Martyria **1** (2026): 53–66
https://doi.org/10.15664/8m1mtv37

Martyria

ARTICLE 5

SACRED POWER IN SECULAR STATES: THE RESURGENCE OF RELIGION IN THE POLITICS OF CHINA, THE UNITED STATES, AND ISRAEL

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(Received 16 January 2026; revised 21 March 2026; accepted 8 April 2026; first published online 30 June 2026)

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the increasingly prominent role of religion in shaping political systems, leadership decisions, and national policies across three distinct geopolitical contexts: China, the United States, and Israel. Whilst secularization theory once predicted the declining influence of religion in modern governance, recent decades have demonstrated a marked resurgence of religious discourse and motivation in political spheres worldwide. Through comparative analysis, this study explores how religious ideology manifests differently across these three nations yet consistently exerts substantial influence over domestic and foreign policy decisions.

In China, the Communist Party's complex relationship with religion oscillates between suppression and strategic co-option, particularly evident in policies affecting Tibetan Buddhism, Islam in Xinjiang, and state-sanctioned Christianity. The United States exhibits a robust tradition of religious influence through evangelical Christianity's impact on the Republican Party, shaping policies on abortion, education, and international relations, particularly regarding Israel. Israel presents a unique case where religious identity remains inseparable from national identity, with religious parties wielding disproportionate political power and increasingly influencing settlement policies, civil law, and regional security decisions.

This analysis reveals that religion's political influence operates through distinct mechanisms in each context—ideological control in China, electoral mobilization in the United States, and coalition necessity in Israel–yet all three nations demonstrate that religious considerations remain central to contemporary governance. The findings demonstrate that comprehending the trajectory of modern political systems requires sustained scholarly attention to the mechanisms through which religious conviction shapes governance, policy formation, and the exercise of state power.

The conventional wisdom of twentieth century social science held that modernization, technological advancement, and increased education would inevitably lead to the privatization and diminishment of religious influence in public life. This secularization thesis—articulated by theorists from Max Weber to Peter Berger—suggested that religion would retreat to the margins of modern societies, particularly in their political institutions. The thesis held that as societies became more educated, scientifically literate, and economically developed, rational and empirical worldviews would displace religious ones, rendering religion an increasingly private matter

without significant bearing on public governance or political identity.[1] Yet the opening decades of the twenty first century have demonstrated the limitations of this prediction. Across diverse political systems and cultural contexts, religion has reasserted itself as a significant force shaping national policies, political movements, and governmental decisions. This resurgence manifests differently across various nations, reflecting unique historical trajectories, political structures, and religious traditions, yet the phenomenon appears sufficiently widespread to warrant systematic scholarly attention.

This essay examines the increasing influence of religion on politics through comparative analysis of three nations that represent distinct models of religious-political interaction: China, the United States, and Israel. These cases were selected for their diversity in political systems, dominant religious traditions, and historical relationships between religion and state, yet all three demonstrate clear trajectories of intensifying religious influence on governance. China, officially an atheist state governed by the Communist Party, paradoxically demonstrates increasing engagement with religion as both a threat to manage and a resource to deploy. The United States, with its constitutional separation of church and state, nonetheless exhibits substantial religious influence on electoral politics and policy formation, particularly through evangelical Christianity. Israel represents a case where religious and national identities remain fundamentally intertwined, with religious parties exercising influence far beyond their numerical representation in the electorate.

The comparative approach adopted here illuminates how religion influences politics through different mechanisms across varying contexts whilst identifying common patterns in this phenomenon. By examining these three nations, this analysis contributes to broader scholarly debates about religion's role in contemporary governance, the validity of secularization theory, and the implications of religious political influence for democratic institutions, human rights, and international relations. This essay argues that religion has not retreated from modern political life but has instead adapted and intensified, operating through distinct mechanisms in each national context to produce substantial and consequential policy outcomes.

