have that in common. But there are differences of both degree and kind. First, religions make transnational claims across enormous populations: they are probably the largest unit to which individuals claim loyalty. Islam, for example, claims roughly 1.5 billion adherents, or roughly 22% of the world’s population, making it bigger than the most populous nation (China has 1.3 billion citizens). Christianity claims more than 2 billion, or 33% of the world’s population. These religions transcend national boundaries and have made claims about authority that challenge nation-state boundaries (the resurrection of the Caliphate, or the Vatican’s transcending secular state jurisdictions). Even though national religious traditions often differ, even within the same international denomination, religion is unique in the implicit alternative it offers to secular organization of state boundaries, both because religion transcends secular borders and because it offers an alternative set of principles by which to organize life. This has meant that transnational religious authority can undermine and threaten existing forms of the state, as it already did in early modern Europe (Nexon 2009).

Second, religion is an unusually demanding identity. Some religions make claims about every aspect of their adherents’ lives, ranging from their political views to dress codes and dietary restrictions to where they may work, live, or travel. Beyond these quantitative differences, however, “religion is concerned with the supernatural; everything else is secondary” (Stark & Finke 2000, p. 90). The consequent fear of damnation or exclusion may “enable religious organizations to exert on their members pressure unimaginable in most secular organizations” (Wald et al. 2005, p. 132). Above all, religious identities (and, more precisely, religious practice) uniquely offer the promise of supernatural goods, of salvation and nirvana. As a result, these identities may not be as pliable as ethnic ones are often claimed to be: abandoning a given religion may mean eternal damnation.
Ironically, in the eyes of would-be religious persecutors, other people’s religions are shallow, errant, and fraudulent and can easily be changed. In fact, they must be changed; forcing conversion is the only way to save souls and remove a source of spiritual pollution. Thus, persecutors see violence as a justifiable and rational policy, despite the apparent absurdity of trying to force different religious beliefs on someone by violence.\(^2\)

Third, precisely because the stakes are so high and involve eternal reward and punishment, religion can also withstand secular onslaught that would eradicate other communal identities. Religious organizations are much harder to repress than are unions, newspapers, political groups, or student organizations (Sahliyeh 1990, p. 13). Decentralized religions are especially difficult to suppress: it would be difficult to eliminate all the clergy or places of worship in predominantly Protestant or Muslim countries. The clergy often have little to lose. For them, the costs of participation, even in risky and costly communal mobilization, are dwarfed by the costs of inaction, since by inaction they stand to lose their congregations. This may be why the more public the protest of local clergy under communism, the greater their communal authority and legitimacy (Wittenberg 2006).

These quantitative and qualitative differences mean that religion may be a unique form of identity, and we should avoid simply treating it like any other fungible marker. At the very least, the transnational claims of religion and the intensity of its demands on its followers suggest that we need to take these variables into account when examining the political implications of individual and collective identities. This is especially the case because religion interacts with and reinforces other identities: ethnic religious groups are extremely vigorous (Putnam & Campbell 2010; for a very different view, see Stark & Finke 2000). Its ideological cognates (doctrine), association with entrenched institutions (hierarchies and networks of places of worship), and emphasis on collective ritual make religion a potent reinforcer of other identities. The result is that many secular identities may have latent religious components as well (Mitchell 2006, Trejo 2009).

**Religions Are Not (Always) Fungible: Taking Doctrine Seriously**

Doctrinal differences further differentiate one religious group from another. Doctrine is the set of beliefs and indicated practices espoused by a given religious denomination. Doctrine thus structures both thought and practice. There are several aspects to doctrinal differences: for example, religions differ in their “salvific merit,” which “connects the perceived probability of salvation to a person’s lifetime activities” (McCleary & Barro 2006, p. 51). Some, like Catholicism or Buddhism, score very highly. Others, like Calvinism, do not. Religions also have a “political theology,” or “shared ideas about legitimate political authority” (Philpott 2007, p. 505), which affects how the religious authorities view political regimes and policies and how they then mobilize their faithful. Doctrines differ even within denominations. As Stepan (2000) points out, religions are “multivocal”—Islam, Western Christianity, and Confucianism each contain multiple voices, perspectives, political views, preferred practices, and emphases on different beliefs. To be an actively participating evangelical Protestant itself means a variety of activities and organizational belongings.

Doctrinal differences have immediate political implications. As we will see in the next section, they can foster different individual political views, secular state institutions, and economic

\(^2\)This point applies to Christianity more than Islam. Once the Islamic community was defined historically, its focus was on making Muslims better Muslims rather than on conversion. I am grateful to David Smith and Pauline Jones Luong for bringing up this distinction.
outcomes. Differences and similarities in doctrine may also create distinct (and unexpected) political alliances and conflicts: for example, the evangelical–Catholic prolife coalition of the 1990s in the United States, or the conflict between the autocrat/Islamicist disavowal of human rights as “Western imperialism” and the Catholic Church, which opposed this assault on what it saw as universal human values at the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights in June 1993 (Weigel 1999, p. 26). It is for this reason that scholars working with public opinion surveys such as the General Social Survey (GSS) have begun to recategorize religious traditions (Steensland et al. 2000) to reflect the nominal differences in religious denominations (rather than simply placing them on a fundamentalist–liberal spectrum), and to take account of the differences not only among denominations, but also between affiliation and belief (Steensland et al. 2000).

There are also political implications to the internal organization of denominations that are influenced by doctrine. Catholic hierarchies support and are supported by the need for mediation between God and the believers, whereas the belief in an immediate and direct relationship between God and the faithful in some Protestant denominations supports a much flatter hierarchy with no clear leadership or lines of authority. As a result, the political impact of Catholics and Protestants may vary. The Catholic Church has insisted on the universality of its doctrine and its political relevance—and has both the experience and the organization to enforce these convictions (Martin 1999, p. 40). Evangelicals and other Protestants have long carried on traditions of separation of church and state (and a suspicion of the corrupting influence of politics), speak with multiple voices rather than an ideological monopoly, and have far less experience in holding secular power. The structure of the religion thus shapes the degree and type of influence its members seek to exert on politics.

