

Introduction

This book has three main goals. First, it repudiates the commonly held assumption that the separation of religion from state affairs is a necessary condition for a well-functioning democracy. With a structured comparison of the experiences of Turkey and Israel, the chapters show that when popular preferences support the inclusion of religion in the regime, failing to do so may work against democratic performance. Conversely, the integration of religion in the state within certain bounds, if this policy accords with popular preferences, may have a positive influence on democratic governance.

Second, the analysis offered herein relies on a novel theoretical framework for explaining how varying levels of religious recognition by the state affect democratic performance. This framework provides a foundation for understanding the initial recognition given to religious content and actors in emerging regimes and changes in the state–religion relationship over time. Most important, it introduces conceptual boundaries within (or outside) which the state–religion relationship will support (or undermine) democratic performance. This is an important contribution to the literature on religion in politics—arena where, despite growing interest and the emergence of more nuanced postsecular perspectives, most research is still preoccupied with the belief that religious integration in politics negatively affects democratic regimes.

Third, this book aims to shed additional light on the nature of political modernization projects by assessing the applicability of lessons learned from Turkey and Israel to other polities seeking to democratize while confronting public demand for official recognition of religion. This question is most timely in Middle Eastern societies that seek formulas for sustainable governance following the Arab Spring, but it may prove helpful in other regions of the world and for other types of collective identity.

Background

Since the second half of the twentieth century, theories of modernization have adhered to the so-called secularization thesis: the belief that as societies advance, religion loses its societal functions, and consequently, religious values and institutions lose their authority. That is, based on the Western experience after the Enlightenment, theories in the social sciences have assumed that modernization and the ascent of reason would shrink religion's role in society, until it ultimately disappears. Contrary to all predictions, however, religion is far from its demise. Not only has religion not disappeared, but in many places, some of which are highly modernized, it has become even more central as a basis for political mobilization and as a core layer of identity. Although there has been a gradual shift in scholarly perspective toward a more nuanced understanding of religion's role in contemporary societies, the social sciences are still largely preoccupied with the notion of secularization (Karpov 2010, 233).

Recently, contemporary sociology has raised some doubts as to the accuracy of predictions about societal secularization and demonstrated that religion remains a potent social force in many societies across the globe (Berger 1999; Putnam and Campbell 2012; Stark 2015). Yet the application of the secularization thesis to the political realm—namely, the notion that religion and democracy are incompatible, and therefore that a secular political sphere is a condition for functioning democracy—largely remains the consensus view. This is mainly because religion and democracy are at odds: religion is about an ultimate divine truth, whose authority is rooted in the transcendental domain, whereas democracy emphasizes the peaceful coexistence of different truths, with authority rooted in human will. The policy prescription arising from this is straightforward: for democracy to flourish, politics should be isolated from religious influence. Even scholars who oppose a strict marginalization of religion from the public sphere embrace the view that the political domain should not be subject to religious influence. Casanova (2001, 1047) writes, “the relocation of the church to civil society implies not only voluntary disestablishment from the state . . . but also disengagement from political society proper . . . [T]his relocation is the very condition for the possibility of a modern public religion.” Likewise, Habermas (2008, 28) notes that “the ‘separation of church and state’ calls for a filter between these two spheres—a filter through which only ‘translated,’ i.e., secular contributions may pass from the confused din of voices in the public sphere into the formal agendas of state institutions.”

There is no doubt that some manifestations of religion stand in contradiction to democratic principles. In some societies, religious empowerment involves intolerance, violence, disrespect for civil rights, and systematic discrimination against women (Inglehart and Norris 2003)—a reality that seems to support the view that democracy and religion are inconsonant with one another. Nevertheless, to the degree that some present-day manifestations of political religion are irreconcilable with democratic principles, this book suggests that this is not necessarily because of unmitigated contradiction between religion and democratic values. At times, the causal arrow may run the other way. The centuries-long Western domination in the world and the strict imposition of a narrow, Western interpretation of democracy—which has strong liberal and secularist elements—on societies with large religious sectors, may be a cause of contemporary extremist manifestations of religion.