RELIGION AND POLITICS IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA

The relationship between religion and politics in the People's Republic of China presents a paradox. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) officially espouses atheism and Marxist materialism, yet religion has become an increasingly prominent concern in Chinese political discourse and policy formation over the past two decades. This engagement reflects both

[1] Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, 1st ed. (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, Inc., 1990).

apprehension about religion's potential to challenge party authority and recognition of religion's utility in promoting social cohesion and supporting the party's legitimacy.[2]

Under Xi Jinping's leadership since 2012, the Chinese government has intensified efforts to bring religious practices under state control whilst simultaneously promoting elements of traditional Chinese religious and philosophical thought that align with party objectives. The policy of "Sinicization" of religion, formally articulated in 2015, requires all religious traditions in China to align with Chinese culture and socialist values.[3] This approach represents a shift from earlier strategies: in the Maoist era (1949–1976), the CCP pursued aggressive suppression of all religious practice, often violently, whilst the post-Mao reform period of the 1980s–1990s allowed a degree of religious revival under looser oversight. The Sinicization policy marks a new phase of active reformation of religious practices and doctrines to align them with state purposes rather than merely tolerating or prohibiting them. The Sinicization campaign has affected all major religious traditions in China, but its implementation has been particularly severe regarding Islam and Tibetan Buddhism, whilst more accommodating toward state-sanctioned Christianity and folk religions that can be framed as components of Chinese cultural heritage.

The treatment of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang province exemplifies how religious considerations shape Chinese domestic policy with far-reaching human rights implications. Beginning in 2017, the Chinese government dramatically escalated policies targeting Uyghur religious and cultural practices, establishing what authorities describe as "vocational education and training centres" but which numerous observers characterize as detention camps holding over one million people.[4] Government documents reveal explicit concern about Islamic religious practice as incompatible with party ideology and Chinese national identity. Policies have included prohibitions on religious dress, restrictions on mosque attendance, surveillance of religious education, and reported forced renunciation of Islamic beliefs. Whilst Chinese authorities frame these measures as counterterrorism and deradicalization efforts, the policies clearly reflect anxiety about religion's capacity to sustain alternative identities and loyalties that might challenge party control.

Similarly, Chinese policy toward Tibetan Buddhism demonstrates religion's central role in political calculations. The Chinese government's insistence on controlling the selection of the

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[2] Fenggang Yang, *Religion in China: Survival and Revival under Communist Rule* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 77–104, https://doi.org/10.1093/jcs/css067

[3] Xinhua, "Xi Jinping: Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era," October 18, 2017, https://www.xinhuanet.com/english/download/Xi_Jinping's_report_at_19th_CPC_National_Congress.pdf

[4] Human Rights Watch, "'Eradicating Ideological Viruses': China's Campaign of Repression Against Xinjiang's Muslims," September 9, 2018, https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/09/09/eradicating-ideological-viruses/chinas-campaign-repression-against-xinjiangs

next Dalai Lama—including claims that reincarnation of living Buddhas must have government approval—represents an extraordinary assertion of state authority over religious doctrine.[5] This position recognizes that Tibetan Buddhism remains a potential rallying point for Tibetan identity distinct from Chinese national identity. The government has invested substantial resources in promoting party-approved interpretations of Tibetan Buddhism whilst restricting practices and teachings associated with the Dalai Lama or Tibetan independence.

Conversely, the Chinese government has shown increased interest in promoting Confucianism and selected elements of Buddhism and Daoism that can be presented as components of Chinese cultural heritage compatible with party rule. President Xi has frequently invoked Confucian concepts in political speeches, and the government has supported the establishment of Confucius Institutes worldwide as a tool of cultural diplomacy to promote Chinese culture and soft power internationally — demonstrating how religion and philosophical tradition directly shape China's foreign policy strategy.[6] This selective promotion of religious and philosophical traditions demonstrates the party's recognition of religion's potential utility in legitimating authority and promoting social values aligned with party objectives, provided religious authority remains subordinate to party authority.

The Chinese case thus reveals religion influencing politics through a distinctive mechanism: whilst lacking the electoral dynamics that characterize democratic systems, religious considerations shape Chinese policy through the party's assessment of religion as either threat or resource to its political monopoly. This dynamic has produced policies of simultaneous suppression and co-option that have profound implications for religious freedom, ethnic minority rights, and China's international relationships.

RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE IN AMERICAN POLITICS

The United States presents a contrasting model wherein religion influences politics primarily through democratic participation, electoral mobilization, and the advocacy efforts of religious organizations and individuals. Despite constitutional separation of church and state, religious considerations have shaped American politics throughout the nation's history. The past five decades have witnessed particularly intensive religious engagement in political life, predominantly

[5] U.S. Department of State, "2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: China," June 2, 2022, https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/china/

[6] Xin Liu, "China's Cultural Diplomacy: A Great Leap Outward with Chinese Characteristics? Multiple Comparative Case Studies of the Confucius Institutes," *Journal of Contemporary China* 28, no. 118 (2019): 646–61, https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2018.1557951

through the mobilization of evangelical and conservative Roman Catholic voters around social and cultural issues.[7]

The emergence of the Christian Right as a significant political force in the late 1970s fundamentally altered American politics. Organizations such as the Moral Majority—founded by Jerry Falwell in 1979—succeeded in mobilising evangelical Christians who had previously been politically disengaged.[8] This movement coalesced around opposition to abortion following the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision, resistance to the Equal Rights Amendment, and broader concerns about secularization and moral decline. The Christian Right became closely aligned with the Republican Party—providing crucial electoral support whilst shaping the party's platform on social issues.

This alignment has produced substantial policy consequences. The appointment of Supreme Court justices committed to overturning Roe v. Wade became a central objective for religiously motivated voters, culminating in the 2022 Dobbs v. Jackson decision that eliminated constitutional protection for abortion rights.[9] This outcome represented the culmination of a decades-long religious political movement and immediately triggered state-level legislative action to restrict or prohibit abortion, demonstrating the concrete policy impact of religiously motivated political engagement. Religious conservatives have similarly influenced education policy, promoting voucher programmes for religious schools, challenging evolution instruction, and advocating for school prayer.[10]

Foreign policy represents another domain where religious influence on American politics has been particularly pronounced, especially regarding Israel. Christian Zionism—the belief that Christians should support the Jewish state for theological reasons related to biblical prophecy—has become influential among evangelical Christians who constitute a significant Republican constituency.[11] This religious motivation has reinforced American support for Israel—sometimes in ways that exceed strategic considerations. For instance, polling by the Pew Research Center in 2005 has found that white evangelical Protestants are among the strongest supporters of Israel of any American religious group—with a majority citing biblical prophecy as a reason for their support.[12] Evangelical support was instrumental in the Trump administration's decision to

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[7] José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
[8] Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 103–30, https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195340846.001.0001.
[9] Supreme Court of the United States, *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, 597 U.S. ___ (2022), https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/19-1392_6j37.pdf
[10] Ira C. Lupu, David Masci, and Robert W. Tuttle, "Religion in the Public Schools," Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, May 2007, https://www.pewforum.org/2007/05/03/religion-in-the-public-schools/
[11] Shalom Goldman, *Zeal for Zion: Christians, Jews, and the Idea of the Promised Land* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 187–215.
[12] Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, "American Evangelicals and Israel," April 15, 2005,

relocate the American embassy to Jerusalem and recognize Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights—decisions that broke with longstanding international consensus and American policy.[13] The influence of Christian Zionism demonstrates how religious beliefs can shape foreign policy in ways that have significant international implications.

The 2016 and 2020 presidential elections further illuminated religion's role in American politics. Despite Donald Trump's personal history appearing inconsistent with evangelical values, white evangelical Christians provided overwhelming support for his candidacy—with approximately eighty percent voting for Trump in both elections.[14] This support reflected a transactional relationship wherein evangelicals accepted Trump's personal failings in exchange for policies advancing their priorities, including Supreme Court appointments, religious liberty protections, and support for Israel. This dynamic revealed how religious political influence operates through electoral calculations rather than necessarily requiring personal religious conviction from political leaders.

Recent years have also witnessed intensifying debates about religious liberty, particularly regarding tensions between anti-discrimination protections for LGBTQ individuals and religious objections to same-sex relationships. Religious organizations and individuals have challenged requirements to provide services for same-sex weddings, include contraception in health insurance, or use preferred pronouns—arguing such requirements violate religious freedom.[15] These conflicts demonstrate ongoing debate regarding religion's proper role in a pluralistic democracy and the extent to which religious beliefs justify exemptions from generally applicable laws.

The American case thus illustrates how religion influences democratic politics through electoral mobilization, coalition formation, and sustained advocacy on specific policy issues. This influence operates within constitutional constraints but has nonetheless produced substantial policy outcomes aligned with religious conservative priorities, particularly regarding abortion, education, and support for Israel.

