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RELIGION, DEMOCRATISATION
AND DEMOCRACY

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The question of how religious actors¹ might affect democratisation has been controversial for decades. Scholars stressed the importance of political culture in explaining the success or failure of democratisation after the Second World War in West Germany, Italy and Japan (Linz and Stepan, 1996; Stepan, 2000; Huntington, 1991). In addition, religious traditions – for example, Roman Catholicism in Italy and Christian Democracy in West Germany – were said to be important in the (re)making of a country’s political culture after an experience of totalitarian regimes (Casanova, 1994; Madeley, 2009). During the ‘third wave of democracy’ (mid-1970s to late-1990s), a lot of attention was paid to the role of religion in democratisation (Huntington, 1991). For example, it was widely noted that in Poland, the Roman Catholic Church played a key role in undermining the communist regime and helping to establish a post-communist, democratically accountable regime (Weigel, 2005, 2007). This undermining and eventual replacement of an unelected government by ‘people’s power’ had a wider political effect beyond Poland, extending to elsewhere in formerly Soviet controlled Central and Eastern Europe, as well as Latin America, Africa and parts of Asia. There was also the contemporaneous rise of the Christian Right in the United States, and its considerable impact on the electoral fortunes of both the Republican Party and the Democratic Party. Add to this the widespread growth of Islamist movements across much of the Muslim world, with significant ramifications for electoral outcomes in various countries, including Algeria, Egypt and Morocco, successive electoral successes for the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party in India, and substantial political influence over time for various ‘Jewish fundamentalist’ political parties in Israel, and we have clear and sustained evidence of religion’s recent importance in democratisation and experiences of democratic regimes.

Focusing upon the Central and East European democratising experience more generally, Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan argued that religion was not generally a key explanatory factor explaining democratisation outcomes (Linz and Stepan, 1996). In relation to Muslim countries, Fred Halliday (2005) argued that apparent barriers to democracy in some such countries, especially in the Middle East and North Africa, are primarily linked to certain shared social and political features. These generally include long histories and experiences of authoritarian rule and weak and often fragmented civil societies and, although some of those features tend to be legitimised in terms of ‘Islamic doctrine’, there is in fact nothing specifically ‘Islamic’ about them. On the other hand, for Huntington (1996), religion has a crucial impact on democratisation.
Huntington claims that Christianity has a strong propensity to be supportive of democratisation and the consolidation of democracy while most other religions, including Islam, Buddhism and Confucianism, do not.

This chapter seeks to build on such insights and arguments. To do so, it examines key debates on religion and democratisation reflected in the following three hypotheses:

- religious traditions have core elements which are more or less conducive to democratisation and democracy;
- religious traditions may be multi-vocal – but at any moment there are dominant or loudest voices more or less receptive to and encouraging of democratisation;
- religious actors rarely if ever determine democratisation outcomes. However, in various ways and with a range of outcomes, they are often of significance for democratisation.

The chapter is divided into four sections: (1) Religious deprivatisation and political change: a worldwide phenomenon; (2) Defining democratisation and religion; (3) Religion, political society, civil society and the state; and (4) Concluding comments. Overall, the aim is to examine the veracity of the three hypotheses in the bullet points above. In the next section, we examine how religious deprivatisation has led to political changes in many parts of the world. After that, we look at how religion is defined, in order to clarify how it can affect politics and political outcomes, including democratisation and democracy. The third section examines three important components of politics: political society, civil society and the state, with a view to identifying and discussing religion’s influence in relation to each and, overall, how they affect democratisation and democracy.

Our general starting point is that in general around the world, religions have left their assigned place in the private sphere. This means they have in many cases become recognisably politically active in various ways and with assorted outcomes. This re-emergence from political marginality dates back until at least the 1980s. At that time, Casanova notes, ‘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 involved a remodelling and re-assumption of public roles by religion, which theories of secularisation had long condemned to social and political marginalisation.