A final implication of doctrinal differences is that only some religions are fungible—that is, individuals can convert to another religion without paying significant theological or social costs. Within American Protestantism, for example, it is relatively easy to change churches or denominations, and “church shopping” is an accepted practice. Across non-Protestant denominations, however, conversions become considerably more complicated (Bruce 2000). Even in the United States, the religious market par excellence, where roughly 40% of Americans have switched from their parents’ religion (Putnam & Campbell 2010, p. 137), it is enormously more difficult to switch into or out of Orthodox Judaism or Mormonism than it is to switch among evangelical Protestant denominations. Conversion costs can be high even if the ideological or doctrinal differences involved are relatively small. In fact, as the tragic history of the Uniates, Orthodox–Catholic conflict, or Shia–Sunni–Sufi conflicts shows, conversion costs can be highest for closely proximate denominations. Apostates (those who abandon a religious tradition) and heretics (those who adopt unorthodox religious views) are the transgressors most heavily punished by religious bodies. This further suggests that religious monopolies may reflect not state regulation but extreme social pressures to remain within a given denomination.

At the same time, we cannot infer political preferences from doctrine alone. Doctrine interacts with secular structures and pressures to produce distinct configurations of influence, institutions, and policy (de Swaan 1988, p. 85). As the Fundamentalism Project shows, even the ostensibly unchanging doctrines of fundamentalist sects are reworked and reinterpreted over time and across groupings (Marty & Appleby 1991–1995), and the rise of fundamentalism is a backlash against secular political developments and innovations as much as it is an expression of religious orthodoxy. Similarly, the overrepresentation of Islam in civil wars has far more to do with elite religious outbidding and the susceptibility of societies to such outbidding than to intrinsic qualities of Islam (Toft 2007). The Taliban, Hamas, and Hezbollah, meanwhile, are such effective forces of violence not only because of their religious beliefs, but also because of their resilient and cohesive structure, focused as it is on enhancing team effort, preventing free riding and defection, and obtaining
credible signals of commitment from its members (Berman 2009, Iannaccone & Berman 2006, Berman & Laitin 2008). Doctrine is critical, but it does not act alone.

Similarly, there can be as much internal variation in preferences and strategies within a given religious body as there is among denominations, as the various national strategies of the Roman Catholic Church show (Warner 2000, Philpott 2007). Just as national churches may vary in their doctrinal focus, shared doctrine does not presuppose the same political strategies or influence. Primarily Catholic countries, from Poland to Italy to France, show very different patterns of Catholic church behavior, emphases, and teaching. The American Conference of Bishops emphasized social justice and nuclear disarmament until the 1990s—while their counterparts in Ireland fought the liberalization of divorce laws. Nor is there a single Catholic strategy: instead, church tactics have varied over time and across countries, with different national versions of Catholicism as a result.

Two significant implications for the study of identity and institutions follow from an attention to doctrine. First, the costs of switching religions can vary enormously, and not necessarily in direct proportion to the actual doctrinal differences. Similarity does not imply fungibility, and some identities are far more difficult to change than others. Second, doctrine matters as an ideology that serves to influence both institutional creation and individual behavior. Religion can thus provide the mechanisms by which symbols, traditions, rituals, and myths influence social and political interactions. This specification of mechanisms is critical for cultural accounts, which have tended to underspecify mechanisms (Johnson 2002, p. 227). Taking doctrine seriously allows us to delineate the mechanisms of cultural influence, both by identifying which issues are relevant to religious organizations and by suggesting how religious doctrine and its secular context interact.

If doctrinal differences affect political expectations, institutional configurations, religious political coalitions, and the fungibility of religion, then they need to be taken more seriously than the current literature has done. Rather than a label that can be costlessly changed, denomination is a stickier plaster that adheres, often painfully. Without an appreciation (at the least) of doctrinal differences, or a serious effort to theorize them, the relationship between religious ideas and secular institutions, the variance in political strategies and effectiveness of different denominations, and political coalitions among religious bodies become difficult to explain. In short, religion can influence public policy, secular institutional configurations, and regime durability. In examining this causal impact, we need to be sensitive both to the independent roles played by doctrine and religious organization and to the interactions between religious convictions and the secular state. The state can support or repress religion—but it is just as fundamentally shaped by religious convictions, ideas, and popular mobilization.

HOW RELIGION AFFECTS POLITICS

How can comparative politics benefit from a serious consideration of religion and its role in politics? Religion has had clear and significant, if not always intuitive, impacts in several domains. This section discusses its influence on voting and political behavior; the power of religious bodies as institutional players, lobbyists, and coalition partners; religion’s role in the origins of institutions (and long-term political outcomes); the impact of religion on attitudes toward and policies of social welfare; and its broad influence on regime type and durability.

Faith and Political Behavior

Religion influences political behavior in both directly shaping views on political issues (through doctrinal affinities) and indirectly implying support for specific policies and regimes (through the
organizational support and mobilization of religious authorities and institutions). Religion can thus function not only as a source of communal loyalty and shared identity and understandings, but also as a powerful ideology, a set of normative principles and claims about how the world ought to function. Several analyses have accordingly focused on the role religion plays in determining political attitudes and behavior on the individual level. For example, religious individuals are more likely to be motivated to pay taxes and comply with tax regulations (Torgler 2006), and religious countries appear to have lower crime rates (Hull 2000). Doctrinal differences matter here: Protestants, for example, have a lower “tax morale” than other religious people, perhaps because they view their success as based on effort and view the poor and unemployed as responsible for their plight (Furnham 1983).

A long-standing tradition sees religion as important to voting behavior (Rose & Urwin 1969, Lijphart 1979, Roemer 1998). Those who are religiously committed are more conservative in their worldviews than the nonaffiliated or unbelieving (Hayes 1995). Beyond these general statements, however, the impact of religiosity on political views is not straightforward. Membership in doctrinally very conservative denominations, such as fundamentalist Protestants, correlates with partisanship, but only through particular issue positions: thus, religious beliefs affect issue positions, which in turn produce partisan leanings (Jelen 1993). The impact of religious affiliation on political attitudes such as tolerance, however, is heavily dependent on the degree of commitment or intensity of belief and practice (Beatty & Walter 1984). Within denominations, the growing differentiation and fragmentation among American Protestants, for example, has meant that the category of “Protestant” has lost analytical value even as doctrinal conservatives are increasingly Republican, and a new cleavage based on religious commitment may be emerging (Layman 1997, 2001).

