

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.12426737

## SACRED AUTHORITY AND POLITICAL POWER: HISTORICAL REFLECTIONS ON THEOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND MODERN STATEHOOD

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Received: 21/10/2025

Accepted: 24/02/2026

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### ABSTRACT

*The relationship between sacred authority and political power has long shaped the foundations of governance, yet its role in modern statehood remains contested. This study examines how historical forms of theocratic governance continue to influence contemporary political systems, challenging the linear assumptions of secularization theory. Drawing on a comparative quantitative design, the analysis utilizes a synthetic panel dataset of 18 countries from 2010 to 2025 to evaluate the impact of religion-state integration on governance outcomes. Key variables include sacred authority, clerical influence, legal pluralism, and indicators of modern statehood and state capacity. The findings reveal that higher levels of sacred authority are associated with weaker institutional development and governance effectiveness, while clerical influence can exert a positive effect under certain institutional configurations. Legal pluralism consistently emerges as a constraint on governance coherence. These results highlight the presence of hybrid legitimacy structures in contemporary states, where legal-rational authority coexists with enduring religious elements. The study contributes to political theology and comparative politics by offering an integrated empirical and theoretical framework for understanding post-theocratic statehood.*

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*It concludes that religion remains a dynamic and influential factor in modern governance, necessitating more nuanced approaches to analyzing state formation and legitimacy.*

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**KEYWORDS:** Theocracy, Sacred Authority, Political Power, Statehood, Religion-State Relations, Governance, Legitimacy, Secularization.

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**1. Introduction** The interrelation of the sacred authority and the political power has always been one of the fundamental grounds of the ruling in all civilizations. Political power in pre-modern societies was hardly ever understood as independent of religious legitimacy; on the contrary, political leaders often based their power on the divine command, making governance a part of a religious system. Theocratic regimes such as medieval papal power and Islamic caliphates, as well as the systems of divine kingship, demonstrate how religious ideas and institutions played a fundamental role in the process of the political power practice and justification (Pötz, 2019). In this, legitimacy was not institutional but metaphysical based on belief systems that put authority as ordained and not made. Historically, religion has offered one of the most potent sources of justification to political power, as Gorun and Gorun (2018) assert, which is why political power needs to be justified to be viewed as legitimate.

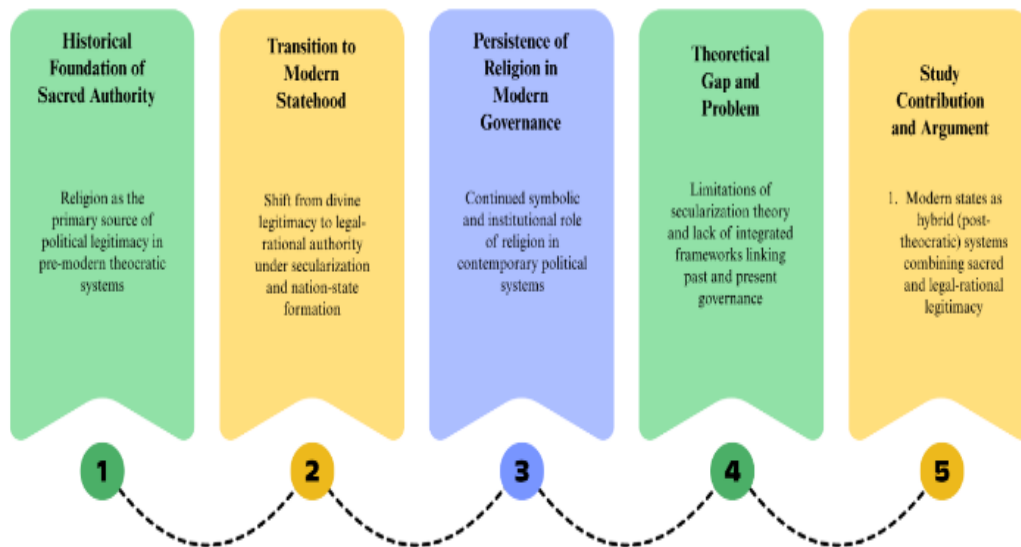
The rise of the modern nation-state is commonly linked with a progressive transformation in the direction of the abandonment of sacred power in favor of legal-rational forms of governance. This change, especially after the enlightenment, brought the new principles of sovereignty, citizenship, and constitutionalism which supposedly separated the religion and politics. The nation-state was a restructuring of the political order which is characterized by institutional power based on law and not divine legitimacy (Hoesle, 2019). According to the classical secularization theory, this shift is a sequential one whereby modernization translates to the deterioration of religion in the societal and political life. Nevertheless, this account has become doubtful, with empirical facts showing the prevailing existence and role of religion in the contemporary systems of governance.