What, if anything, is politically distinctive about secularisation? ‘Secularisation’ involves a significant diminishing of religious concerns in everyday life. Secularisation was once thought to be a unidirectional process, characterising progress from tradition to modernity. As societies moved in this direction, it was thought inevitable that they would progress from a sacred condition to one where religion had decreasing ability to influence public outcomes. The point would eventually be reached whereby the sacred would become both socially and politically marginal. Secularisation theory confidently proclaimed that religion was destined universally to become ‘only’ a private matter, losing its public significance. As Shupe (1990: 19) notes, ‘the demystification of religion inherent in the classic secularisation paradigm posits a gradual, persistent, unbroken erosion of religious influence in urban industrial societies’. Such was secularisation theory’s hold on the understanding of successive generations of social scientists, that the Spanish sociologist José Casanova (1994: 17) was correct when he wrote that secularisation theory ‘may be the only theory which was able to attain a truly paradigmatic status within the modern social sciences’. Casanova’s comment followed the understanding of most of the leading figures of nineteenth- and twentieth-century social science – including Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim, Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, Talcott Parsons, Herbert Spencer and Max Weber. All believed that secularisation was an integral facet of ‘modernisation’, a global trend of major developmental relevance everywhere as societies modernised.
all believed that religion would gradually fade in importance and cease to be significant with the advent of industrial [that is, modernised] society. The belief that religion was dying became the conventional wisdom in the social sciences during most of the twentieth century.

(Norris and Inglehart 2004: 3)

As modernisation extended its grip, so the argument went, religion would everywhere be ‘privatised’, losing its grip on culture, becoming a purely personal matter. Thus, religion would no longer be a collective force with significant mobilising potential for social and/or political changes. In short, secularisation, the US sociologist, Donald Eugene Smith proclaimed, was ‘the most fundamental structural and ideological change in the process of political development’ (Smith 1970: 6). It was thought a one-way street: societies gradually – but inexorably – move away from being focused around the sacred and a concern with the divine to a situation characterised by significant diminution of religious power and authority.

Secularisation theory tout court turned out to be wrong. Rather than fading away, it is frequently observed that religion has made a return to social and political prominence in many countries, especially in the developing world, over the last two or three decades. Many would now accept that the opposite to religious marginalisation occurred: widespread religious resurgence, with ramifications for how we understand politics and international relations (Haynes, 2013). Religion’s social and political influence is said to be high in several regions of the world, not ‘only’ in much of the developing world, but also in a key Western, ‘developed’ country: the United States. Whereas in the 1960s and 1970s secularisation theorists predicted the ‘death’ of religion, now many accept they were wrong. For example, the late Peter Berger (1999: 3), once a leading proponent of the secularisation thesis, later accepted that, ‘far from being in decline in the modern world, religion is actually experiencing a resurgence … the assumption we live in a secularized world is false … The world today is as furiously religious as it ever was’. Thus, contrary to conventional wisdom, ‘modernisation’ did not actually weaken religion – but instead strengthened it, leading to a widespread religious resurgence. We are now as a result experiencing a religious revival, which consequently brings religion into renewed political activity and prominence in many parts of the world. Norris and Inglehart (2004: 215–216) state that ‘some of these reported phenomena [of religious resurgence] may have been overstated’ but it is the case that ‘the simplistic assumption that religion was everywhere in decline, common in earlier decades, has become implausible to even the casual observer’.

It was once believed to be axiomatic that modernisation inevitably leads to religious privatisation and secularisation. As a result, there would be a fundamental, global decline in religion’s social and political importance. This was believed to be the case, regardless of religious tradition or form of political power dominant in the context in which religion found itself. The 1979 revolution in Iran posed fundamental questions in relation to this conventional wisdom. Contemporaneously, the Roman Catholic Church began to play an increasingly important role in relation to democratisation in Central and Eastern Europe, Africa, East Asia and Latin America. These two developments not only collectively emphasised that modernisation does not always lead straightforwardly to increased secularisation and its corollary, religious marginalisation, but also that religion may play a fundamental role in issues of political representation and legitimacy, including democratisation and democracy. Contrary to secularisation theory, there has been a widespread – some say, global – resurgence of religion, often as a political actor in numerous countries (Casanova, 1994; Davie, 2000; Stepan, 2000). This has involved various religious traditions. Overall, this emphasises not only that there is more than one relevant interpretation of modernisation but also that religion can and does play a role in political changes, even in parts of the world, such as Western Europe, long regarded as inevitably and invariably secularising.
Religious deprivatisation and political change: a worldwide phenomenon