Although religious commitment matters for partisanship in the United States, its impact elsewhere is far less clear. Conservative Christianity in the United States is associated with conservative stances across domains of public policy. In contrast, otherwise conservative religious Europeans hold more liberal attitudes on transnational issues such as European integration or foreign aid than their secular neighbors (MacIver 1989). Similarly, Islamic piety pushes respondents toward political conservatism more in secular societies, and less so in religious ones [where presumably religiosity does not differentiate respondents as much as it would in a secular society (Tessler 2002)]. More broadly, support for political Islam does not presuppose antidemocratic attitudes: in several cases, this relationship is either nonexistent or mediated by gender (Tessler 2002).

Here, in asking how religion influences political views, we need to better specify which aspect of religion matters. “Religion” is frequently included in a battery of control variables in regressions examining political behavior, along with educational attainment, age, race, and gender, without regard for how belief, affiliation, or observance might matter. Moreover, belief, participation, and belonging are three distinct dimensions of religiosity (Layman 1997, 2001 Eisenstein 2006, Jelen & Wilcox 2002, Beatty & Walter 1984). Belief is an internalized and personal adherence to the doctrine and to the sacred: the personal level and kind of faith, acceptance of church doctrine, and relationship to the deity, the sacred, and religious teachings. Commitment, or participation, is activity within the church(es): attending services, evangelizing, and meeting with other church members. In many ways, this is a measure of the intensity of religiosity, or the degree to which the believer is willing to sacrifice time and effort in the name of religion. Belonging, or affiliation, is a much weaker connection to a religion than participation: in many cases, it is simply self-identification, or a nominal belonging to a given organized religion. Even though this may be the weakest indicator of personal religiosity, it “traditionally has been the only religious variable in studies of political behavior” (Layman 1997, p. 289). It is often unclear which of these specifications might be the most important in a given study and why. Yet, as we will see, one
important approach (the political economy of religion) focuses on participation whereas another (demand-side explanations) focuses on belief. Their findings conflict, but this may be simply a function of the specifications chosen. Just as importantly, “religion” interacts with other salient factors. As the studies above suggest, the impact of religious beliefs or belonging is likely to be mediated by the intensity of observance or commitment.

**Religious Authorities as Political Players**

Religious organizations are political actors who engage in alliances, support specific political formations, and structure social and political cleavages. In medieval and early modern Europe, churches legitimated monarchical rule in Europe (and often acted as a competing source of political authority and power). Religion was thus never far from the rise of the state. In one particularly nuanced argument, religious denominations influenced the regime types that arose in early modern Europe: where Calvinist insurgents could rely on strong traditions of representative government, constitutionalism was preserved. Conversely, where such a movement or traditions were lacking, absolutism prevailed (Gorski 2003).

In the modern era, religious authorities readily became involved in democratic politics. The political activities of churches and the coalitions they form have influenced the formation of political party systems and the maintenance of governments (Kalyvas 1996, Warner 2000). The fundamental cleavages driving the formation of parties and broader political conflict were between church and state, as the secular state wrested control over education, poverty relief, and legitimation from religious authorities. This is the familiar story of the formation of long-lasting political cleavages in European politics (Lipset & Rokkan 1967, Rokkan 1981). More recently, however, this story has been elaborated to show how clerical–anticlerical divides brought together disparate secular politicians in some countries, such as France, and why parties of Catholic religious defense had an ambivalent relationship to democratization, thanks partly to the church authorities’ suspicion of popular democracy (Gould 1999, Ertman 2009, Van Kersbergen & Manow 2009). Again, the doctrine and hierarchical structure of Catholicism influenced its political role and prescriptions.

Religious authorities founded political movements and political parties, as the story of Christian Democracy in Europe and Turkish Islamic parties shows (Kalyvas 1996, Alinordu 2010). Thus, the Roman Catholic Church inadvertently fomented the rise of Christian Democratic parties in Western Europe. The Roman Catholic Church attempted to stave off a liberal challenge in nineteenth-century Europe by lending its support to lay Catholic movements—only to see them acquire an autonomous life of their own and transform themselves into Christian Democratic parties that were only tenuously connected to the Church (Kalyvas 1996). These parties had both an uneasy and fundamental relationship to the Church, gaining organizational autonomy and retaining doctrinal affinities (van Kersbergen 1994, Kalyvas & van Kersbergen 2010, Grzymala-Busse 2011).

Moreover, churches act strategically to form coalitions and influence policy. Subsequently, these Christian Democratic parties were but one potential coalition partner for the Church in Europe as it sought to form political alliances with incumbent parties, exchanging government policy concessions for electoral mobilization by the Church on behalf of the parties (Warner 2000). The Roman Catholic Church after World War II acted to prevent communist rule in Italy and other countries, and it formed coalitions with right-wing governing parties that exchanged policy concessions for considerable political support and electoral mobilization that would benefit the right-wing incumbents. Here, if we think of the Church as an interest group, then several considerations influence whether it will form an alliance with a political party, such as the
extent to which it can obtain its goals elsewhere, the costs of supplying its own politicians, the stability and popularity of the ally, and the “core competencies” of the Church (Warner 2000, p. 30). In exchange for policy concessions, the Church can provide access to its organizational resources, reputation, training of campaign staff, voter education, votes, and financing (Warner 2000, p. 29).

What is less clear from this scholarship is the portability of the findings outside of the immediate context. Although these studies carefully acknowledge both the cross-country differences and the possibility of internal factions within the churches, they tend to focus on the Roman Catholic Church, which may be uniquely suited to act (and be studied) as a unitary political actor, being “renowned for its centralization, bureaucratization, and hierarchical organization” (Bellin 2008, p. 326). It is less clear whether the more decentralized Protestant churches or other religious traditions are cohesive as institutional players, or agile as economic firms, to the extent that the medieval Roman Catholic Church was (Ekelund et al. 1996).

Churches also lobby legislatures and set the political agenda. They can select and increase the salience of issues and lead voters to evaluate politicians according to criteria they set out—framing and priming, respectively (Scheufele 2000). Critically, popular religiosity appears to be a necessary condition for religions to influence politics—but popular demand for religious influence on politics is not. Churches have framed policy debates and obtained their preferred policies even when popular majorities overwhelmingly disapprove of church influence on voting and policy making (Grzymala-Busse 2010). Here, the churches’ doctrinal preferences interact with their moral authority and institutional access. As a result, we see variation in policy outcomes across similarly Catholic countries, in domains such as abortion, gay rights, stem cell research, and education (Minkenberg 2002, 2003). For example, abortion is restricted to saving the life of the mother in Ireland and Poland but is available freely in ostensibly Catholic Italy and Croatia. Similar variation can be observed in Latin America (Htun 2003, Hagopian 2009).