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https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2005/04/15/american-evangelicals-and-israel/

[13] John Fea, *Believe Me: The Evangelical Road to Donald Trump* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 112–34.

[14] Pew Research Center, "In Changing U.S. Electorate, Race and Education Remain Stark Dividing Lines," June 2, 2020, https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2020/06/02/in-changing-u-s-electorate-race-and-education-remain-stark-dividing-lines/

[15] George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, second ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), https://www.scribd.com/document/420104805/George-M-Marsden-Fundamentalism-and-American-Culture-New-Edition-2006

ISRAEL: RELIGION, NATIONALISM, AND POLITICS

Israel represents perhaps the most complex case of religious political influence among the three nations examined here, as religious and national identities remain fundamentally intertwined in ways that defy simple categorization as either secular or religious state. The declaration establishing Israel in 1948 defined it as a "Jewish state," which is a formulation that inherently links religious identity to national identity and citizenship in ways with profound political implications.[16]

Religious parties have participated in Israeli governing coalitions almost continuously since independence—exercising influence far exceeding their electoral support through coalition bargaining. This influence has shaped numerous policy domains, including family law, which remains under religious rather than civil jurisdiction, Sabbath observance regulations, dietary restrictions for public institutions, and educational policy.[17] The political power of religious parties has increased in recent decades, particularly as ultra-Orthodox parties have become crucial coalition partners for right-wing governments.

The role of religion in Israeli politics has been especially pronounced regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and settlement policy. Religious Zionism—which views Jewish settlement throughout biblical Israel as a religious commandment—has become increasingly influential in shaping territorial policy.[18] Religious settlers and their political supporters have successfully lobbied for governmental support for settlements in the West Bank—framing territorial expansion as fulfilment of religious obligation rather than merely strategic consideration. This religious motivation has complicated peace negotiations, as religious settlers often reject territorial compromise that would require evacuating settlements established on land they regard as divinely promised to the Jewish people.

The influence of religious parties reached new heights in the government formed in late 2022 under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, which included several far-right religious parties holding key ministerial positions. This coalition has advanced legislation reflecting religious priorities, including efforts to expand rabbinic authority over conversions, increased funding for ultra-Orthodox educational institutions, and strengthened protections for religious

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[16] The Knesset, "Basic Law: Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People," July 19, 2018, https://main.knesset.gov.il/en/news/pressreleases/pages/pr13978_pg.aspx

[17] Pew Research Center, "Israel's Religiously Divided Society," March 8, 2016, https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2016/03/08/israels-religiously-divided-society/

[18] Jonathan Rynhold and Dov Waxman, "Ideological Change and Israel's Disengagement from Gaza," *Political Science Quarterly* 123, no. 1 (2008): 11–37, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233571896_Ideological_Change_and_Israel's_Disengagement_from_Gaza

sensibilities.[19] Proposed judicial reforms that would weaken the Supreme Court's power to overturn legislation have been supported partly by religious parties seeking to reduce judicial intervention in religious matters and settlement policy.

Religious considerations also shape Israeli policy regarding non-Jewish citizens and residents. The Nation-State Law passed in 2018 declared that "the right to exercise national self-determination in the State of Israel is unique to the Jewish people," effectively enshrining a hierarchy between Jewish and non-Jewish citizens.[20] This law exemplifies how the relationship between Jewish religious identity and Israeli national identity produces policies that privilege one religious-ethnic group over others, with significant implications for Palestinian citizens of Israel and the broader question of whether Israel can simultaneously be both Jewish and democratic.

The tension between religious and secular Jews within Israeli society has also intensified—particularly regarding military service exemptions for ultra-Orthodox yeshiva students, government funding for religious institutions, and the authority of religious courts over personal status matters. These conflicts reflect broader questions about Israel's character and the proper role of religion in a state that defines itself partially through religious identity whilst maintaining democratic institutions.

Recent years have witnessed increasing international criticism of Israeli policies toward Palestinians, criticism that Jewish religious and political leaders sometimes characterize as antisemitism. This framing demonstrates how religion influences not only domestic policy but also international discourse, as criticism of specific policies becomes entangled with questions about religious prejudice and the legitimacy of a state defined through religious-national identity.[21]

The Israeli case thus reveals the profound complexity that emerges when religious identity becomes constitutive of national identity and citizenship. Unlike China, where the state seeks to control religion, or the United States, where religious influence operates primarily through democratic participation, Israel demonstrates how religion can become embedded in the fundamental structure and self-definition of a state in ways that shape virtually all policy domains.