Globally, two phenomena are simultaneously taking place. First, there is said to be an increase in various forms of spirituality and religiosity, although this also implies in many cases both fragmentation and decline in societal clout of hitherto leading religious organisations in many countries (Davie, 2000). The increase in spirituality and religiosity are manifested in various ways including ‘new’ religious and spiritual phenomena, including manifestations of ‘New Age’ spirituality; ‘foreign’, ‘exotic’ Eastern religions, including Hare Krishna; ‘televangelism’; renewed interest in astrology, and ‘new’ sects, such as the Scientologists. Note, however, that such religious entities, as Casanova (1994: 5) points out, are ‘not particularly relevant for the social sciences or for the self-understanding of modernity’, because they do not present ‘major problems of interpretation … They fit within expectations and can be interpreted within the framework of established theories of secularization’. The point is that they are normal phenomena. They are examples of private religion. They do not individually or collectively question or challenge the extant arrangements of society, including political and social structures. Indeed, such religious phenomena are apolitical; and ‘all’ they really show is that many people are interested in spiritual issues and sometimes they involve new expressions. In addition, in many Southern European countries with Roman Catholic cultures – for example, Italy, Poland and Spain – the Church is losing moral appeal for many people, especially among the young (Ceccarini, 2009). In sum, globally the multiplicity of existing and new religious phenomena belies the idea that religion would inevitably lose its appeal for many people, even in apparently highly secular countries, including France and Turkey. In addition, innovative religious forms appear to be increasing their appeal, often at the expense of traditional religions. But from a political perspective these new religions are rarely of political importance.

Second, not only Christian churches – especially the Roman Catholic Church in both transnational and national contexts – but also Islamic religious actors in many countries, as well as Judaist political parties in Israel, now openly seek to articulate viewpoints on a variety of political and social issues, more readily and openly than in the past. Such religious entities typically resist state attempts to side-line them.

Three questions are central in seeking to account for religion’s current political impact in many countries. First, why should religious organisations seek to become actors with political goals? This occurs when religious entities feel that change is necessary and that the state is not well equipped to oversee and lead such changes, not least because the solutions it seeks are secular ones; and they do not chime well with religious interpretations. Second, how widespread is the phenomenon? Our starting assumption is that it is extensive, although the following account indicates that it is not uniform in its implications. Third, what are the political consequences of religion’s intervention in democratisation and/or the workings of an existing democratic polity? The short answer is that they are variable. For example, sometimes religion appears to have a pivotal influence on political outcomes – for example, the role of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland in relation to democratisation in the 1980s. Elsewhere, related outcomes can be both unexpected and variable, sometimes expressed at the level of what Ulrich Beck has called ‘sub-politics’, that is, political contestation played out not in political society but at the level of civil society (Beck, 1997).

While differing in terms of specific issues that encourage them to act politically, religious actors 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, they typically refuse to render to secular power-holders automatic material or moral support. Instead, they are concerned with various social, moral and ethical issues, which are however nearly always political to some degree. Religious actors 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 religious actors 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 – and in many places, political – contestation.

However, the key point is not from which religious tradition individual religious actors come. Instead, religious entities are very often also political actors, wielding varying degrees of influence in relation to political outcomes, while sharing a focus on a key issue: a desire to change their societies in directions where what they regard as religiously acceptable standards of behaviour are central to public life, including political life. Pursuing such objectives, they use a variety of tactics and methods, operating either at the level of civil society and/or political society. In democratising and already-democratic polities, religious actors are compelled to play by the rules of the democratic game if they wish to enjoy legitimacy and, in most cases, continued existence. Like any other political actors, if a religious party or entity resorts to extra-democratic means, such as extremism, violence or terrorism, it will quickly find itself beyond the pale and no longer allowed to function within the parameters of ‘normal’ political interactions.

Defining democratisation and religion

Before turning to these issues in detail, it is useful to start by discussing two of the key terms used in this chapter: ‘democratisation’ and ‘religion’.