In examining how churches act as institutional players, at least two notes of caution apply. First, as noted above, only some religious organizations have the capacity to act as unitary institutional players, and even those need to satisfy additional conditions: “religious groups must come to consider political action as a sacred obligation, draw on various internal resources to prosecute that action, and confront a political environment that may hinder such efforts” (Wald et al. 2005, p. 140). In other words, they need to hold grievances, obtain organizational capacity, and encounter favorable political opportunity structures that offer influential secular allies.

Second, if religious organizations make doctrinal demands, only some societies and polities will be responsive. The demand for religion may vary at the national, not just individual, level: in effect, some countries’ “intercept” or “baseline” religiosity is higher or lower than others’, and we should explain that difference, rather than focusing only on the variance around the mean. We thus need a richer account of the social and political resonance of religion: both its ability to retain adherents in spite of their disapproval of church political activity and its ability to forge a variety of political alliances to obtain policy goods. One hypothesis might be that some societies, despite their disapproval of church political activity, are more receptive to religious framing of politics owing to long-standing fusion of religious and national identities. In many cases where religion has been fused with nationalism, secular nationalism is replaced with new loyalties and motives for conflict that are more compelling and less negotiable than secular nationalist ones alone (Juergensmeyer 1993, 2008). Where the churches had earlier protected the nation against either a repressive domestic state or a hostile colonial power, for example, they gained the moral authority that subsequently translated into policy success; and as we will see, such protection may also lead to durable and high popular religiosity.
Religion and Institutional Origins

Religion—and the denominational differences in doctrine that bring with them specific ideas and norms regarding appropriate institutional solutions—can influence both the choice of institutions and the long-term outcomes. Woodberry’s (2011) analyses of the impact of Protestant missionaries go the farthest. He argues that Protestant churches and missionaries (and their Catholic counterparts where they faced Protestant competition) promoted mass literacy, printing, and the rise of several institutions. They developed civil society, both directly and in response to their missionary efforts; they fostered rule of law, by mobilizing white colonial settlers (the more independent the missionaries from sponsor states, the more they could speak out against injustices and demand reform); and they minimized market regulation, e.g., by advocating the breaking of monopolies and opposing forced labor. Education, in turn, spurred social mobility, opportunities for women, and long-term health improvements, among other favorable outcomes. In a more moderate articulation of this thesis, Protestantism facilitates democracy: the doctrine encourages individual conscience, with the Bible as key authority rather than priests or religious authorities, and its tenets “tend towards separation and independence from ancient church structures and traditions as well as political authorities” (Woodberry & Shah 2004 p. 48).

Specific institutional legacies are further laid at the hands of religion. Schooling has been a central issue in the relationship between church and state. Both actors are in effect “taking an option on the future by ensuring the control of education of children and adolescents” (Rémond 1999, p. 147). The gradual wresting of education from the church into the secular state’s hands has been a signal process in the development of the state (De Swaan 1988)—and here again, denominational differences played a considerable role in determining how these processes unfolded. More recently, elements of doctrinal teaching, such as subsidiarity and transnational identities in Catholic doctrine, have informed the organization and development of institutions such as the European Union (whose founders, including Robert Schuman and Konrad Adenauer, were all committed Roman Catholics).

Dominant religious doctrines shaped would-be state institutions even before the state was founded. Lutheran, Calvinist, and Catholic doctrines each view the source of poverty differently and see its moral import in distinctive ways. Accordingly, each church imposed different regimes of poverty assistance in early modern Europe: integration, punitive work, and exclusion, respectively (Kahl 2005, 2007). These distinctions do not map directly onto Esping-Andersen’s (1990) famous typology of welfare regimes. As a result, several outstanding puzzles in the study of the welfare state are resolved: for example, why the United States and United Kingdom hold individuals responsible for their own poverty, whereas Scandinavian countries and Germany view poverty relief as a social responsibility. Conversely, in several countries where traditional class- and party-based accounts of the welfare state would lead us to predict sparse provisions for women and children, we see instead a strong, progressive role for the state in family policy. The underlying reason was church–state conflict in the nineteenth century, won by the secular liberal forces of the nation-state (Morgan 2009).

Doctrinal differences play a critical role not only in the choice of secular state institutions but also in religion’s broader relationship to the nation-state. Protestant free and reformed churches have held a strongly antistate position, whereas Lutheran and Orthodox state churches either “never questioned the prerogative of the central state in social policy and education” (van Kersbergen & Manow 2009, p. 4) or actively embraced the state as a provider of resources and a close partner. In contrast, the Catholic Church in the nineteenth century fought liberal efforts to build modern nation-states, but it supported democratization efforts and ensured social
peace in the twentieth-century transitions to democracy in Southern and Eastern Europe. Critical
to explaining this variation are doctrinal differences, both across religions and across time.

**Religion’s Impact on Political Economy**

Historically, welfare regimes, unemployment patterns, and educational expenditures have been
literature emphasizes religion’s impact on the political economy of the welfare state. Religion
here affects political economy in two ways. First, the conflict between church and state over
poverty relief has led to distinct patterns of subsequent welfare-state structure and provisions. In
turn, welfare-state provisions depress religious observance and participation, as state provisions
substitute for church amenities (Gill & Lundsgaarde 2004). This relationship may also explain
why some of the greatest political conflict in church–state relations occurred over the provision
of welfare services, such as education, hospitals, and poverty relief.

Second, religious electorates are less likely to support welfare-state provisions, presumably
confident in religious institutions’ capacity to protect individuals from the vicissitudes of economic
downturns (Scheve & Stasavage 2006, Dehejia et al. 2007). More religious individuals prefer lower
levels of social insurance, because religion substitutes for the state as a source of insurance against
adverse life events (Scheve & Stasavage 2006). Some religions emphasize the value of hard work
and individualism, leading their adherents to oppose welfare programs that decouple work and
reward (Benabou & Tirole 2006). Where religious charities can substitute for the welfare state, it
is feasible for poor religious voters to oppose the welfare state (Huber & Stanig 2009).

Exemplifying this recent turn in political economy, De la O & Rodden 2008 argue that religion
distracts voters from voting in their class interests by acting as a cross-cutting cleavage. The more
the poor attend church, the more likely they are to vote against Left parties. What is less clear is the
adjudication between the two hypothesized mechanisms. It may be the case that religious beliefs
substitute for economic preferences; for poor religious voters, the psychic benefits of religion act
as a substitute for the welfare state. Alternatively, religious beliefs may distract from economic
preferences by creating a second issue dimension that proves more compelling. The uncertainty
persists partly because the observable implications of each hypothesis are empirically difficult to
disentangle, and partly because the two are logically compatible with each other.