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[19] Ehud Sprinzak, *The Ascendance of Israel's Radical Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 267–94, https://doi.org/10.1093/jcs/35.3.620

[20] The Knesset, "Basic Law: Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People," July 19, 2018, https://main.knesset.gov.il/en/news/pressreleases/pages/pr13978_pg.aspx

[21] Yossi Shain and Aharon Barth, "Diasporas and International Relations Theory," *International Organization* 57, no. 3 (2003): 449–79, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818303573015

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS

Examining these three nations comparatively illuminates both the diverse mechanisms through which religion influences politics and certain common patterns that transcend contextual differences. Each nation demonstrates a trajectory of increasing religious influence over recent decades, though from different starting points and through different pathways. This simultaneity across diverse contexts suggests that we are witnessing a broader phenomenon rather than isolated national developments.

The mechanisms of religious political influence differ sharply across the three cases. In China, the Communist Party manages religion as either threat or resource, producing authoritarian policies of suppression and co-option without any democratic participation. In the United States, religious influence flows through electoral mobilization, coalition formation, and advocacy within constitutional constraints. In Israel, religion is constitutive of national identity itself, with religious parties exercising disproportionate power through coalition bargaining—a mechanism distinct from both the American democratic model and Chinese state control. What unifies these divergent pathways is their shared consequence: religious considerations produce significant, concrete policy outcomes in each context.

Returning to the secularization thesis: the findings across these three cases demand a substantial revision of that framework. The classic thesis—as articulated by Weber and later Berger—assumed a linear relationship between modernization and religious decline. Yet China is one of the world's most technologically advanced states; the United States is among the wealthiest and most educated; Israel is a technologically sophisticated democracy—and in all three, religious influence on politics has intensified rather than diminished. This pattern supports the post-secular turn in scholarship, associated with theorists such as José Casanova and Jürgen Habermas, who argue that religion has not retreated from public life but has instead been "de-privatized," re-entering political discourse in ways the original secularization thesis failed to anticipate. The three cases examined here illustrate the diverse forms this re-entry takes, suggesting that future scholarship must abandon linear models of secularization in favour of contextually sensitive frameworks.[22] Despite these different mechanisms, certain common patterns emerge. All three nations demonstrate that religious considerations significantly shape policies with profound human rights implications, including restrictions on reproductive rights, religious freedom for minorities, and equality for LGBTQ individuals. Religious influence in each nation has contributed to intensifying political polarization, as religious and secular constituencies adopt increasingly divergent positions on fundamental questions about the proper

[22] José Casanova, Public Religions in the Modern World (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 211–234.

ordering of society. Each case also reveals how religious influence on politics can complicate international relations, whether through Chinese repression of religious minorities, American policy toward Israel shaped by Christian Zionism, or Israeli settlement policy motivated partly by religious claims to territory.

The three cases also demonstrate that religious political influence need not correlate with high levels of religious observance among the general population. China remains predominantly secular in personal religious practice,[23] yet religion profoundly shapes policy. In the United States and Israel, religious political influence has increased even as some measures of traditional religious observance have declined. While scholarship on American religious history shows complex patterns of religious participation over time, with periods of both growth and decline in traditional denominational affiliation,[24] the relationship between such participation and political influence remains non-linear. This suggests that political religion may operate somewhat independently from personal religious practice.[25]

These findings have significant theoretical implications for understanding religion's role in contemporary politics. The secularization thesis predicted that modernization would reduce religion's political influence, yet all three nations examined here combine modernity with substantial religious influence on governance. This suggests that secularization theory requires substantial revision to account for religion's persistent, and in some cases increasing, political salience. Rather than inevitable secularization, we observe diverse patterns of religious influence adapted to different political systems and cultural contexts.