From this perspective, the varying experiences of Israel and Turkey, the only two modernist political projects in the Middle East that have exercised democratic practices through most of their political histories,¹ represent a paradox that begs explanation. Turkey emerged as a modernist political project that imitated the Western secular interpretation of democracy. Despite decades of constant attempts (some of them highly repressive) to marginalize religion from public and political life, the country has ended up less democratic and far from truly secular. Imposing strict secularism from above required authoritarian state-building during the first three decades after independence, recurrent military interventions in politics, and substantial violations of individual rights. If anything, the contemporary Turkish model—what we see in Turkish politics today—marks a slow departure from the original model and more openness to the presence of religion in the public sphere. Yet the initial policies toward religion have taken their toll on Turkish political culture. Today, the Turkish political system is plagued by polarization, distrust, and increasing authoritarian trends, all consequences of its past policies (Baran 2010; Dağı 2015; A. Rubin 2017). Also striking, state repression proved unable to eliminate the religious component from Turkish life, and religion in contemporary Turkish society and politics seems stronger and more irrepressible than ever.

Conversely, the state of Israel represents a modernist political project that deviated from the Western secular model of democracy, granted the Jewish religion a central official role, and has been able to maintain a stable democratic regime. In Israel, too, however, the state–religion relationship has not remained steady. After two decades of constructive relations, religious factions confronted the democratic state with extremist and abusive

political behavior. One segment of the religious population, the religious Zionists, have turned from constructive collaboration with the state to a territorial-expansionist agenda in the Palestinian Occupied Territories and extraparliamentarian (often illegal) activities. The other segment of the religious population, the Haredim (ultraorthodox), have increased their leverage in Israel's fragmented political structure and exploited the democratic regime to obtain sectarian benefits at the expense of other groups in society. Yet despite the escalating encounters between the religious factions and the state in Israel, the Israeli regime has been quite successful in containing these challenges and preserving a stable democratic system.

The intricate history of the state-religion interaction in Turkey and Israel is marked by perplexing processes and outcomes for which existing explanations cannot adequately account. In turn, a close comparison of these two cases leads to some surprising and counterintuitive conclusions that challenge most of the existing scholarship on the impact of the state-religion relationship on democratic performance.

Of course, the state-religion relationship is not the sole influence on democratic performance. The rich corpus on democracy and democratization in recent decades suggested various structural, agential, and cultural influences on transitions from authoritarian regimes, the emergence of democratic regimes, and democratic performance. Important among them are power distribution among classes and sectors in the society (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986; Huber, Rueschemeyer, and Stephens 1993), political development and institutional strength (Przeworski et al. 2000), the structure and performance of the economic sphere (Acemoglu and Robinson 2005), and the relative weight of liberal-constitutional ideas (Zakaria 1997). The current study does not underestimate the relevance of other factors to the development of democratic regimes and democratic performance. Rather, it aims to complement them by offering another prism—that of the state-religion relationship—through which we can gain better understanding of trends in democratic governance. This is why, wherever relevant, the analysis offered in this book acknowledges the influence of other factors (economic development, institutional strength, and the relative power of civil society) on democratic trends in the explored cases.

In these pages, I develop an analytical framework for explaining the impact of the state-religion interaction on democratic performance. I apply it through a structured comparison of Turkey's and Israel's religion-state dynamics and their impact on democratic governance. In the final stage, I assess the broader applicability of the findings beyond these cases.

