

Religion and Politics in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa

Edited by
Jeffrey Haynes



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Religion and Politics in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa

In the early twenty-first century, it is now clear that religion is increasingly influential in the political realm in ways which call into question the principles and practices of secularism. The Iranian revolution of 1978–9 marked the decisive ‘reappearance’ of political religion in global politics, highlighting a major development which is the subject of this edited volume.

Addressing a highly salient and timely topic, this book examines the consequences of political interactions involving the state and religious actors in Christian, Muslim and Judaist contexts. Building on research, the basic premise of this text is that religious actors – including Islamist groups, the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox churches – pose various challenges for citizenship, democracy and secularisation in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The key questions on which the book focuses are: Why, how, and when do religious actors seek to influence political outcomes in these regions?

Providing a survey of what is happening in relation to the interaction of religion and politics, both domestically and internationally, this book will be of interest to students and scholars of politics, religion, European and Middle East studies.

Jeffrey Haynes is Associate Head of Department (Research and Postgraduate Studies) and Professor of Politics at London Metropolitan University, UK.

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Series editor's preface

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was a debate in European political science about the political significance of religion or, more precisely, religious orientations. While some scholars argued that it continued to be an important factor in explaining the way people think politically and vote, others maintained that class had become the dominant force. In the wake of the New Left movements, this seemed to be almost self-evident.

However, Europe has changed in many ways since then. First, migration has substantially altered the religious composition of Western European societies, and a significant portion of those who migrated into the affluent Western European states are less secularised than the majority of the citizens of the host countries. Second, with the end of the Cold War, religion reasserted its role as an important factor in some countries of the East–Central Europe, most notably in Poland. And third, religion did not just dwindle away to nothing in the secularised societies of Western Europe. The Christian churches and their collateral organisations remained influential political actors, not least due to the simple fact that their links with the political systems are highly institutionalised in many countries. While the Lutheran Church is virtually a part of the state apparatus in some Scandinavian countries, significant portions of the welfare spending is administered through church-related organisations elsewhere. This institutional anchorage provided the Christian churches with sufficient resilience, and religiously inspired debates and conflicts have remained on the agenda of many European nations.

Furthermore, the debate mentioned above focused exclusively on Western Europe, and the example of migration highlights the fact that the relationship of religion and politics can no longer be fully understood by focusing on one region alone. After all, significant shifts in religious thinking in one region can have far-reaching repercussions elsewhere via its potential impact on groups of migrants.

The current volume is one of the few books that takes a broadly comparative view. By looking at very diverse countries including, among others, Turkey, Morocco, Israel and Spain, attention is drawn to commonalities and differences between very different religious actors and the way they interact with the political system. The book concentrates on three central and interrelated themes, namely citizenship, secularisation and democracy.

While generalisations are very difficult on the basis of such diverse cases, one lesson is obvious: The often bemoaned strong involvement of religious actors in issues of citizenship, secularisation and democracy in the countries of the Middle East and Northern Africa does not constitute a fundamental distinction to European countries. To be sure, the democratic credentials of European religious actors may be less doubtful in most cases than is often true for the Middle East and Northern Africa. Yet the fundamental issue of the boundary between religion and the secular state is by no means fully resolved in European countries. In some countries, there is considerable institutional linkage which guarantees the continued influence of religious actors in state affairs. What is more, such privileges may be extended to the religious organisations of immigrants, as the example of Germany shows, where the state actively promotes the formation of Islamic overarching organisations.

Hence, religious actors have considerable influence in some of the secular European societies and, arguably, the likelihood of conflicts between them and secular states increases with increasing secularisation. As the progress of medical technology is marching on, it gives rise to a range of ethically charged debates where secular states tend to take pragmatic positions which are likely to be met with resistance by religious communities. To be sure, issues of the so-called biopolitics, including the regulation of reproductive medicine, stem cell research, euthanasia and cloning, will provide a battleground for ongoing struggles over the boundaries of the secular European state.

Thomas Poguntke, Series Editor
Bochum, May 2009

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1 Religion and politics in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa

Jeffrey Haynes

The main premise of this book is that religion has left its assigned place in the private sphere in both Europe and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), becoming politically active in various ways and with assorted outcomes. The starting point is to note that from the 1980s, ‘what was new and became “news” ... was the widespread and simultaneous refusal of religions to be restricted to the private sphere’ (Casanova 1994: 6). This involves a remodelling and re-assumption of public roles by religious actors – which theories of secularisation had long condemned to social and political marginalisation. This is what the chapters of this book collectively seek to accomplish.

While differing in terms of specific issues that encourage them to act politically, religious entities commonly reject the secular ideals that have long dominated theories of political development in both developed and developing countries, appearing instead as champions of alternative, confessional outlooks, programmes and policies. Seeking to keep faith with what they interpret as divine decree, religious entities¹ typically refuse to render to secular power holders automatic material or moral support. They are concerned with various social, moral and ethical issues, which are nearly always political. They may challenge or undermine both the legitimacy and autonomy of the state’s main secular spheres, including government and more widely political society. In addition, many churches and other comparable religious entities no longer restrict themselves to the pastoral care of individual souls. Now, they raise questions about, *inter alia*, interconnections of private and public morality, claims of states and markets to be exempt from extrinsic normative considerations, and modes and concerns of government. What they also have in common is a shared concern for retaining and increasing their social importance. To this end, many religious entities now seek to bypass or elude what they regard as the cumbersome constraints of temporal authority and, as a result, threaten to undermine the latter’s constituted political functions. In short, refusing to be condemned to the realm of privatised belief, religion has widely reappeared in the public sphere, thrusting itself into issues of social, moral and ethical – in short, political – contestation.

The aim of this book is to examine the current relationship between selected religious actors and the state in Europe and the MENA. Its title, *Religion and Politics in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa*, seeks to capture what its