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## **Two Propositions for the Future Study of Religion-State Arrangements**

This is a rather exciting, what some have even described as a heady, time for scholars of religion and politics. One century after the publication of Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, religion matters again for the social sciences! The last fifteen years, in fact, have seen an explosion of studies which have affirmed the influence of religion in global politics and which have chided earlier scholars for missing such influence or predicting its absolute decline. Religious terrorism and conflict; the rise of Pentecostals and Evangelicals in the Americas; the debate over Islam and democracy; the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; neo-conservative politics in the United States; the immigration of Spanish-speaking Catholic individuals in the Americas or Arabic-speaking Muslim individuals in Europe; the sex abuse scandals in the Catholic Church; the negotiations over the split of the Anglican Church. Many studies note this litany of significant events to hammer out the conclusion that religion matters once again. This contemporary boom in religious studies, however, has yet to reach its intellectual maturity. Although certainly not the only indicator of scholarly development, the absence of any generally testable hypotheses emanating from theoretical work within studies of political science is one small sign of the growth still to be done in this field.

In a small way, my current theoretical research attempts to stimulate such growth by theoretically building upon the work of several recent social scientists who have set out to analyze cross-national variations in religion-state arrangements. This effort has been spearheaded

by attempts by scholars such as Jonathon Fox<sup>1</sup>, Brian Grim and Roger Finke<sup>2</sup>, John Madeley<sup>3</sup> and others to both codify differences in the institutional arrangements between religion and state as well as theoretically isolate what sort of explanatory power these variations might possess for political and social phenomena.

Two general conclusions which all of these studies make are: 1) there is simply an abundance of ways by which contemporary governments remain institutionally involved in the religious markets of their countries and, partly because of such government involvement, 2) religious actors and organizations still hold a surprising degree of authority over political matters, even in the post-industrialized countries of the Northwest.

Within these studies, Grim and Finke (2006) make a basic distinction between two (statistically significant) dimensions of religion-state arrangements that is useful for helping us to find our bearings in this abundance of government involvement in religion. They refer to these dimensions as Government Regulation of Religion (GRI)<sup>4</sup> as opposed to Government Favoritism of Religion (GFI). GRI measures the overt restrictions on religious individuals or religious organizations' rights, liberties and freedom of movement, as well as the content of their belief. GFI, on the other hand, measures the range of government subsidies and policies of friendliness which might identify a regime with one or a few religions but not necessarily entail that that regime will regulate (or be regulated by) those religions. The following table presents selections of countries which fall within some ideal categories of GRI and GFI.

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<sup>1</sup> Fox Jonathon, *A World Survey of Religion and the State*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Grim Brian and Finke Roger, "International Religion Indexes: Government Regulation, Government Favoritism, and Social Regulation of Religion", *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion*, 2006/1, pp. 1-40.

<sup>3</sup> Madeley John, "A Framework for the Comparative Analysis of Church-State Relations in Europe," *West European Politics*, 2003/1, pp. 23-50.

<sup>4</sup> As in their Government Regulation of Religion and Government Favoritism of Religion Indexes.

**Selections of Countries within Ideal Categories of Government Regulation of Religion (GRI) and Government Favoritism of Religion (GFI) :**

	<b>Low levels of GRI</b>	<b>High levels of GFI</b>
<b>High levels of GRI</b>	Laos, Vietnam, North Korea, Tajikistan, Djibouti, Kyrgyzstan	Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Turkey, Pakistan, Iraq, Yemen
<b>Low levels of GRI</b>	USA, Uruguay, Australia, Great Britain, Paraguay, Norway, Sweden, Canada	Argentina, Belgium Portugal, Costa Rica, Peru, Greece, Italy, Senegal, Chile, Slovenia, Malta

There are many interesting insights which this table helps bring to light. For the purpose of this short research brief, however, I would like to focus our attention simply on the table's lower right hand quadrant and notice that there are quite a number of a) democratic countries and b) Catholic countries hanging on down there. In a recently published piece<sup>5</sup> which complements similar work by Fox<sup>6</sup>, I argue that while government regulation of religion is significantly and negatively associated with lower cross-national aggregate scores of democracy, there is little association between those same democracy scores and government favoritism of religion, especially at lower levels of government regulation of religion. As long as a regime can hold its levels of GRI at bay, that regime can institute surprisingly high levels of GFI and still flourish as a democracy. A lot of predominantly Catholic countries seem to have done just that. In other

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<sup>5</sup> Driessen Michael, "Religion, State and Democracy: Analyzing Two Dimensions of Religion-State Arrangements", *Politics and Religion*, 2010/3, pp. 55-80.