More broadly, some forms of religiosity may depress economic growth whereas others may
stimulate it (McCleary & Barro 2006). Religious participation (church attendance) is associated
with a decrease in rates of economic growth, but some religious beliefs, such as belief in hell,
heaven, and an afterlife, tend to increase economic growth by promoting behavioral changes on
the individual level (Barro & McCleary 2003). In one version of the argument, higher productivity
signals salvation; this is true for those individuals who believe in predestination, as Calvinists do,
and for whom economic wealth and productivity is not a way of earning grace but a way of demonstr-
ating it. In another pathway, individuals work harder and more efficiently in order to secure
salvation and earn grace, as in the Catholic tradition and several Protestant ones. Intriguingly,
government involvement in religion is actually linked to economic modernization in another study
(Fox 2006).

One potential problem with these analyses, of course, is that religious doctrine, political insti-
tutions, and economic outcomes influence each other. It may very well be, for example, that the
 provision of certain types of welfare goods or identity mobilization makes individuals more likely
to choose a specific denomination (Chesnut 2003, Trejo 2009). Yet these endogeneity problems
 can be ameliorated (if not eliminated) through the use of experimental methods or instrumental
variables. In a particularly compelling example, Becker & Woessman (2009) find that the economic
prosperity of Protestant regions is due not to a particular work ethic, as Max Weber argued, but
to higher stock of human capital: specifically, literacy. Higher literacy, in turn, is a direct result of
Lutheran doctrinal emphasis on reading the Bible for oneself. Becker & Woessman use distance
to Wittenberg, the heart of Lutheranism, as an instrument for Protestantism that is not related
to either education or economic development, and find that Protestantism has a strong effect on
literacy.

Religion and Regimes
Religious bodies can legitimize and lend support to secular regimes—or conversely, withdraw that
support and oppose particular secular incumbents and governing structures. Churches and regimes
thus mutually influence and constitute each other’s development and strategies. For example,
where the Catholic Church faced competition from Protestant denominations in Latin America,
it was more willing to support indigenous popular movements for democracy (Gill 1998) and to
promote secular ethnic mobilization (Trejo 2009). Even if the assumption that the poor demand a
church that opposes autocracy is “empirically questionable” (Philpott 2007, p. 512), the argument
at its core shows how competition (itself influenced by state regulation) leads religious bodies to
adopt political stances that then affect their own standing in societies and vis-à-vis governments.

In settings as varied as Poland, the Philippines, Spain, and Brazil, Roman Catholic churches
used a variety of tactics to oppose authoritarian regimes: mobilizing popular support, protecting
the opposition, withdrawing previous public support for the incumbent, or developing a liberation
theology that led local priests and bishops to oppose authoritarianism in the name of human rights
and social justice (Gill 1998, Ramet 1998, Philpott 2004). In these efforts, the churches “have shown
a remarkable ability to mobilize collective action, including political protest” (Gill 2001, p. 118).

By the same token, secular regimes influence religious strategies. For example, Philpott (2007)
argues that integrationism—the fusion of state prerogatives given to a particular religion and that
religion’s claims on the state—is the reason why Islam may preclude democratization. Ironically,
this is not because of an inherent antidemocratic stance within Islamic doctrine—though au-
thoritarian regimes have justified themselves in Islamic terms, as in Iran, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and
Afghanistan under the Taliban—but instead because the authoritarian regimes in Islamic countries
have often been rigidly secular, outlawing Islamic movements and prompting a “correspondingly
undemocratic posture in Islamic movements that have arisen to oppose them” (Philpott 2007,
p. 516, see also Iannaccone & Berman 2006). Here, the repression of religion leads the religion
to adopt a particular political stance.

Critically, the ramifications of various types of church–state integration do not simply follow
from the level of integration. Democracy can coexist with integration. For example, we do not
see a strict separation of church and state even in Western Europe, long held up as a model of
secularization and democracy—yet democratic practice has not suffered (Stepan 2000; see also
Monsma & Soper 1997). Although government intervention in religion is lower in democracies
than in nondemocracies, few states separate religion and politics fully, and democracies exhibit
a wide range of (non)separation (Fox 2006). Attitudes toward publicly visible religion also vary
tolerations,” or the mutual respect and nonintervention of the state and the religious institution,
matter considerably more for democratic practice than a rigid separation of the two spheres (which
is unobtainable in practice) (Stepan 2000). What is less clear is whether this autonomy determines
the church’s attitude to democracy and its public opposition to authoritarian rule, or whether more
prosaic factors, such as competition with other denominations, are just as important in fostering
church support for democratic regimes (Gill 1998) and indigenous rights (Trejo 2009).
In short, religion matters, not just because its adherents are committed to it, but because the ideas, identities, and cultural mechanisms it entails continue to shape political life. Religious doctrines and denominations remain sources of ideology and identity, policy pressure, social mobilization, and political influence. As a result, religious organizations and beliefs shape both political behavior and institutional configurations.

Sustaining Influence?

Is this influence of religion waning? Modernity has not undermined the importance of religion, despite the predictions of advocates of secularization, ranging from Durkheim to Weber to their followers. The political implications of religion remain both clear and enormous (Sahliley 1990, Appleby 2000, Burleigh 2007). But some scholars argue that the meaning of religion has changed, in that the sacred and secular have become differentiated (Casanova 1994, Casanova 2006, Taylor 2007). In these interpretations, religious belief and doctrine have become privatized, rather than acting as “grand legitimators, responsible for integrating and regulating society as a whole” (Gorski & Altinordu 2008, p. 58). Indeed, the differentiation of the sacred and secular allows us to examine how the two can influence each other. Other scholars have argued that secularization proceeds, but in very specific contexts that maximize social and economic security (Bruce 2000, Norris & Inglehart 2004). Few, however, claim that religion is disappearing from the global political stage.

Moreover, organized religion and the secular state are in constant interaction, if not conflict. There are certainly grounds for such conflict: “Persons in authority generally seek the means of preserving their power. For religious authority, this may often mean reaching out for the assistance of the state, as religious groups typically lack the backing of coercive power. Overlapping authority between state and religious leaders may also cause conflict…religious leaders may use their institutional position to challenge unpopular governments as a means of preserving their authority or credibility among parishioners” (Gill 1998, p. 120). Once religion is introduced into politics, it becomes very difficult to disinvite it: “not only do its absolutist criteria clash with the politics of compromise, but religion tends to be emotionally ‘hot’ and accompanied by its own experts who are frequently difficult to control…very few state officials relish publicly opposing religious considerations once they have been activated” (Demerath 1991, p. 30).