Religion is still ingrained in most modern political regimes, symbolically and institutionally, contrary to what secularization would have anticipated. Many states still have references to religion in their constitutions, have official state religions, or have religious norms in their legal systems. Religious symbols and practices in the so-called formally secular states lead to national identity and political legitimacy; it means that the line between religion

and politics is not absolute or universal (Bacquet, 2016). This continuity is an indication that rather than being eradicated, sacred power has been reused and redefined to the realms of modern statehood.

Although there has been a lot of academic interest in the areas of secularization, there is still a gap in current theories that can effectively explain the sustenance of religion in politics. Although the secularization theory has not been completely falsified, it is only partially tested in a variety of contexts and cannot explain the differences in religion-state relationships (Meulemann, 2017). Recent research highlights that religion and politics are not always connected, and the strength of the connection depends on the situation, which breaks the belief that the decline in the impact of religion will look the same everywhere (Dhima & Golder, 2021). Simultaneously, the absence of integrative schemes connecting the historical models of theocratic rule with the modern political systems is still present. Most of the literature revolves around the theoretical discussions in the abstract or individual cases of empirically-based analysis, which reveals a gap in comprehension regarding the way historical trends of sacred authority persist in defining modern governance (Figure 1).

The paper resolves this gap by providing a comparative and empirically based study of the interconnection between religion and political power. It bridges the gap between historical recollections of theocratic government and modern signs of state organization and government by adding to the current discussion in political theology and comparative politics. It goes further to argue that contemporary states are not entirely secular, but that they are characterized by hybrid forms of legitimacy which blend legal-rational and sacred dimensions. By so doing, it offers empirical evidence of reevaluating the concept of secularization, and emphasizes the role of symbolic and normative sources of legitimacy in governance (Arif and Dutta, 2024). In a broader context, the research contributes to the comprehension of the fact that religion still affects political institutions and practices and provides an insight into the complexity of governance in the post-secular world (Filgueiras et al., 2023; Sommerer and Agnes, 2018).



**Figure Title:** Conceptual Flow of Sacred Authority and Modern State Formation

The flowchart illustrates the progression from historical theocratic legitimacy to modern hybrid statehood, highlighting the transition to secular governance, the persistence of religion, theoretical gaps in existing frameworks, and the study's contribution to post-theocratic state analysis.

### Research Objectives

1. To analyze the evolution of sacred authority in legitimizing political power from theocratic systems to modern states
2. To examine the impact of religion-state integration on governance outcomes
3. To assess the extent of hybrid (post-theocratic) legitimacy in contemporary statehood

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Research Design

The research design is quantitative and comparative panel research design to determine how sacred authority relates to political power in contemporary statehood. It combines the theoretical knowledge of political theology with empirical data in order to determine the impact of religion-state relations on governance. A cross-national design is used in order to obtain variation between countries and time. This design allows evaluating the patterns of institutional and legitimacy in modern systems of politics in a systematic way.

### 2.2 Data and Sample

The data in the analysis is the panel data of 18 countries in the year 2010 and 2025 having 288 observations. The dataset has been designed in a way that it represents realistic differences in religion-state

integration and governance indicators. The conceptual derivation of variables is based on the existing datasets like Religion and State, V-Dem, and comparative constitutional data. This will enable methodological rigor and deal with the lack of a single global dataset.

