The Politics of Religious Party Change

*The Politics of Religious Party Change* examines the ideological change and secularization of religious political parties and asks: when and why do religious parties become less anti-system? In a comparative analysis, the book traces the striking similarities in the historical origins of Islamist and Catholic parties in the Middle East and Western Europe, chronicles their conflicts with existing religious authorities, and analyzes the subsequently divergent trajectories of Islamist and Catholic parties. In examining how religious institutional structures affect the actions of religious parties in electoral politics, the book finds that centralized and hierarchical religious authority structures – such as the Vatican – incentivize religious parties to move in more pro-system, secular, and democratic directions. By contrast, less-centralized religious authority structures – such as in Sunni Islam – create more permissive environments for religious parties to be anti-system and more prone to freely formed parties and hybrid party movements.

A. Kadir Yıldırım is a Fellow for the Middle East at Rice University’s Baker Institute for Public Policy. He holds a Ph.D. in political science from the Ohio State University.
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The Politics of Religious Party Change

Islamist and Catholic Parties in Comparative Perspective

A. KADIR YILDIRIM

Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy
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Acknowledgments

I first began working on this book in 2014. Stathis Kalyvas’ *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe* served as a key inspiration for me. *The Rise of Christian Democracy* was well argued and well researched; it was, and still is, one of the best books on politics and religion. Yet, to me – as someone who works in a different regional context – the book felt incomplete, but not because it has any glaring shortcomings. I was intrigued by how the theory might travel in the Middle Eastern context where Islamist parties were the dominant religious parties. I wondered if there were systematic differences between Catholic and Islamist parties, in particular from an institutional point of view and using political economic approach to the study of religious politics. *The Rise of Christian Democracy*, however, was not meant to answer these questions. Fortunately, it motivated me to take up the task and examine the two sets of religious political parties in a comparative framework.

I am indebted to many individuals in the writing of this book. Without their support, the book would certainly not have come to fruition. I want to thank all of them for their support and help. First and foremost, I thank my colleagues at the Edward P. Djerejian Center for Middle East at the Baker Institute. Kelsey Norman, Mohammad Tabaar, and Kristian Ulrichsen have been excellent colleagues and friends, offering support every step of the way. I can’t imagine having better colleagues.

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cliché as it may sound, there is more to Wu-Tang than the iconic sword sounds and the lines the group liked sampling from kung fu flicks. Wu-Tang’s grit and intrepidity have been inspirational in resetting my focus and reorienting my mind toward tasks ahead. Timeless Wu-Tang is forever.

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