One conclusion that emerges from these discussions is that God is most certainly not dead—and S/He remains politically (and economically) active. Religious loyalties continue to structure political thought and action. By paying greater attention to religion and religious doctrine, comparative politics thus stands to gain insight into political behavior, the origins of institutions, the importance of churches as institutional players, and the role of doctrine and religious ideas in social and political interactions.

HOW POLITICS INFLUENCES RELIGION: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF RELIGION

Even as religion has structured institutions and political behavior, we continue to observe considerable variation both in the intensity of religious practice and belief and in their subsequent impact on politics. Poland is very different from the Czech Republic, and Ireland, even after the recent Church scandals, is far more religious than France. Accordingly, public policy in Poland and Ireland is far more influenced by Catholic Church preferences than in the resolutely secular Czech Republic or France.

These differences beg the question of the political determinants of religion itself. Why are some countries, groups, and individuals so much more religious (as measured by belief,
observance, and belonging) than others? Many states have attempted to harness religion, to sanction some beliefs and not others, and to regulate, control, and coerce religious denominations into supporting particular political options. Such attempts took on a great variety of forms and levels of intensity, even across countries with ostensibly the same state ideology and regime type (such as the communist one-party states) (Ramet 1998).

The impact of such state attempts to control religion has led to the flowering of a “political economy of religion” (see Gill 2001 and Clark 2010 for stimulating and concise overviews). In a quest to provide the micro foundations of religious behavior, these approaches focus on the regulatory environment: how states favor a particular religion over others, and what impact such regulation has on religions’ ability to meet consumers’ preference heterogeneity.

To summarize, where the religious market can freely offer diverse alternatives to heterogeneous religious beliefs and preferences, rates of religious participation and denominational affiliation increase (Chaves & Cann 1992, Finke & Stark 1992, Stark & Iannaccone 1994, Iannaccone 1998, Gill 2001, Clark 2010). Competition among religions drives them to better meet consumer “demand,” and consequently to increase innovation and efficiency. Religious pluralism thus breeds religious fervor. In contrast, where the state regulates religious markets by financially or politically supporting a state religion, the levels of religious pluralism and participation decrease. Specifically, where costs of market entry are high and the state favors particular religions, religious participation drops. These differences in regulation explain why only some countries have succumbed to secularism, most notably those that extend state privileges to established religions, as in Northwest Europe.

The regulation of religious markets is said to depress participation for several reasons. Consumers have no control over the quantity or quality of the religious goods provided; state interests are unlikely to converge with consumer preferences; one publicly sponsored religion can never provide variety of religious choices demanded by diverse individuals; and finally, even if religious alternatives arise, individuals are already bound to the inefficient state religion (Iannaccone 1991, Chaves & Cann 1992). Two implications follow. First, as both Tocqueville and Marx noted, “it was the caesaropapist embrace of throne and altar under absolutism that perhaps more than anything else determined the decline of church religion in Europe” (Casanova 1994, p. 29). Second, given the heterogeneity of religious preferences, some argue that “the only means of enforcing a religious monopoly is by government fiat” (Gill 2001). Religious monopolies cannot occur “naturally,” in the absence of state mandate (Stark 1992, Gill 2001). Instead, in one account, insecure leaders faced with a dominant religion enforce a monopoly; where several religious minorities are equally powerful, rulers will favor low state regulation (Gill 2008).

This compelling and provocative approach changed the terms of the debate. It suggested that the more competitive the religious market, the more likely we are to see the demand for diverse religious offerings met, and thus, greater religious observance. Where religions face more competition, they put in greater effort to attract consumers, and the result is greater religious participation. In this framework, attempts by organized religion to influence politics are an alternative supplied in the religious market (for those consumers who prefer an activist religion) and/or a way of gaining greater market share by diversifying the portfolio of outreach strategies. State support that ensures a privileged position for the church may also be the result of political influence by the church, as was the case with the Russian Orthodox Church (Knox 2005).

Yet, as powerful as they are, these accounts leave several areas to be clarified. The dragon of “secularism” that the scholars of religious markets have been slaying is in fact a paper tiger: the radical prediction that religion is doomed to extinction (Wallace 1966) is not representative of the broader scholarship on secularization. Indeed, a conceptualization of “secularization” as a
wholesale turn away from religious faith and participation had not been adopted generally and has been disavowed by the scholarship (see the valuable discussion by Gorski & Altinordu 2008). It is hardly surprising that religion continues to flourish if no theory predicted its demise. Further, political economy approaches conceptualize religiosity as participation rather than as belief. Yet there are participants who do not believe and believers who do not participate (Huber 2005, Davie 1990). As a result, finding a vibrant religious marketplace with many participants does not preclude tenuous individual connections to faith (one indicator of secularization). Thus, the “churn” generated by conversions and moving from one church to another is a sign of a healthy religious marketplace—but it can also indicate weak commitment to a particular religion.

Some pointed criticisms can be levied against the religious markets approach. First and foremost, monopolies flourish, and newly liberalized markets do not undergo a religious upsurge. Stark argues that “to the extent that only one faith is available without risk of sanctions, religious apathy and indifference will be high. That is, if the market is inherently segmented whenever the religious economy tends toward monopoly, substantial demand must go unsatisfied and many consumers will withhold their patronage” (Stark 1992, p. 262). Yet Ireland, Malta, and Poland are all naturally occurring monopolies, ones that survived despite state efforts to undermine them. Stark & Finke (2000) then argue that conflict can act as a substitute for competition, that “religious firms can generate high levels of participation to the extent that the firms serve as primary organizational vehicles for social conflict” (Stark & Finke 2000, p. 202). But what are the micro foundations here, and why would social conflict create religious vibrancy? This proposition has been used to explain the high levels of observance in Catholic Poland—yet Croatia and Lithuania, both of which faced similar levels of social conflict, show lower levels of religiosity (Froese & Pfaff 2001, p. 490). Jenkins (2007, p. 50) warns against confusing causes with consequences: “perhaps the religious monopoly just means that people have not felt the need to set up rival religious bodies.” A more compelling explanation for the existence of “natural monopolies” is that where fixed costs are large—i.e., where people view alternative religions as close substitutes—monopolies can arise without state intervention (Barro & McCleary 2005). It is not the case that monopolies cannot occur “naturally” (Gill 2001).