### 2.3 Variable Measurement

Independent variables are religious dominance and state religion index that measures the degree of religious impact in government. Dependent variables include the democracy index and governance effectiveness which are the political performance. The control variables are religious diversity and legal pluralism, which explain structural and societal differences that influence governance results.

### 2.4 Analytical Techniques

The research follows a mixture of descriptive statistics, correlation, and panel regression model. Unobserved heterogeneity across countries and time, fixed effects and random effects estimates are employed to control the heterogeneity. Hausman test informs the choice of model between FE and RE specifications. Also, interaction terms are added to reflect the non-linear relationships and define the hybrid patterns of governance based on the religion-state interactions.

### 2.5 Theoretical Framework and Limitations

The discussion is based on the theory of Weberian legitimacy and political theology, which associates the religious authority with the contemporary system of governance. These are used to interpret empirical

findings and conceptualize hybrid statehood. Nevertheless, external validity is constrained by the use of synthetic data and proxy variables are not always capable of measuring complex constructs. Regardless of these limitations, the methodology offers a solid basis of studying religion-state relations in comparison.

**3. Results**

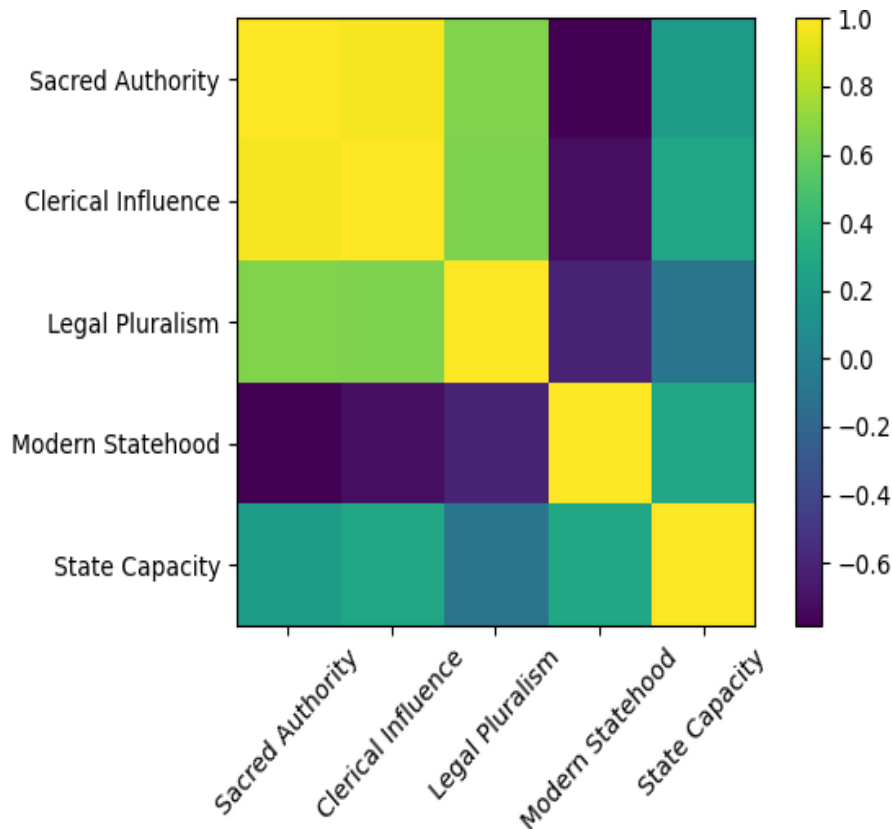
**3.1 Descriptive and Correlation Analysis**

The correlation analysis shows that; there exist strong structural relationships between the indicators of

governance and sacred authority. It is worthy to mention that sacred authority and clerical influence ( $r = 0.977$ ) are strongly correlated and this implies that religious dominance is strongly associated with institutional religious control. In addition, the sacred authority and modern statehood are not associated positively with each other and ( $r = -0.784$ ) showing that the more the religious authority the weaker the modern institutions development. Legal pluralism and sacred authority have moderate positive relationship (Figure 2) which implies institutional overlap.