A New Analytical Framework for the State–Religion Relationship

As this book demonstrates in detail, the varying experiences of Israel and Turkey with regard to the state–religion interaction and its dynamic effect on democratic performance during different periods cannot be adequately explained by existing theories. I am referring primarily to the various shortcomings of the secularization thesis (Stark 1999; Swatos and Christiano 1999), and to the problematic limitations of the inclusion-moderation thesis (Tezcür 2010; Schwedler 2011; Gurses 2014) and some minor fallacies of the twin tolerations thesis (Stepan 2001). Briefly, none of these theories offer a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding the full spectrum of interactions between religion and the state and their effect on democratic governance. The political element of the secularization thesis, with its premise that democratic governance mandates the isolation of religious inputs from the political sphere, does not conceive a religious presence in politics as an option (Bader 2010). It cannot serve to analyze cases where such interactions exist and produce diverse outcomes. The inclusion-moderation thesis, with its linear outlook (more inclusion is better), has three shortcomings. It falls short of providing a clear range for the constructive operation of religion in democratic settings; it draws its inferences mainly from nondemocratic Middle Eastern societies, which qualifies its applicability to democratic contexts; it fails to clearly distinguish between opportunistic and principled support for democracy (Tezcür 2010; Gurses 2014).

Alfred Stepan's (2000, 2001) twin tolerations is the most sophisticated existing framework for studying religion–state coexistence under democratic rule. However, it also suffers from several drawbacks, especially where the cases explored here are concerned. First, Stepan's conceptualization of democracy carries a considerable liberal component that borrows from his earlier work (Linz and Stepan 1996), which somewhat limits the applicability of his concept of democracy (Hashemi 2009). Second, although the twin tolerations thesis embraces a wide range of religious manifestations in the public and political spheres, it adheres to the secularization thesis's prohibition on religious veto powers in politics (Stepan 2000, 39)—something that may well happen, and indeed happened when religious parties became part of the government (Israel) or even led it (Turkey). Third, Stepan acknowledges the right of religious populations (agency) to participate in politics, but he does not discuss the presence and impact of religious content in the state, independent of religious political agency. Also important, he recommends

sanctions against religious agents in politics if the latter violate democratic principles (Stepan 2000, 40), but the essence of such sanctions remains vague. For example, will these actors be suspended from politics permanently, temporarily, or at all?

A recent trend of “postsecular” literature remedies most of the shortcomings of earlier scholarship regarding the role of religion in politics. Specifically, the postsecular literature departs from the secularization thesis’s sweeping negation of religion in politics, and allows—both normatively and analytically—the integration of religious actors, content, and argumentation into its analysis of the effect of religion in politics (Habermas 2008; Ferrera 2009; Calhoun, Juergensmeyer, and VanAntwerpen 2011; Gorski et al. 2012; Nynäs, Lassander, and Utriainen 2012; Graham 2013; Stepan and Taylor 2014; Fox 2015). The perspective offered by this book joins to and complements the postsecular literature. It does not view the relationship between the state and religion as a static, unidirectional process that is simply either bottom-up or top-down and largely predetermined. The relationship is instead framed, in the tradition of Migdal’s (2001) state-in-society theory, as reciprocal and dynamic. This perspective allows room for significant changes over time, following the political behavior of each actor—religious players and state organs—and their mutually constitutive effect on each other. In addition, it accounts for how structural and ideational changes in the surrounding environment might influence the phenomenon under investigation. Applying such an approach to the study of the state–religion relationship can help us understand the determinants of this relationship over time and reconsider deterministic conclusions about the ability of religion to peacefully coexist with and even reinforce democratically governed states.

More specifically, the analytical perspective I develop in chapter 2 has at least two substantive advantages where the analysis of religion in politics is considered. First, it implements a nondeterministic, open-ended approach that enables it to account for various outcomes in the relationship between the state and religious actors, ranging from mutual respect and support for democratic governance to clashes and attempts to undermine each other. Second, it has the capacity to explain the dynamic dimension of the state–religion interaction on the time axis, something that is overlooked by most existing theories of religion and state.