Democratisation is a process. It can occur in four not necessarily discrete stages: (1) political liberalisation; (2) collapse of authoritarian regime; (3) democratic transition; (4) democratic consolidation. Political liberalisation is the process of reforming authoritarian rule. Collapse of the authoritarian regime stage refers to the stage when a dictatorship falls apart. Democratic transition is the material shift to democracy, commonly marked by the democratic election of a new government. Democratic consolidation is the process of embedding both democratic institutions and perceptions among both elites and citizens that democracy is the best way of ‘doing’ politics.

The four stages are complementary and can overlap. For example, political liberalisation and transition can happen simultaneously, while aspects of democratic consolidation can appear when certain elements of transition are barely in place or remain incomplete. Or they may even be showing signs of retreating. On the other hand, it is nearly always possible to observe a concluded transition to democracy. This is when a pattern of behaviour developed ad hoc during the stage of regime change becomes institutionalised, characterised by admittance of political actors into the system – as well as the process of political decision-making – according to previously established and legitimately coded procedures.

Until then, absence of or uncertainty about these accepted ‘rules of the democratic game’ make it difficult to be sure about the eventual outcome of political transitions. This is because the transition dynamics revolve around strategic interactions and tentative arrangements...
between actors with uncertain power resources. Key issues include: (1) defining who is legitimately entitled to play the political ‘game’; (2) the criteria determining who wins and who loses politically; and (3) the limits to be placed on the issues at stake. What chiefly differentiates the four stages of democratisation is the degree of uncertainty prevailing at each moment. For example, during regime transition all political calculations and interactions are highly uncertain. This is because political actors find it difficult to know: (1) what their precise interests are; and (2) which groups and individuals would most usefully be allies or opponents.

During transition, powerful, often inherently undemocratic, political players, such as the armed forces and/or elite civilian supporters of the exiting authoritarian regime, characteristically divide into what Huntington has identified as ‘hard-line’ and ‘soft-line’ factions (Huntington, 1991). ‘Soft-liners’ are relatively willing to achieve negotiated solutions to the political problems, while ‘hard-liners’ are unwilling to arrive at solutions reflecting compromise between polarised positions. Democratic transition is most likely when ‘soft-liners’ triumph because, unlike ‘hard-liners’, they are willing to find a compromise solution.

A consolidated democracy is often said to be in place when political elites, political groups and the mass of ordinary people accept the formal rules and informal understandings that determine political outcomes: that is, ‘who gets what, where, when and how’. If achieved, it signifies that groups are settling into relatively predictable positions involving politically legitimate behaviour according to generally acceptable rules. More generally, a consolidated democracy is characterised by normative limits and established patterns of power distribution. Political parties emerge as privileged in this context because, despite their divisions over strategies and their uncertainties about partisan identities, the logic of electoral competition focuses public attention on them and compels them to appeal to the widest possible clientele. In addition, ‘strong’ civil societies are thought to be crucial for democratic consolidation, in part because they can help keep an eye on the state and what it does with its power. In sum, there is democratic consolidation when all major political actors take for granted the fact that democratic processes dictate governmental renewal.

Despite numerous relatively free and fair elections over the last two decades in many formerly authoritarian countries, in most cases ordinary people continue to lack ability to influence political outcomes. In many cases, this may be because small groups of elites – whether civilians, military personnel or a combination – not only control national political processes but also manage more widely to dictate political conditions. Under such conditions, because power is still held by relatively small groups of elites, political systems have narrow bases from which most ordinary people are, or feel, excluded. This can be problematic because, by definition, a democracy should not be run by and for the few, but should signify popularly elected government operating in the broad public interest.

In sum, during the third wave of democracy, increased numbers of governments came to power via the ballot box – yet not all of them have exhibited strong democratic credentials (Carothers, 2002).

Turning to the issue of defining religion, it has long been noted how extraordinarily difficult it is to reach a consensus on this issue. Sociologists have tended to use two main approaches in this regard. Religion is either: (1) a system of beliefs and practices related to an ultimate being, beings, or to the supernatural; or (2) that which is sacred in a society, including ultimate inviolate beliefs and practices. For purposes of wider social science analysis, religion can usefully be approached (1) from the perspective of a body of ideas and outlooks – that is, theology and ethical code; (2) as a type of formal organisation – that is, ecclesiastical ‘church’ or comparable entity; or (3) as social group – that is, a religious organisation, movement or party. Religion can affect the temporal world in one of two ways: by what it says and/or does. The former relates to religion’s doctrine or theology, the latter to its importance as a social phenomenon and mark of
identity, which can function through various modes of institutionalisation, including civil society, political society and religion–state relations.