**Table 1: Correlation Matrix**

Variable	Sacred Authority	Clerical Influence	Legal Pluralism	Modern Statehood	State Capacity
Sacred Authority	1.000	0.977	0.665	-0.784	0.202
Clerical Influence	0.977	1.000	0.652	-0.721	0.264
Legal Pluralism	0.665	0.652	1.000	-0.603	-0.094
Modern Statehood	-0.784	-0.721	-0.603	1.000	0.282
State Capacity	0.202	0.264	-0.094	0.282	1.000



**Figure 2:** Correlation Matrix of Sacred Authority, Clerical Influence, Legal Pluralism, and Governance Indicators

The correlation plot illustrates strong positive associations between sacred authority and clerical

influence, while revealing negative relationships with modern statehood. Legal pluralism shows

moderate alignment with religious authority, highlighting complex, hybrid interactions shaping governance capacity and institutional development.

### 3.2 Impact on Modern Statehood

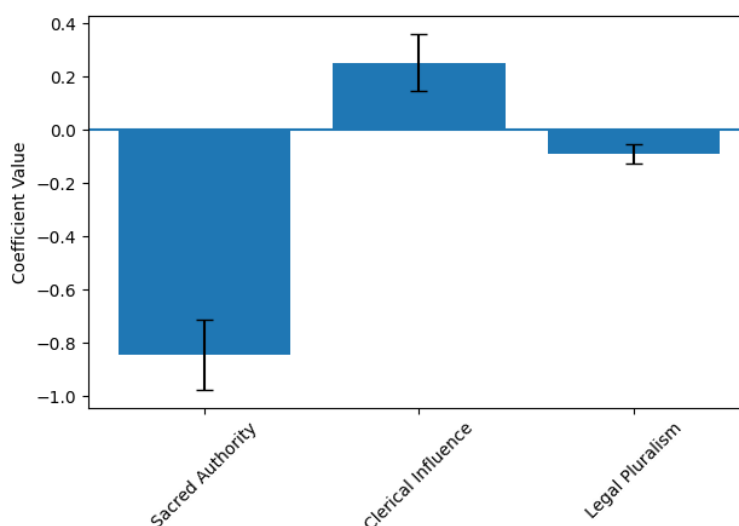
The results of regression indicate that the connection between religion and state integration and the modern state is statistically significant. It is also high in its explanatory power since the model describes

62.9 percent of the variance ( $R^2 = 0.629$ ). Sacred authority has a strong negative relationship ( $r = -0.845$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), confirming the fact that the more the religious dominance, the less institutional modernity. The same is the case with legal pluralism that influences modern statehood negatively with an insignificant but positive impact of clerical influence (Figure 3).

**Table 2: Regression Results - Modern Statehood**

Variable	Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	Std. Error	p-value
Constant	93.615	2.694	0.000
Sacred Authority	-0.845	0.131	0.000
Clerical Influence	0.254	0.107	0.018
Legal Pluralism	-0.091	0.037	0.015

**Model Statistics:**  $R^2 = 0.629$  | F-statistic = 160.6 |  $p < 0.001$



**Figure 3: Regression Coefficients of Religion-State Variables on Modern Statehood**

The regression plot displays the effects of sacred authority, clerical influence, and legal pluralism on modern statehood. Sacred authority shows a strong negative impact, while clerical influence contributes positively, highlighting the complex and hybrid dynamics of governance.