Second, the absence of regulation, or the liberalization of religious markets, does not result in the predicted religious upsurge. This is partly because the political economy approach does not conceptually differentiate between regulation as repression and regulation as subsidy. “State regulation” is almost inevitably measured as the state support for a given church but not as the active repression of other denominations (for an important exception, see Grim & Finke 2007). Yet state support for one religion is not the same as the suppression of others. Unless the state coerces society into supporting a given religion, or tries to eliminate alternative religions, it is not clear how privileging one religion suppresses the demand (and, more importantly for the theory, the exercise of that demand) for other religions.

If we are interested in the constraints on religious participation, then our subject is not states privileging one religion over others but rather states preventing others from arising. Anti-proselytizing laws, for example, explicitly and directly constrain religious participation in ways that subsidizing a dominant religion does not. This is especially the case because state support for a given religion actually frees up potential consumers for other denominations: it makes the state-favored religion less popular. After all, even in countries with established churches, disaffected believers are free to move to other denominations, as in nineteenth-century England with its flourishing of nonconformist sects [from 1840 to 1960, sects outnumbered the Anglican population in several regions of England (Jenkins 2007, p. 51)]. As a result, this account fails to explain why state support for one religion would mean that other denominations fail to attract adherents or sacralize politics.
Conversely, why does the absence of regulation not result in greater observance? The political economy of religion has difficulties in explaining the low rates of religiosity in states with no state support for a particular religion, such as France, the Czech Republic, or Estonia. In these free markets, we should see high rates of observance, if the assumptions of high and heterogeneous demand for religion hold. Why do we not see religious entrepreneurs move in and the rates of religious observance go up accordingly? If the assumption of a universal and varied need for religion is true, then “the sacred should have returned...where secularization had gone the furthest and the absence of religion created the greatest need. Accordingly, we should have witnessed religious revivals in highly secularized societies such as Sweden, England, France, Uruguay, and Russia. Yet the public resurgence of religion took place in places such as Poland, the United States, Brazil, Nicaragua, and Iran, all places which can hardly be characterized as secularized wastelands” (Casanova 1994, pp. 224–25).

The answer given by the political economy of religion is that previous state support for a given religion prevents current conversions to other religions in a liberalized market (Iannaccone 1994). But this is having it both ways: if state-supported religions are so inefficient in satisfying consumer demand, how could they bind adherents so successfully? Either people seek new religious alternatives (in which case nominal state support for one denomination should have little effect on consumers turning to other denominations) or they do not, in which case the key assumption of heterogeneity of religious preferences and their intensity is violated. Put differently, the relationship of the political economy of religion to history—and the determinism of the past—is contradictory. On the one hand, believers are said to freely move between religions. On the other hand, actions taken in the past (i.e., state support for a religious monopoly) prevent them from doing so. This literature, in short, has some difficulty addressing the conditions, and the costs, of joining or leaving denominations.

More broadly, without a clearer appreciation of doctrine (other than as a strict practice) or how it matters, the political economy literature operates within unacknowledged boundary conditions of American Protestantism. The political economy approach argues that reaffiliation (change within a religious tradition) is much less costly and more frequent than conversion (change of religious traditions) (Stark & Finke 2000, p. 114). Yet this is true for American Protestants far more than for other denominations, or other religious markets. If anything, as noted above, the punishments meted out to apostates and heretics in many religious traditions suggest that the closer the chosen alternative, the higher the cost paid by the convert. Indeed, assuming fungibility leads to the conclusion that markets are a “natural state”—but where products (religious or otherwise) are highly differentiated, oligopolies are a common outcome.

Finally, political economy accounts of religion face several empirical anomalies that they dismiss or simply misconstrue. Catholic countries are excluded from consideration, “having yielded sufficiently deviant results to require separate consideration” (Stark & Finke 2000, p. 237). Catholicism is said to be more vibrant because (a) low-level clergy are supported entirely by donations, so they have to be entrepreneurial; (b) Catholicism is not subject to intervention by secular governments; and (c) the religion is international in character (Stark & Finke 2000, p. 243). The first two of these statements are untrue; the third is ad hoc. It is also not the case that the diversity of religious orders in Catholicism reconciles monopoly status with vibrancy (Finke & Wittberg 2000): religious orders are not the laity, by definition, so it is not clear how they channel popular diversity of religious preferences, especially given that several orders (such as the Jesuits) were set up by the Catholic hierarchy to enforce doctrinal orthodoxy. Free market conditions for competing Islamic groups are said to explain the vibrancy of Islamic monopolies (Stark & Finke 2000, p. 249), a statement many Iranians or Saudis would find puzzling, to say the least. In the end, a meta-review of 24 studies found little relationship between pluralism and participation, with mixed results for
state regulation (Chaves & Gorski 2001; see also Olson 1999 and Voas et al. 2002 for a pointed methodological critique).

Along with the literature on the origins and patterns of religious belief (Atran 2002, Sloan Wilson 2002, Dennett 2006), these market analogies assume a high, heterogeneous, and inelastic demand for religion. In the political economy literature, societies have similar levels of demand for religion (and varied preferences regarding the type of religion), and religions are fungible: individuals can change their religious commitments easily, irrespective of the religious alternatives on offer. These explanations do not examine why some individuals and, by extension, some societies may be more or less receptive to religious mobilization and belief. Yet empirical testing of the political economy models shows that there is significant demand-side variation across religious markets (Montgomery 2003). And, if such variation in the demand for religion exists, then the differences in religious participation can be the result not of supply-side competition and offerings, but of demand-side forces, contrary to the explanations in the political economy of religion.

One such demand-side model argues that insecurity—material, economic, psychological, and political—explains why people turn to religion, and by extension, why some societies are more religious than others (Norris & Inglehart 2004). One implication here is that countries undergoing massive transitions and upheavals, such as the collapse of communism in East Central Europe, ought to turn to religion. Given religion’s traditional concern with morality, such constituencies should be especially receptive to religious incursion into public policy issues framed as “moral.” As one observer of the American political scene noted, “morality policy politics may be more prevalent where fundamental religious principles are the foundation for political debate” (Mooney 2001, p. 16). Yet the insecurity and uncertainty that followed the fall of (secular!) communism has not resulted in an increase in religious observance or belief anywhere in the postcommunist region; in fact, where we observe change, it is in the opposite direction. As with the political economy of religion, the fundamental problem with the demand-side approach is that structural conditions are held responsible for behavior—but when market structures or levels of security change, behavior does not.

