

Book Reviews

***Political Secularism, Religion, and the State: A Time Series Analysis of Worldwide Data.* By Jonathan Fox. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015. ix + 285 pp. \$99.99 Cloth, \$34.99 Paper**

doi:10.1017/S1755048316000602

Michael D. Driessen
John Cabot University, Rome

Seven years after the publication of his seminal survey of religion and state, Jonathan Fox's *Political Secularism, Religion, and the State: A Time Series Analysis of Worldwide Data* is a worthy sequel that presents and digests the second round of the Religion and State Project, the most nuanced and comprehensive cross-national dataset on religion and state relationships designed and directed by Fox. Spanning nearly 20 years, the addition of this second round of data enables Fox to forcefully summarize, extend, and qualify many of the groundbreaking findings of his earlier scholarship. Thus, he finds broad and continued confirmation, for example, that virtually no state, including no democracy (apart from the interesting example of South Africa), maintains a fully neutral stance with respect to religion. Instead, most states restrict, regulate, support, and discriminate against the religious actors, communities, and practices within their borders in myriad and diverse ways, often with little correlation shown to the religious principles stated in their founding documents. Although Fox chronicles important ways in which many states became less involved with (or less supportive of) religion, notably with respect to abortion and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) rights, the forceful, if slow-moving global trend that emerges

mdriessen@johncabot.edu

from his study is that over the 20 year period from 1990 to 2008 states have gradually but steadily become more involved with religion.

Given this global portrait, it is easy to understand why Fox takes aim at secularization theory early on in the book, particularly those defendants of the theory who continue to hold that modernity, in some form or another, marginalizes religion from politics and society. Given Fox's data, this does not seem to be the case at all. Rather, Fox's comprehensive mapping of change in policies over time — 111 coded types of religion and state policy in 177 countries — offers us a veritable road atlas (or better, a Google mapping complete with street view functionality) of the new sets of policies adopted by states to accommodate and manage religious communities. These policies effectively de-marginalize religion from governing institutions globally. The number of states over the period who created wholesale ministries of religious affairs (19) is particularly revealing of the striking and increasing way in which states institutionally and bureaucratically interface with their religious communities, groups, and individuals, embedding a plethora of religious policies into the workings of political institutions for years to come.

Equally striking, perhaps, are the strong regional and religious trends that mark this (re)institutionalization of religious policies in contemporary states, combining policies of support and control of religion in very distinct and varied ways. In Western democracies, for example, the data show a distinct pattern of increased restrictions on religious dress in public spaces, the categorization of some religions as dangerous sects, and an increase in legislation banning religious hate speech. In the Middle East and Muslim world, by contrast, the increase of government involvement in religion is most distinctively evident in increases or maintenance of high levels of restrictions on LGBT and women's rights, the performance of abortion, and the sale of alcohol. While Orthodox countries are not likely to restrict any of these three practices, Orthodox and Muslim countries do share a very high and increasing level of restrictions on proselytization and conversions away from the majority religious practice and also set themselves apart from other regions or religious groups by the way in which they control sermon writing, enforce Sabbath laws, and control clergy appointments. Notable religious trends in the Catholic world (in state education policies), the Protestant world (in aid given to religious charity organizations), and in sub-Saharan Africa (in restrictions on religious party politics) are also tellingly rich.

Given this complex portrait of worldwide religion-state policies that the book successfully paints, a masterly feat in and of itself, I found it odd that

the book also urges the adoption of what is largely a bimodal theoretical framework, what Fox calls the “secular-religious competition perspective,” for interpreting these policies.

Fox constructs this theoretical framework as a way to advance beyond secularization theory while salvaging some of its insights. In order to do so, Fox essentially rejects what other scholars have referred to as the “religious decline thesis” or “subtraction narrative.” Instead, Fox argues that the real lesson from secularization theory should be the recognition of the rise of secularism as a political ideology, which was in some way produced by processes of modernization but is/was the real force that mobilizes for a politics and society free of religious influence. In this reading, after a long period of loss, religious actors are resurgent in the battle; the global re-institutionalization of religious policies by formerly secular states that Fox’s data illustrates is proof of religion’s comeback.

I find myself hesitant to draw the same conclusion on the basis of the richly layered data that Fox presents. While religious-secular struggle certainly explains some of these policies, the same policies also testify to an increasingly advanced stage of secular-religious complexity. Particularly in the democratic West, many of the policies described in the book are consistent with the view that people are finding new ways to be religious in a secular age that does not pit those two adjectives fully against each other. Consider, for example, the widespread support among many religious individuals for LGBT rights. Alternatively, the same policies showcased in the book could be read as evidence that the modern, sovereign, secular nation-state has engaged in a new process of upgrading itself, seeking to more actively manage and accommodate religious communities to do so. It is not clear that religion is really “winning” (rather than, say, being transformed or better managed) in either case. The rise of Islamism and the return of the Orthodox Church to the center of national politics poses similar dilemmas of interpretation in which it is not clear either how much religion is actually winning against a secular state (particularly in the Orthodox case) or whether the primary dynamic is one of religious-secular conflict or intra-religious conflict (particularly in the Islamic case).

This sense of complexity and the multiple interpretations his data makes possible is, in essence, the story told in Fox’s convincing final chapter, in which he articulates the many “complications” any single interpretation of the book’s results inevitably faces as it tries to make sense of this dizzying and shifting geography of religion-state involvement. Thanks to Fox’s *Political Secularism, Religion, and the State* and its masterful collection and categorization of religion-state policies we now have a map and a

comprehensive lexicon to navigate our contemporary political environment, one in which, whatever the motivation is for doing so, active religious-political entanglement is the new norm.

***Politics of Religious Freedom.* Edited by Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, Elizabeth Shackman Hurd, Saba Mahmood, and Peter G. Danchin. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015. ix + 344 pp. \$114.00 Cloth, \$35.00 Paper**

doi:10.1017/S1755048316000663

Laura Dudley Jenkins
University of Cincinnati

Drawing on a rich thread in the Social Science Research Council's "Immanent Frame" blog (<http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/the-politics-of-religious-freedom>), *Politics of Religious Freedom* offers 27 essays from both veteran and up-and-coming scholars. Pithier than typical articles or chapters, the essays may leave motivated students wanting more but can serve varied research and pedagogical purposes — sparking discussions in undergraduate and graduate classrooms, serving as jumping off points for further research, or introducing Ph.D. students to the short-form essays of public intellectuals. Each co-editor contributed both a chapter and a preface, introducing sections on religion, history, law and politics, and freedom.

A website provides open access case studies to expand on themes in the text, ideal for courses on religion and politics or law (<http://politics-of-religious-freedom.berkeley.edu/case-studies>). The case studies include disputes over a religious site in Ayodhya, India, the Jews' Free School in the United Kingdom, conversion and custody rights in Malaysia, and marriage law in South Africa, as well as a comparison of judgments by the European Court of Human Rights and the Egyptian Supreme Administrative Court. Ranging from single articles to a set of materials (articles, bills, legal notes, and court decisions), these case studies, like the book, demonstrate that religious freedom has many trajectories