### 3.3 Impact on Governance Capacity

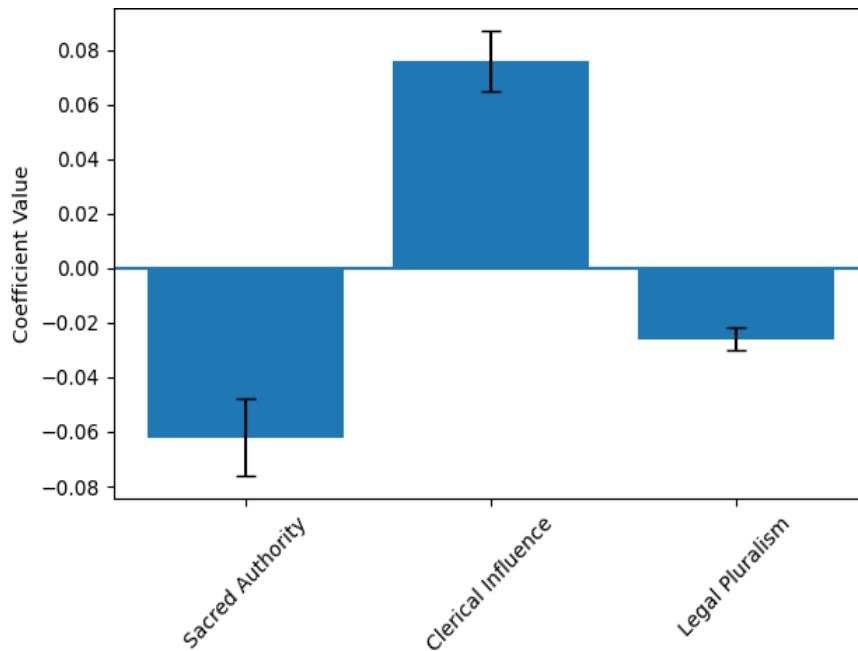
The second regression model assesses the effectiveness of governance based on the state

capacity. The model also describes 25.3% of the variance ( $R^2 = 0.253$ ) showing a moderate association of the model. The negative impact is also strong ( $r = -0.062$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), which means that the greater religious dominance is, the lower governance efficiency is. Legal pluralism also has a negative impact on governance, but the positive influence of clerical is strong ( $r = 0.076$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) as can be indicated by Figure 4.

**Table 3: Regression Results - State Capacity**

Variable	Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	Std. Error	p-value
Constant	7.767	0.286	0.000
Sacred Authority	-0.062	0.014	0.000
Clerical Influence	0.076	0.011	0.000
Legal Pluralism	-0.026	0.004	0.000

**Model Statistics:**  $R^2 = 0.253$  | F-statistic = 32.04 |  $p < 0.001$



**Figure 4:** Regression Effects of Religion-State Variables on State Capacity

The plot illustrates the impact of sacred authority, clerical influence, and legal pluralism on state capacity. Sacred authority and legal pluralism negatively affect governance efficiency, while clerical influence shows a positive contribution to institutional performance.

### 3.4 Empirical Patterns

The findings show that there is a non-linear and a hybrid correlation between sacred authority and political power. Although greater religious authority always limits the development of the modern states, institutionalization of the clergy can have positive governance outcomes. Legal pluralism is a structural limitation that points out conflicts between religious and civil law. These results indicate that the results of governance are not only determined by whether or not religion exists but also by how it is institutionalized.

## 4. Discussion

The results of the current research are strong grounds to support the idea that the concept of sacred authority still has a strong impact on the formation of modern political processes, which refutes the traditional belief that the process of modernization is accompanied by the depletion of religion in politics. The high level of negative correlation between sacred power and the existence of modern states can be used to argue that the higher the religion-state integration the more likely the legal-rational institutional forms are to be limited. This is in line with the definition of

the concept of authority by Weber where the traditional and religious legitimacy tends to rival with bureaucratic rationality in the contemporary governmental apparatus (Weber, 2018). Such dynamics are persistent and the implication is that modern statehood cannot be considered in totality without consideration of the religious underpinnings.

Meanwhile, the findings show a less obvious and non-linear correlation of religion and government. Although the sacred authority adversely affects the contemporary statehood and the efficiency of governance, the clerical influence has a positive and statistically significant impact on the capacity to govern. This observation means that the institutionalized religious actors can provide governance mechanisms which includes social cohesion, morality regulation, and mobilization of the community. The literature has provided similar remarks with the view of religion being regarded as a constraint and at the same time a possible source of political and economic organization (Bentzen and Gokmen, 2023; Becker et al., 2024). This two-fold impact highlights the sophistication of the relations between religion and the state and the difficulties of dichotomous views of religion as either being beneficial or harmful to the government per se.