One potential solution is to develop a richer account of the state. As noted above, political economy accounts view the state as a market regulator that privileges certain religions over others. Yet state repression can make national martyrs out of religious bodies, creating both powerful attachment to monopoly religions and popular resonance to their claims. We thus need a more nuanced view of the state and its roles, including both support for and oppression of religion. More fundamentally, we cannot take for granted the “nation-state” as a coherent entity: the state may oppose the nation-building project (as it did in colonial and communist regimes), or state can be established when no coherent national identity yet exists. Religion can then become a protector of the nation, as it did in Ireland and Poland. The close alignment of religious and national identities then catalyzes religiosity and provides resonance to subsequent political claims by religious authorities. In short, the alliance between nation and religion matters for church vitality—and earlier hostile state regulation (as oppression) actually strengthens it.

As a result, natural monopolies not only exist—they can flourish, if sustained by the intertwining of nationalism and religious belief. These monopolies have roots not in state regulation but in the historical relationship between nation and church, and the fusion of national and religious identities, as in Poland and Ireland (Breuilly 1993, Ramet 1998, Martin 2005). Levels of both participation and belief are high, given the church’s nurturing and the double bind of betraying the nation by leaving the religion. Conversely, where the church is perceived to have earlier opposed the nation, even the absence of regulation will not result in greater religiosity, as in the Czech Republic and France.
Movement between religions is no longer seen as devoid of transaction costs. Instead, the costs of conversion will vary directly with the degree of fusion between religion and nation. Where the fusion is tight, apostasy or conversion can be perceived as betraying the nation: “heresy becomes a national definition of treachery” (Martin 2005, p. 131). National identity and community ties also mean that individuals may disagree with church teachings and with church political activity, yet remain loyal to the faith itself. As a result, extensive objections to church political activity coexist with high religiosity. This dynamic is clearest in Catholic churches, but it is also visible in Protestant denominations (Hertzke 1988, p. 147). Above all, churches can now enter the political arena and find that their claims resonate both with society and with secular politicians. Offending religious sensibilities blurs into national treason, and politicians are anxious about offending a powerful societal actor. Secular elites fear electoral backlash and increased costs of governing that would come with church opposition, and their risk aversion is exacerbated by the information asymmetries between elites and voters.

CONCLUSION

The study of religion and comparative politics holds great promise for the study of identity, institutional origins, the state, and the strategies of institutional actors. The critical implications go far beyond the study of religion itself, as we have seen. Religious attachments affect voting and popular mobilization. Churches can become powerful institutional players that lobby, influence policy, and form effective coalitions with both secular and denominational partners. Doctrinal differences translate into distinct patterns of state institutions, economic performance, and policy preferences. And finally, natural religious monopolies and conversely, resolutely secular countries, show how churches played a central role in the struggle of nations and states.

As we examine these patterns of the mutual influence of the sacred and the secular, the study of religion invites us to take doctrine seriously, both as a source of unique identity and as a powerful demarcation of institutional preferences. Failure to do so blinds us to the differences in the resulting institutional configurations, to the very high costs paid by those who travel only a short distance from their original identity, and to the peculiar coalitions (and lack thereof) that result when religion enters politics, and vice versa.

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Contents

A Conversation with Kenneth Waltz

Kenneth Waltz and James Fearon .......................................................... 1

How (and Why) Is This Time Different? The Politics of Economic Crisis in Western Europe and the United States

Jonas Pontusson and Damian Raess ...................................................... 13

The Consequences of the Internet for Politics

Henry Farrell .............................................................................................. 35

What (If Anything) Does East Asia Tell Us About International Relations Theory?

Alastair Iain Johnston .............................................................................. 53

Using Roll Call Estimates to Test Models of Politics

Joshua D. Clinton .................................................................................... 79

Global Civil Society: The Progress of Post-Westphalian Politics

John S. Dryzek .......................................................................................... 101

Global Distributive Justice: Why Political Philosophy Needs Political Science

Michael Blake ............................................................................................ 121

Varieties of Capitalism: Trajectories of Liberalization and the New Politics of Social Solidarity

Kathleen Thelen ....................................................................................... 137

Domestic Explanations of International Relations

Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Alastair Smith ........................................ 161

Electoral Accountability: Recent Theoretical and Empirical Work

Scott Ashworth ......................................................................................... 183

International Influences on Elections in New Multiparty States

Judith G. Kelley ......................................................................................... 203

Formal Models of International Institutions

Michael J. Gilligan and Leslie Johns ....................................................... 221
## Contents

In From the Cold: Institutions and Causal Inference in Postcommunist Studies  
*Timothy Frye* .......................... 245

International Regimes for Human Rights  
*Emilie M. Hafner-Burton* .......................... 265

Is Health Politics Different?  
*Daniel Carpenter* .......................... 287

LGBT Politics and American Political Development  
*Richard M. Valelly* .......................... 313

Policy Makes Mass Politics  
*Andrea Louise Campbell* .......................... 333

Formal Models of Bureaucracy  
*Sean Gailmard and John W. Patty* .......................... 353

Studying Organizational Advocacy and Influence: Reexamining Interest Group Research  
*Marie Hojnacki, David C. Kimball, Frank R. Baumgartner, Jeffrey M. Berry, and Beth L. Leech* .......................... 379

Causes and Electoral Consequences of Party Policy Shifts in Multiparty Elections: Theoretical Results and Empirical Evidence  
*James Adams* .......................... 401

Why Comparative Politics Should Take Religion (More) Seriously  
*Anna Grzymala-Busse* .......................... 421

Geographic Information Systems and the Spatial Dimensions of American Politics  
*Wendy K. Tam Cho and James G. Gimpel* .......................... 443

Richardson in the Information Age: Geographic Information Systems and Spatial Data in International Studies  
*Kristian Skrede Gleditsch and Nils B. Weidmann* .......................... 461

### Indexes

Cumulative Index of Contributing Authors, Volumes 11–15 .......................... 483

Cumulative Index of Chapter Titles, Volumes 11–15 .......................... 485

### Errata

An online log of corrections to *Annual Review of Political Science* articles may be found at [http://polisci.annualreviews.org/](http://polisci.annualreviews.org/)