<sup>6</sup> Fox, *A World Survey of Religion and the State*, p. 339.

words, in practice, it appears to be quite possible for a state to violate the principle of “ideological neutrality” (so dear to the inheritors of the liberal tradition, from Habermas to Rawls) yet still institute just as many basic social rights and civil liberties *and* guarantee a separation of powers and alternation of leadership as those states who do keep a principle of ideological neutrality.

I would like to offer two reflections which draw from this insight and propose them as propositions requiring further evaluation by future scholarship on religion-state arrangements:

1.

My first reflection is that friendly religion-state arrangements represent an under-theorized option for states seeking alternative pathways towards democracy. In many of the Catholic countries in the lower right quadrant of our table, the institutional Catholic Church put up enormous struggles against the liberalizing forces who championed the institutionalization of democratic reforms. Putting aside the complexities of national histories for a moment, we could understand the high level of government favoritism of religion which we observe in some of those countries today (such as, especially, Belgium and Italy) as reflections of the compromises that were made in negotiations between Catholic-friendly and secular-friendly political forces and which were meant to resolve those political struggles. Instituting some government friendliness of religion in the constitution allowed state elites to propose democracy as a project which did not pit two competing visions of the state against one another: a lay-secular as opposed to a clerical-religious one. Over time, many of the hostilities of Catholic forces to democratic ideas and principles faded as Catholic politicians moderated and secularized some of

their goals and ideas and marginalized intransigent Catholic elites whose resistance to such political moderation posed a growing political-electoral liability.

This is an important experience to remember, analyze and consider today as policy-makers and scholars continue to debate the compatibility between “Islam” or “Islamists” and democracy and search for alternative pathways towards democratization in North Africa and the Middle East. The influence of French ideas and history on the scholarship of the Middle East and the importance of the Turkish experience of nation-building have led many on all sides of the debate to exaggerate the levels of political and religious secularism required of the state to make democracy work. While *laïcité* in either the French or Turkish versions may represent one possibility for the institutional arrangement between religion and state in a democracy, there are other possibilities, as the Catholic countries of the lower right quadrant of our table attest, which leave much more room for a friendlier arrangement between religion and state. These are possibilities which deserve further intellectual inquiry.

2.

My second reflection is that we can notice that there is some degree of correlation between the institutional friendliness of a religion-state arrangement and the corresponding intensity of the religious life within that country. Limiting myself to the experience of the countries of Western Europe, I would like to propose that the institutionalization of religious friendliness in the state could be thought of as providing some mediation on the downward forces which secularization exercises on levels of national religiosity. By subsidizing and encouraging religious belief, even in a democracy, the state creates a more likely context for the

(re)-emergence of something along the lines of what Casanova<sup>7</sup> has termed “public religions,” by creating a protective space for those religions and allowing them some time to re-propose themselves in the political and social life of a nation. The presence of a public religion, by itself, cannot hold back many of the massive changes associated with modernization and its effects on the conditions of contemporary religious belief. Yet, I propose, states who institutionally promote a religion can help prevent the total religious secularization of society or the reduction of mass individual attachment to institutional religious beliefs and rituals to “subsistence levels”<sup>8</sup>. My preliminary data analyses seems to indicate that some types of state subsidies for religion, particularly some forms of government-mandated religious education programs in public schools, increase the likelihood of both higher levels of regular participation in religious rituals (higher, on average, than other countries, but not higher than fifty years ago) and much greater mass identification with one religious tradition. In this light, we could think about government sponsored religious education as aiding the regeneration of a loose societal association over time between a national identity and some set of religious values, favoring the creation of very large, national “milieus”<sup>9</sup> where it is easier than not for a citizen to continue to hold religious as opposed to secular beliefs. Differences in the type of friendliness between religion and state might explain why, for example, many Catholic countries of Europe continue to register surprisingly high levels of religiosity relative to their Protestant neighbors, what some scholars have referred to as the “Catholic effect”<sup>10</sup>. As is true of my first proposition, however,

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<sup>7</sup> Casanova José, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

<sup>8</sup> Bruce Steve, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Taylor Charles, *A Secular Age*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> Ian Smith and John Sawkins “The Economics of Regional Variation in Religious Attendance”, *Applied Economics*, 2003/14, pp. 1577-1588.

this second one is in equal need of further research and theoretical exploration, and it is my hope that this brief *commentaire* might invite others to join me in just such exploration.