The analytical framework offered herein departs from the heavy emphasis on secularism that characterized previous theories and advances the political element of the postsecular literature in four important ways, which I present as four analytical propositions. The first is that religion and

democracy may be compatible, meaning that they can peacefully coexist in a stable political system. The second is that the Western model of democracy, with its strong emphasis on secularization, is not the only viable option for democratic regimes. In other words, nonsecular variants of democracy are a conceivable option. The third proposition is that the state–religion interaction is dynamic and develops over time. Particularly crucial are the factors that shape new regimes' approach toward religion, because they set the starting point for the relationship and establish strong path-dependent arrangements and institutions that often will have enormous influence on how this relationship evolves over time (Mahoney 2000; Pierson 2004).

The last proposition relates to how religious actors should be perceived and analyzed in democratic society and politics. It holds that religious groups are social actors whose modes of behavior and engagement with the state are not random but are largely dependent on state policies toward them, which in turn leads to certain responses by these groups, and so on, creating a mutually constitutive interaction. The affiliation of religious actors is most important in this regard, namely, whether religious actors are integrated to the state apparatus and promote state policies or work mainly in civil society and challenge state policies (Huber, Rueschemeyer, and Stephens 1993, 74).

Case Selection: Why Compare Israel and Turkey?

Israel and Turkey are different in many respects, such as size, level of economic development, geographic position, and state traditions. Despite these differences, they are appropriate candidates for comparison because of their many relevant similarities (the most important of which I detail below) and chiefly because of two crucial points of difference. Let us start with the latter. First, from their origins, Israel and Turkey adopted opposite policies toward religion. For different historical and structural reasons, the Zionist nationalist movement and later the state of Israel gave Jewish religious content and actors (which I distinguish from the more amorphous and debatable “Jewishness” of the state that appears in Israel’s declaration of independence and basic laws, which may be interpreted as primarily ethnic²) a positive official role in their ideologies and policies. In Turkey, the Kemalist nationalist movement and the Turkish state fought religious manifestations in the public and political spheres and repressed Islamic culture (although Republican Turkey’s Diyanet, the directorate of religious affairs, acknowledged affiliation with Sunni Islam as an element of Turkish collective identity, thereby giving primacy in the

secular system to one strand of Islamic identity; Keyman 2007, 225). These different strategies generated very different roles for religion as an identity and as a political instrument, which make these cases good candidates for study and a comparison between them telling.

Second, while neither state implemented a liberal democracy, they vary significantly in terms of their democratic performance. Israel has maintained a stable democratic regime despite considerable domestic and external challenges. In contrast, Turkey has endured frequent interruptions to democratic rule by unelected actors, including the security apparatus and the judiciary. Moreover, the legacy of hegemonic rule established by the previous Kemalist elite has been adopted by the incumbent religious elite and continues to undermine Turkish democracy. These striking differences, and the correlation between them, provide the theoretical puzzle of this study.

In terms of their similarities, the two states are located in the Middle East and have long been the only democratic (or partially democratic) polities in this region (Diamond 2010). This fact alone puts them in a unique position and makes a comparison interesting on the regional level. Moreover, Palestine was a province of the Ottoman Empire for more than 400 years, and despite varying legacies of their colonial pasts, the two countries share several related and relevant historical experiences. The most relevant point in this respect is that the British Mandate in Palestine, and later the state of Israel, retained the millet system, originally implemented in Palestine by the Ottoman Empire, which grants partial autonomy to each religious community in society.

In addition, the establishment of the two states was the accomplishment of two successful national projects—Zionism and Kemalism—that borrowed national and modern agendas around the same period of time (late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) from European intellectual discourse (Avineri 1981; Mardin 1989). Similarly, these national movements benefited from an exceptional leadership manifested in the personalities and leadership skills of Kemal Atatürk in Turkey and David Ben-Gurion in Israel, two men of rare qualities who laid the foundations of their states and were central in dictating the initial arrangements of the state–religion relationship (Bar Zohar 1987; Mango 2008). Also significant is that the foundation of the two modern states was the ultimate outcome of long and costly wars of independence that consolidated the prominent status of their national leaderships and facilitated the latter’s long-term rule.