It is necessary to distinguish between religion expressed at the individual and group levels: only in the latter is it normally of importance for understanding related political outcomes. From an individualist perspective, we are contemplating religion’s private, spiritual side, ‘a set of symbolic forms and acts which relates man [sic] to the ultimate conditions of his existence’ (Bellah, 1964: 359). But to move into the realm of politics, as we do in this volume, is necessarily to be concerned with group religiosity, whose claims and pretensions are always to some degree political. That is, there is no such thing as a religion without consequences for value systems, including those affecting politics and political outcomes. Group religiosity, like politics, is a matter of collective solidarities and, frequently, of inter-group tension, competition and conflict, with a focus on either shared or disputed images of the sacred or on cultural and/or class, in short, political, issues. To complicate matters, however, such influences may well operate differently and with ‘different temporalities for the same theologically defined religion in different parts of the world’ (Moyser, 1991: 11).

To try to bring together the relationship between democratisation and religious actors in all their varied aspects and then to discern significant patterns and trends is not a simple task. But, in attempting it three points are worth emphasising. First, there is something of a distinction to be drawn between looking at the relationship in terms of the impact of religion on democratisation, and that of democratisation on religion. At the same time, they are interactive: one stimulates and is stimulated by the other. In other words, because we are concerned with the ways in which power is exercised in society, and the ways in which religion is involved, the relationship between religion and democratisation is both dialectical and interactive. Both causal directions need to be held in view.

Second, religions are creative and constantly changing; consequently, their relationships with democratisation can also vary over time. In this volume, the authors are all concerned to examine religious entities in democratisation outcomes both currently and over the last few decades.

Finally, as political actors religious entities can only usefully be discussed in terms of specific contexts; in the chapters that comprise this volume, it is the relationship with government which forms a common, although not the only, focal point. Yet, the model of responses, while derived from and influenced by specific aspects of particular religions, is not necessarily inherent to them. Rather this is a theoretical construct suggested by much of the literature on state–society relations, built on the understanding that religion’s specific role is largely determined by a broader context. The assumption is that there is an essential core element of religion shaping its behaviour in, for example, Christian, Islamic or Jewish societies and communities. It is, however, possible to question this assumption. The focus of many earlier studies was to seek to analyse how existing religious beliefs or affiliations affect political outcomes, including those related to democratisation. In this volume, however, we are equally concerned with the reverse process: how do specific political contexts affect how and what selected religious entities do in relation to democratisation?

Religion, political society, civil society and the state

To understand the general political importance of religious actors, and by extension how they involve themselves in democratisation, it is necessary first to comprehend what they say and do in their relationship with the state. When we refer to the ‘state’ we mean something more than ‘mere’ government. The state is the continuous administrative, legal, bureaucratic and coercive system that attempts not only to manage the various state apparatuses, but in addition to
‘structure relations between civil and public power and to structure many crucial relationships within civil and political society’ (Stepan, 1988: 3). As a result, almost everywhere in the world, apparently regardless of the nature of political systems and/or the level of economic development in a country, states have over time sought to reduce and control religion’s political importance and involvement. That is, around the world states have sought to privatise religion, and thus considerably to reduce its political impact. Sometimes, for example in the United States (mainline Protestantism), Poland and Italy (Roman Catholicism) and Turkey (‘official’ Sunni Islam), states attempt to erect a ‘civil religion’ arrangement, whereby a certain designated religious format effectively ‘functions as the cult of the political community’ (Casanova, 1994: 58). The declared purpose is to try to create and develop forms of consensual, corporate religion, claiming to be guided by general, culturally appropriate, specific religious beliefs of intrinsic and ‘universal’ societal significance. In short, when states seek to develop ‘civil religions’ it is an attempted strategy to try to avoid social conflicts and promote national coordination and cohesion.

