Preface

This book offers the first comparative theory of religion and political development. Religion is defined as a set of norms shaping citizen perceptions of government, bureaucratic provision of public goods, and political regimes. It constitutes a self-sufficient administrative, social, and economic system that the state rationally imitates, as it has preceded and oftentimes led to the formation of nation-states. This is why religion is essential in analyzing political regimes, bureaucracies, and state–society relations. In historical perspective, the secularism–clericalism divide is treated as superficial; religion has provided the state with a set of norms that consolidate its legitimacy and facilitate the protection of citizens’ collective interests. The belonging to a community, the essence of individual salvation, and the state of human condition after natural death all define and justify the presence of religion in society.

Huntington in the *Clash of Civilizations* (1997) predicted that cultural differences would draw the lines of war and ethnic conflict. His concept of the West included Roman Catholicism, but excluded Eastern Orthodoxy, and identified Islam as the main cultural paradigm that has the propensity to antagonize the West. Religion plays a central role in Huntington’s argument, as it is the driving force both behind the Cold War and regional conflicts in Asia, the Middle East, and elsewhere. This book underscores the significance of religion as a crucial factor for political development and economic transformation. However, and contrary to Huntington, it suggests that all world religions can offer pathways to peace and development through different institutional channels. With a multiplicity of methods (statistical modeling, game theory, lab-in-the-field experiments, comparative historical analysis), we observe that religion matters for political economy and international politics, and not always negatively. This demystification of religion goes beyond the classical discussion on the role of religion in the public sphere and sets the grounds for explaining why some economies are more likely to be democracies and others dictatorships. Throughout the chapters ahead, we find how religion shapes individual preferences for public goods and to what extent centralized government may be positively linked with religiosity and conservative views about politics and society. Weber in the *Protestant*
Ethic (2009) argues that the Protestant work ethic is conducive to private sector development and capitalism. Based on a set of modern formal and quantitative methods, we mainly concentrate on Eastern Orthodoxy, Islam, and Judaism. Particularly, Eastern Orthodoxy is treated as a much more powerful legacy than socialism to understand the long-run paths of regime change, state structure, and intergovernmental relations in Russia. The centrality of Eastern Orthodoxy in understanding Russian political economy is one of the main contributions of this book.

Calvinism created the conditions for disciplinary revolutions in the Netherlands and Brandenburg-Prussia; in that sense the term disciplinary revolution is used as a substitute for Marx’s bourgeois revolution (Gorski, 2003: 31–34). Moreover, it underscores the rapid spread of disciplinary technologies that facilitated state consolidation in early modern Europe; confessionalization, state power, and social disciplining are intertwined (ibid.: 34–38). Gorski’s argument is that the disciplinary capacity of religion increases state power, because it generates more efficient bureaucracies and advances social order; it treats religion as an exogenous shock that shapes the state ex post rather than ex ante. The historical development of Calvinism as a reaction to the Vatican’s political authority by Northern European principalities treats religion as a rationalization movement against administrative centralization and social arbitrariness. The thesis of this book has similar origins but arrives at completely different results. The mimesis of religious organizations by administrative institutions is due to survival incentives and career concerns of political leaders. We analyze the incentives and provide evidence for the preferences of two more groups, which are essential in the administrative process: bureaucrats and citizens.

While Fukuyama’s thesis in the End of History (1992) has not been confirmed by the course of globalization over the last 15 years, religion is becoming central in explaining authoritarian resilience, asymmetric federalism, terrorist insurgence, and civil war. A Western liberal democracy steady state has not been yet achieved or accepted as a common form of government. While Weber treated only Protestantism as a set of normative prerogatives that facilitate a rationalization process for governments, we propose that this is the case also for other major world religions such as Eastern Orthodoxy, Judaism, and Islam. The governance rules of Eastern Orthodoxy and Judaism, in particular, may explain why Russia has reverted to authoritarian rule after a short democratic interlude, or why Israel remains a democracy despite the ongoing conflict and the division of the country into the Jewish and Arab sectors.

Hence, religion becomes the unifying element that influences economic activities and administrative structures in both public and private sectors.
The distinction between collectivist and individualist economies originates from the observation that intereconomy relations, formation of commercial networks, and wealth distribution were diametrically different in Genoese and Maghreb merchants (Greif, 1994). This symmetric analogy between individualist and developed economies on the one hand, and collectivist and developing economies on the other, indicates that cultural values matter for economic growth. We extend that theory and suggest that religion matters, because it leads to different administrative systems and enforcement rules that are relevant for contemporary economic development and political institutions.

Russia and Israel are the main cases to be discussed. We provide a new perspective on the understanding of Russian politics beyond the politicized role of the Russian Orthodox Church and its traditional connection to the Kremlin. Universal discipline, high dependence on public goods, and a strong religious identity reveal the persistence of Eastern Orthodox values in Russia’s post-Soviet institutional context. Similarly, the normative dichotomy of Israel between Judaism and Islam – and to a lesser extent Oriental Christianity – is revealed through divergent levels of significance in the role of central religious institutions, evaluation of local governments, and satisfaction with centrally financed public goods. State capacity is modeled not only in terms of objective measures such as policy discretion, budgetary autonomy, and quality of public goods, but also of subjective factors such as distributive ethics, hierarchical preferences, and administrative altruism.

Religion and Comparative Development is the first analytical endeavor on religion and government, when it comes to the microeconomic modeling of democracy and dictatorship as well as empirical linkages between religious norms and the bureaucratic provision of public goods within the framework of survey data analysis and public goods experiments. Moreover, it relates to the rising significance of religion in Middle East and post-Soviet politics, as well as current migration, security, and party developments in the United States and Europe alike.

REFERENCES


Religion and comparative development