The two countries are also comparable in domestic features. Despite a considerable difference in the overall size of their populations, Turkey and

Israel are both home to a significant majority group that identifies itself with one faith—Judaism in the Israeli case and Sunni Islam in the Turkish case. Both countries, since their establishment, have had to deal with a large minority of another ethnicity/nationality that has put forward demands for collective recognition by the state. Israel is home to an Arab minority making up approximately 20 percent of the population (1.8 million people out of 8.8 million), and Turkey has a Kurdish minority of roughly the same percentage (16 million people out of 80 million) (Central Intelligence Agency 2017). These countries have dealt with these large minorities in ways that debase their democratic systems, although using different methods in each case (Peled 1992; Smooha 2002; Peleg and Waxman 2007; Yavuz and Özcan 2015).

Furthermore, despite variations in the level of religion, the commonalities between Judaism and Islam offer good reasons to compare the state–religion relationship in Israel and Turkey. To begin with, Islam and Judaism are based on practice, not on faith. These religions require their adherents to follow a comprehensive code of behavior, as opposed to most strands of Christianity, according to which faith need not necessarily be manifested in particular behavior. Both have a very detailed religious legal code—the Islamic Sharia and the Jewish Halakha—that regulates every aspect of life, including the political realm. Both are characterized by the absence of a clear hierarchical order such as that found in Catholicism, and equally by the lack of a clear distinction between the political and spiritual spheres (Lazarus-Yafeh 2003). The religions share many practices, ceremonies, and traditions as well as doctrinal features. A partial list of similarities includes the following: strict monotheism; dietary laws (kashrut and halal); circumcision; and clergy (rabbis and ulema) who are scholars and theologians but not priests. Both revere the same figure—Avraham (in Hebrew) or Ibrahim (in Arabic)—as the father of the faith; the Jewish prophet Moses is seen in Islam as a role model for Muhammad. Both originally faced the same direction during prayer, toward Jerusalem (Bunzl 2004, 7).

Although the compatibility of Islam and democracy is generally doubted, an Islamic state need not necessarily reject democratic governance. This holds true in Muslim states such as Indonesia and Malaysia, and more recently Tunisia. Currently the Islamic Middle East is admittedly the region most resistant to democracy. But this is not necessarily because of Islam's ethos or doctrinal features (Bellin 2004; Stepan and Robertson 2004; Hinnebusch 2006; Diamond 2010; Esposito, Sonn, and Voll 2015). The dramatic mass protests, regime change, and democratic elections in several Arab countries

since 2011 provide cautious signs of hope for the possibility of democratic progress. Likewise, there is no reason to assume that all strands of Judaism, even though conceived of as somehow Western (via the “Judeo-Christian tradition”), will be consistent in their support for democracy. Therefore, it is not the type of religion that determines its compatibility with democracy. Rather, this is determined by the specific circumstances and continuing dynamic interaction between the state and religious actors in different contexts (Schwedler 2001; Stepan 2001; Soper and Fetzer 2018). In Turkey and Israel, this relationship has changed significantly over time and produced different experiences with democracy. This is where a dynamic perspective can be an effective instrument of analysis to explain trends in the state–religion relationship and account for changes in the role of religion in transitions to democracy.

The cases of Turkey and Israel warrant a new dynamic approach to analyzing the state–religion relationship. In these countries the relationship between the modern state and religion began very differently before independence, witnessed considerable changes over time, and in many ways resulted in opposite outcomes. In the late Ottoman Empire, several factors pushed the leadership of the incoming elite to eliminate all possibility of religious influence in the new order. Following its establishment in 1923, the Republic of Turkey applied the common Western prescription—modernization and democracy require secularism—and tried to marginalize religion by imposing strict secularism through constitutional measures and military repression. Nevertheless, after nine decades of often coercively enforcing this policy, Turkey remained far from socially secular, with significant problems of democratic instability and a resilient authoritarian political culture. Unfortunately, a change of political elite from Kemalist to Islamist has failed to alter the century-old hegemonic political culture in Turkey, and the incumbent regime represses political opponents and restricts civil rights to retain power, a trend that worsened after the failed coup in July 2016 and the April 2017 referendum (see chapter 5).

