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978-1-107-03706-9 - Religion and Authoritarianism: Cooperation, Conflict, and the Consequences

Karrie J. Koesel

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Religion and Authoritarianism

Cooperation, Conflict, and the Consequences

This book provides a rare window into the micropolitics of contemporary authoritarian rule through a comparison of religious-state relations in Russia and China – two countries with long histories of religious repression and even longer experiences with authoritarian politics. Drawing on extensive fieldwork in multiple sites in these countries, this book explores what religious and political authority want from one another, how they negotiate the terms of their relationship, and how cooperative or conflicting their interactions are. This comparison reveals that although tensions exist between the two sides, there is also ample room for mutually beneficial interaction. Religious communities and their authoritarian overseers are cooperating around the core issue of politics – namely, the struggle for money, power, and prestige – and becoming unexpected allies in the process.

Karrie J. Koesel is Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Oregon, where she specializes in the study of contemporary Chinese and Russian politics, authoritarianism, and religion and politics. Her work has appeared in *Perspectives on Politics*, *The China Quarterly*, and *Post-Soviet Affairs*. Koesel's research has been supported by grants from the John Templeton Foundation, the Social Science Research Council, the Fulbright program, the International Research & Exchanges Board, the Einaudi Center and East Asia Program at Cornell University, and the University of Oregon. In 2010, she was the recipient of the American Political Science Association Aaron Wildavsky Award for the best dissertation in religion and politics.

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The most enduring and illuminating bodies of late nineteenth-century social theory – by Marx, Weber, Durkheim, and others – emphasized the integration of religion, polity, and economy through time and place. Once a staple of classic social theory, however, religion gradually lost the interest of many social scientists during the twentieth century. The recent emergence of phenomena such as Solidarity in Poland; the dissolution of the Soviet empire; various South American, southern African, and South Asian liberation movements; the Christian Right in the United States; and Al Qaeda have reawakened scholarly interest in religiously based political conflict. At the same time, fundamental questions are once again being asked about the role of religion in stable political regimes, public policies, and constitutional orders. The series Cambridge Studies in Social Theory, Religion and Politics will produce volumes that study religion and politics by drawing upon classic social theory and more recent social scientific research traditions. Books in the series offer theoretically grounded, comparative, empirical studies that raise “big” questions about a timely subject that has long engaged the best minds in social science.

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To Patrick, Sasha, and Addi

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Those who say religion has nothing to do with politics do not know
what religion is.

– Mahatma Gandhi

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