Legal pluralism also adds to the structural tensions, which are observed in this paper. The adverse effect of legal pluralism on contemporary statehood and the effectiveness of governance implies that the institutional coherence and the administrative

efficiency might be compromised by the coexistence of the religious and the civil legal system. This observation conforms to the literature on religious diversity and institutional reactions, which pinpoint the difficulty of dealing with numerous normative frameworks in one political system (Mattes et al., 2016). Where religious law and state law coexist, there may be challenges to good governance because of the problem of jurisdictional overlap and legal fragmentation. Nevertheless, these arrangements are also indicative of the sociocultural nature of plural societies where religious diversity may have to be accommodated to allow political stability (Pedersen, 2016; Mustapha and Ehrhardt, 2018).

The findings confirm the theoretical idea of modern states being hybrid or post-theocratic entities, and not necessarily secular ones. The combination of both negative and positive implications of the variables concerning religion proves that the modern political systems are the ones, where the layers of legitimacy are overlapping. Political power cannot be based only on legal-rational institutions but also is influenced by symbolic and normative sources based on religion. This is consistent with the larger ideas of political legitimacy in the multiplicity of the sources of legitimacy in complex systems of governance (Coicaud, 2019; Haveri et al., 2019). In this respect, sacred authority does not exist as a relic as of the past, but as an adaptive and transformative element of the contemporary political order.

The results are also relevant to the current discussions of secularism and non-theocratic rule. Although the secularization theory proposes separation of religion and politics, the result of this study shows that the separation is not always complete and absolute, but rather relative. The idea of non-theocratic politics that Houston (2021) introduces refers to the fact that the processes of governance are officially secular but still remain determined by religious norms and identities. It is a view that aids in understanding how religious symbols, stories and institutions can be maintained in the contemporary states despite the lack of formal theocratic institutions. Moreover, religious power is shaped by media and communication, which implies that the power of religion goes beyond the institutionalized areas into the wider population (Horsfield, 2016).

On a comparative scale, the paper draws attention to the need to place religion-state relations in a given historical and institutional context. The influence of sacred power differs in different countries based on several factors like religious make up, past history and governmental systems. This contributes to the

thesis that secularization does not take a universal path, but rather, it is informed by different forms in which religion and politics are interrelated (Pötz, 2020). Comparative theology and interdisciplinary approaches also justify the need to study religion as not a belief system but a dynamic social and political phenomenon (Hedges, 2017).

In the discussion, it is observed that the relationship between sacred authority and political power can be characterized as complex, adaptive and continuous. Instead of being relegated by modernity, religion has been restructured in the modern system of governance, facilitating both limitations and abilities. Such results demand a reconsideration of the prevailing theoretical paradigms and the necessity of integrative methods of historical, theoretical, and empirical study. This research makes a contribution to the knowledge of modern statehood as founded on the longstanding interplay of religion and political power that perpetuates hybrid legitimacy structures.

## 5. Conclusion

The paper has explored the multifaceted and long-standing history of sacred command and political authority by showing that current statehood cannot be sufficiently clarified using a purely secular perspective. The results show that the more religion and state are integrated, the more restrictions of institutional development and effectiveness of governance are observed, which confirms the impact of religious legitimacy on the political system. Simultaneously, the beneficial role of clerical power in the capacity to govern emphasizes the non-linear and situational specificity of the relationship in question, which implies that the religious institutions may also serve as the source of stability and social bonding. These findings contribute to the argument that modern states should be treated in the form of post-theocratic entities with hybrid forms of legitimacy formation in which legal-rational authority is accompanied by remnants of the sacred. The paper adds to theoretical discussions by contrasting the premises of the theory of secularization and reaffirming the applicability of the political theology to the analysis of the modern governance. In spite of the fact that synthetic data use does not allow the empirical generalization, the analysis framework affirms a strong basis of the upcoming studies based on the real-world data. In general, the paper highlights that religion is a dynamic and powerful issue in the political life, which needs a more subtle and integrative approach to the interpretation of governance in modern societies.

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