In contrast, underlying structural and ideational conditions dictated the early integration of religious content into the Zionist ideology and religious actors into the ranks of the movement. Consequently, despite Zionism’s secular orientation, postindependence Israel challenged the standard secularization thesis and chose to grant an official multidimensional role to religion in state affairs.

By integrating religion into the public and political spheres, Israel was able to develop a stable democratic regime and facilitate a relatively peaceful

coexistence of secular and religious worldviews, at least during the first two decades after independence. Since 1967, however, the country's religious actors have endeavored to occupy disproportionate power in the political sphere and violate the principles of democracy by imposing their narrow worldview on different realms of state policy and social life. So far, Israeli democracy has been able to contain these challenges in an effective fashion and retain the democratic principles of the regime, but they have arguably eroded its performance, especially under Netanyahu's governments since 2009.

The lessons from these two cases challenge simplistic assumptions of existing theories about the conceptual relationship between democracy, modernization, and religion. The analytical framework offered in this book compares the dynamic relationship between the state and religion, its evolution over time, and its impact on democratization processes in Turkey and Israel. This can shed new light on our understanding of the state–religion relationship and its influence on democratization and democratic performance more generally.

Structure of the Book

The rest of this book is arranged as follows. In chapter 1 I develop the core premises of the analytical framework that I use throughout and show how it accounts for the state–religion relationship over time, the boundaries of civil society, and how it influences the development of a democratic regime. The remainder of the book applies the framework to Turkey and Israel. Each case is discussed in four consecutive chapters that correspond to four chronological periods. The chronological analysis emphasizes the dynamic element in the state–religion relationship and its corresponding influence on democratic performance in different periods.

Chapters 2 through 5 explore the Turkish experience. Chapter 2 presents the conditions in the prerepublican Ottoman Empire, which determined the role of the Islamic religion in the Turkish Republic. Chapter 3 discusses the nondemocratic phase of Turkish politics, which stretched between 1923 and 1950 and was largely a necessary product of the Kemalist program to impose secularism on society from above. Chapter 4 deals with the first democratic phase in Turkish politics, under Kemalist hegemony, between 1950 and 2000. It demonstrates how the Islamic religion was able to carve its place in Turkish politics, despite assertive attempts by the Kemalist establishment to contain its growing social and political power, and how this interaction

changed religious actors' strategies of engagement with the state in recent years, bringing religious parties to political power in a formally secular regime. Chapter 5 discusses the most recent period of religion–state politics in Turkey under the AKP government (2002–2018). It demonstrates how religion served as an effective platform to pluralize the Turkish political discourse and at the same time exposes the influence of Turkey's initial treatment of religion on the country's current democratic downturn.

Chapters 6 through 9 discuss the evolving relationship between the state and religious actors in Israel. Chapter 6 covers the emergence of the Zionist movement in the late nineteenth century and the factors influencing the role this movement chose to grant the Jewish religion in its ideology and institutions, first in the Diaspora and later in the institutions of the Jewish community in Palestine (the Yishuv). In chapter 7 I investigate the arrangements that organized the role of religion in the new state of Israel and their positive impact on the sustainability of a stable democratic regime in the first two decades after independence. Chapter 8 demonstrates how modifications in the role of religion due to changing social, political, and security circumstances between the mid-1960s and mid-1980s subverted the constructive collaboration that characterized the previous state–religion interaction. Chapter 9 analyzes the mounting challenges by religious populations against the state from the 1980s to the present and how the latter has managed to effectively contain them in the boundaries of democracy.

Chapter 10, the concluding chapter, is divided into two sections. The first assesses the general applicability of the analytical framework as a tool of analysis and suggests some general lessons about the role of religion and other collective identities in emerging democracies as well as possible paths for future research. The second section discusses the applicability of the analytical framework offered in this book to emerging political regimes in the Middle East.