Religious actors’ relationships with the state are by no means limited to attempts by the latter to build civil religions. In fact, in many countries, relations between religious entities and the state are not only now more visible, but also increasingly problematic. Why is this the case? First, it may be that recent increases in religious challenges to the authority of the state are merely transitory reactions in the context of the onward march of secularisation. Second, even if the modern state is particularly vulnerable to legitimation crises, it does not necessarily mean that religion is again becoming automatically relevant to state functioning. Third, religion-based challenges to state hegemony have roots in endeavours by the latter to assert a monitoring role vis-à-vis religion, in effect to control it. We can see such a development at three levels: political society, civil society and at the level of the state itself.

This underlines that in many countries religion is now liberated from providing sometimes slavish legitimacy to secular authority. Many religious actors are now willing routinely to criticise and challenge the state in various ways in relation to a variety of issues and themes. Yet, even if heightened concern about the state’s policies can be held up as evidence of the regeneration of the socio-political power of religion, we still need to ask further questions. The issues are themselves secular and in so far as religious agencies are active in these areas, this is a radical shift of concern from the supernatural, from devotional acts, to what are largely secular goals pursued by secular means. However, a note of caution is in order: we need to bear in mind that when religious interests act as ‘pressure groups’ – rather than as ‘prayer bodies’ – they are not necessarily going to be effective in what they seek to achieve. This is because the more secularised a society, the less likely it is that religious actors will be able to play a politically significant role (Wilson, 1992: 202–203).

Religion and political society

At the level of political society – that is, the arena in which the polity specifically arranges itself for political contestation to gain control over public power and the state apparatus – we can note a range of religious responses that are in part dependent upon the degree of secularisation. These include (1) resistance to the disestablishment and the differentiation of the religious from the secular sphere, the goals of many so-called religious ‘fundamentalist’ groups; (2) religious groups and confessional political parties’ mobilisations and counter-mobilisations against other religions or secular movements and parties; and (3) religious organisations’ mobilisation in defence of religious, social and political freedoms – that is, demanding the rule of law and the legal protection of human and civil rights, protecting mobilisation of civil society and/or defending institutionalisation of democratically elected governments. In recent times in pursuit
of such goals, we can note Roman Catholic transnational political mobilisation in and between various countries, as well as activities of Islamist groups in various countries, including Turkey, Egypt, Mali and Indonesia.

**Religion and civil society**

Civil society is the arena where various social movements – including neighbourhood associations, women’s groups, religious entities and intellectual currents – join with civic organisations, including lawyers’, journalists’, trade unions’ and entrepreneurs’ associations, to constitute themselves into an ensemble of arrangements to express themselves and seek to advance their interests. Sometimes, the concept of civil society is used in contrast to political society. Unlike the latter, civil society refers to organisations and movements – not political parties – formally uninvolved in both the business of government and overt political management. Note, however, that this does not necessarily prevent civil society organisations from sometimes seeking to or actually exerting political influence, on various matters, including democratic outcomes and the content of national constitutions.

Regarding religion at the level of civil society, one can distinguish between hegemonic civil religions – such as Evangelical Protestantism in nineteenth-century America – and the recent public intervention of religious entities, concerned either with single issues such as anti-abortion or with morally determined views of wider societal development, for example, in relation to homosexual rights or appropriate days for shops to open. In trying to influence public policy – without themselves seeking to become political office-holders – religious entities may employ a variety of tactics, including, in no particular order: (1) lobbying the executive apparatus of the state; (2) going to court; (3) building links with political parties; (4) forming alliances with like-minded groups, both secular and/or from other religious traditions; (5) mobilising followers to lobby and/or protest; and (6) working to sensitise public opinion via mass media. The overall point is that religious actors may use a variety of methods to try to achieve their objectives.

**Religion and the state**

Interactions between the state and religious entities are often referred to as ‘church–state’ relations. It is useful to point out, however, that one of the difficulties in seeking to survey contemporary ‘church–state relations’ is that the very concept of church is a somewhat parochial, Anglo-American standpoint with direct relevance only to Christian traditions. It is derived primarily from the context of British establishmentarianism – that is, maintenance of the principle of ‘establishment’ whereby one church is legally recognised as the only established church. In other words, when we think of church–state relations we may assume a single relationship between two clearly distinct, unitary and solidly but separately institutionalised entities. In this implicit model built into the conceptualisation of the religion–political nexus there is but one state and one church; both entities’ jurisdictional boundaries need to be carefully delineated. Both separation and pluralism must be safeguarded, because it is assumed that the leading church – like the state – will seek institutionalised dominance over rival religious organisations. For its part, the state is expected to respect individual rights even though it is assumed to be inherently disposed towards aggrandisement at the expense of citizens’ personal liberty. In sum, the conventional concept of state–church relations is rooted in prevailing Christian conceptions of the power of the state of necessity being constrained by forces in society – including those of religion.