The findings also raise normative questions about religious influence in politics. Defenders of religious political engagement argue that religious citizens have equal rights to participate in democratic politics based on their values, that religion provides moral resources for critiquing injustice, and that excluding religious voices from public discourse impoverishes political deliberation. Critics contend that religious political influence threatens pluralism, imposes religious views on non-adherents, and undermines rights protections that depend on secular governance. The three cases examined here demonstrate the stakes of these debates, as religious political influence has produced outcomes ranging from civil rights legislation—such as

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[23] Pew Research Center, "Measuring Religion in China," August 30, 2023, https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2023/08/PF_2023.08.30_religion-china_REPORT.pdf

[24] Robert Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776–2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*, 2nd ed., ed. Rodney Stark (United States: Rutgers University Press, 2005), https://doi.org/10.36019/9780813541136

[25] David Martin, *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 41–63, https://www.scribd.com/document/754359423/David-Martin-On-Secularization-Towards-A-Revised-General-Theory-2005

the US Civil Rights Act, influenced by religious leaders like Martin Luther King Jr.—to human rights violations.

CONCLUSION

This comparative analysis of China, the United States, and Israel demonstrates that religion exerts substantial and—in many cases—increasing influence on contemporary politics across diverse national contexts. Far from privatization or marginalization predicted by secularization theory, religion remains centrally engaged with politics—shaping policies on issues from reproductive rights to territorial disputes, and the treatment of minority populations. The mechanisms of religious influence vary across political systems, operating through authoritarian control in China, democratic participation in the United States, and the structural embedding of religious identity in Israel, yet all three pathways produce significant policy consequences.

Understanding contemporary politics requires taking religion seriously as a motivating force and analytical category. Political decisions that appear puzzling from purely strategic or economic perspectives often become comprehensible when religious motivations and frameworks are recognised. Chinese policy toward Uyghurs and Tibetans reflects not only ethnic management but anxiety about religious identity challenging party ideology. American support for Israel reflects not only strategic alliance but religious commitment among influential constituencies. Israeli settlement policy reflects not only security concerns but religious claims to territory.

The continuing, and in some cases intensifying, influence of religion on politics challenges both scholarly predictions and normative aspirations for secular governance. Whether one views this development positively or negatively, it represents a defining feature of early twenty-first-century politics that scholars, policymakers, and citizens must engage seriously. The diverse patterns examined here suggest that religion's political influence will continue adapting to different contexts whilst remaining a significant force shaping how nations govern themselves and interact with one another. Future scholarship must continue examining these patterns whilst remaining attentive to the normative implications of religious influence for democracy, human rights, and pluralism in increasingly diverse societies.

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AUTHOR'S BIO

Niamh Graham is a second year undergraduate at the University of St Andrews, pursuing a joint-degree in International Relations and Sustainable Development. Her academic interests span feminist research methodologies, Marxist theory, and Foucauldian analysis, which shape much of her critical engagement with global politics and social structures. Beyond her coursework, Niamh is an avid reader—enjoying literature both for leisure and for deepening her academic perspectives.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This piece grew out of my frustration with the way many nations insist on separating religion from politics, despite the clear entanglement of the two. I expected the research process to move quickly, especially given my interest in the topic, but I found myself navigating far more unfamiliar material than anticipated. That challenge ultimately strengthened the work, pushing me to engage with new perspectives and histories. A further source of inspiration was one of my

high school Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies teachers, whose enthusiasm for exploring religions beyond Christianity first encouraged me to think critically about how belief systems shape political life.

EDITORS' NOTE

In this paper, Niamh Graham analyzes the contemporary political state of China, the United States, and Israel. She argues that though it occurs in three distinct manners, religion has increasing influence in the political realm of each case study presented which displays the emergence of a broader phenomenon. This phenomenon calls into question the validity of secularization theory and has significant implications for human rights, democratic institutions, and international relations generally.

The case studies chosen by Graham are relevant and diverse—offering nuanced comparisons and contrasts that provide a strong foundation for her overall argument. Her writing is well-structured and clear, rendering important and relevant socio-political and religious topics accessible to a wide audience. Through an original analysis and synthesis of the three aforementioned countries, Graham uniquely contributes to the debate surrounding secularization theories.

The contribution of this paper comes from the relevancy of the topics discussed and the skill with which they are presented and analyzed. This topic, the countries chosen, and Graham's examination are increasingly valuable in the current global political climate. It is critical that religion and theology be included in socio-political and economic discussions and theses; Graham excellently executes and embodies this idea in her work.

EDITORS: Madeline McDermott, Leonie Grosse Osterdahl, and Arthur Zhang