Expanding the problem of church–state relations to non-Christian contexts necessitates some preliminary conceptual clarifications – not least because the very idea of a prevailing state–
church dichotomy is culture-bound. As already noted, church is a Christian institution, while the modern understanding of state is deeply rooted in the post-Reformation European political experience. In their specific cultural setting and social significance, the tension and the debate over the church–state relationship are uniquely Western phenomena, present in the ambivalent dialectic of ‘render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar’s and unto God the things which be God’s’ (Luke 21:25). Overloaded with Western cultural history, these two concepts cannot easily be translated into non-Christian terminologies.

The differences between Christian conceptions of state and church and those of other world religions are well illustrated by reference to Islam. In the Muslim tradition, mosque is not church. The closest Islamic approximation to ‘state’ – dawla – means, as a concept, either a ruler’s dynasty or his administration. Only with the specific Durkheimian stipulation of church as the generic concept for moral community, priest for the custodians of the sacred law, and state for political community can we comfortably use these concepts in Islamic and other non-Christian contexts. On the theological level, the command–obedience nexus that constitutes the Islamic definition of authority is not demarcated by conceptual categories of religion and politics. Life as a physical reality is an expression of divine will and authority (qudrah). There is no validity in separating the matters of piety from those of the polity; both are divinely ordained. Yet, although both religious and political authorities are legitimated Islamically, they invariably constitute two independent social institutions. They do, however, regularly interact with each other. Yet, there may be sometimes serious tensions between Islamist actors and the state in regard to democratisation and political outcomes more generally.

The overall point is that tensions widely exist between secular power-holders and religious actors of various kinds in the modern world. It is often the case in some European countries, for example, that religious actors, apparently regardless of their religious persuasion, may work individually or collectively towards reducing the ability of the state to side-line them. Barras shows this in relation to France where recent years have seen a campaign by some Muslim women to wear Islamic dress. While they regard it as a fundamental human right to be allowed to dress as they wish, French secularists see things differently: Muslim women’s efforts to dress as they wish is regarded by the secularists as a direct contravention of a core French post-revolutionary principle: subjugation of religion by the state. In effect, such religious challenges reflect a wider development: a wish on the part of some religious actors to reverse religious privatisation, a course of action which impacts on a variety of political and social concerns.

Concluding comments

To try to bring together the relationship between democratisation, democracy and religious actors in all their varied aspects and then to try to discern significant patterns and trends is not a simple task. But, in attempting it three points are worth emphasising. First, there is something of a distinction to be drawn between looking at the relationship in terms of the impact of religion on democratisation and democracy and vice versa. Yet, they are also interactive: one stimulates and is stimulated by the other. In other words, because we are concerned with the ways in which power is exercised in society, and the ways in which religion is involved, the relationship between religion, democratisation and democracy is both dialectical and interactive. Both causal directions need to be held in view.

Second, religions are creative and constantly changing; consequently, their relationships with democratisation and democracy can also vary over time. Finally, as political actors, religious entities can only usefully be discussed in terms of specific contexts; it is the relationship with government – whether supporting it or seeking to undermine it – which forms a common,
although not the only, focal point. Yet, the model of responses, while derived from and influenced by specific aspects of particular religions, is not necessarily inherent to them. Rather this is a theoretical construct suggested by much of the literature on state-society relations, built on the understanding that religion’s specific role is largely determined by a broader context. The assumption is that there is an essential core element of religion shaping its behaviour in, for example, Christian, Islamic or Jewish societies and communities.

**Note**

1 Religious faith encourages a religious actor to undertake action. Such actors include: churches and comparable religious organisations in non-Christian religions; social movements whose main motivating factor is members’ religious beliefs; and political parties, whose ideology identifiably also has its roots in religious beliefs and traditions.

**References**