On the morning of December 1, 2000, Vicente Fox arrived at the Basílica de Guadalupe in Mexico City and was promptly surrounded by a crowd of cheering supporters. He prayed for several minutes before the iconic figure of the Virgin of Tepeyac, received communion from the rector of the basilica, and spent a few private moments in the sacristy with a group of priests. The rector spoke to the gathered faithful and declared Fox “the first guadalupano head of state who comes to the feet and the heart of the mother of all Mexicans, to place his hands and heart at the service of the country and to ask that all may be well.” Two hours later, he was sworn into office as president. In Mexico, where revolutionaries had embedded anticlericalism at the heart of the constitution and heads of state studiously avoided displays of personal piety, the victory of Vicente Fox, a man whose faith was prominently featured during the campaign, and with him the victory of the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN; National Action Party), a party with historic ties to Catholic activism, provoked uncertainty and concern among defenders of the secular state.

In Turkey, the 2002 national elections produced a shocking result: The country that Atatürk had molded into a paragon of strict secularism had elected the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP; Justice and Development Party), a party rooted in political Islam, to lead its government. The head of the AKP, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, was barred from holding public office because of a prior conviction for inciting religious hatred. The charge stemmed from his declarations at an electoral rally in 1999, where he had read a poem
that included the lines “The mosques are our barracks, / the domes our helmets, / the minarets our bayonets / and the faithful our soldiers.” Following the election, which equipped the AKP with a supermajority in parliament, the rule was modified to allow him to stand for office in a by-election. Victorious, he entered the parliament and assumed the role of prime minister.

The events in Mexico and Turkey are not isolated exceptions. The irruption of religious politics into secular states has produced some of the most striking political scenes of the last half century, as resurgent religions have transformed the global political landscape. From Islamic revolutionaries in Iran to Evangelical conservatives in the United States, religious leaders and activists have dramatically altered popular and scholarly perceptions of the role that faith can play in the political arena. Religious politics has come front and center in places as different as Algeria, Israel, India, and Poland. Religious political engagement has taken place in democracies and authoritarian regimes, developed and developing nations, countries with strict religion-state separation and ones with firm ties to specific traditions, religiously heterogeneous and homogeneous societies, and virtually every part of the world.

These episodes, however, have varied substantially in their impact on elections and political parties. The growing salience of religion coincided with the global expansion of electoral politics during the final decades of the twentieth century. Yet the ways in which these trends have intersected are quite diverse. In some cases, religious activists and politicians have collaborated to form assertive religious parties that make open appeals to voters’ sectarian identity, maintain strong alliances with religious groups, and foreground religious doctrine in their policy platforms. In others, activists have joined mainstream parties that rely on religion as one element among many and bring devout voters into broader coalitions. And in yet other cases, religious political activism has remained largely outside the electoral arena, in the hands of groups that eschew partisan identification and prefer to negotiate independently with government representatives.

Scholars have long noted that differences in the salience and intensity of religious politics appear correlated to faith traditions. Among contemporary global religions, Islam is often singled out as being uniquely conducive to the emergence of assertive religious parties. In contrast, Catholicism is often seen as having become particularly resistant to explicit partisan mobilization. However, these observations are seldom made on the basis of systematic comparison or subjected to empirical assessment. One of the aims of this book is to describe and compare patterns of religious political mobilization associated with Roman Catholicism and Sunni Islam in an encompassing and even-handed manner. In doing so, it confirms that religious mobilization tends to
take different forms in contemporary Catholic- and Sunni-majority countries while challenging the notion that religious political parties are largely absent in the first and nearly ubiquitous in the second.

Mexico and Turkey are emblematic of the distinct trajectories taken by parties linked to Catholicism and Islam during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. As Mexican elections became more competitive from the 1970s to the 1990s, the PAN increasingly focused on expanding its secular sources of support and moved away from explicitly sectarian appeals. Its doctrinal statements remained indebted to Catholic social thought, and many of its leaders and candidates had ties to Catholic organizations, but these features were increasingly sidelined in its campaign efforts. In contrast, the predecessors of the AKP, the Millî Selâmet Partisi (MSP; National Salvation Party) and Refah Partisi (RP; Welfare Party), spent those decades developing assertive approaches to religious mobilization as they navigated a complex political environment punctuated by military interventions. Their platforms were infused with references to religious doctrine, and candidates openly relied on their devout reputations to differentiate themselves from the secular establishment and cultivated ties to religious associations in civil society as a means of reaching out to voters. The AKP abandoned much of the explicitly doctrinal rhetoric but retained the reputation and grassroots networks built by its predecessors. When the PAN and AKP came to power in the opening years of the twenty-first century, both parties included some religiously oriented elements in their agendas and faced resistance from the secular establishment and progressive elements in civil society. However, the PAN adopted a defensive, supporting role in debates about religion and public policy and failed to implement much of its agenda. In contrast, the AKP spearheaded efforts to expand the role of religion in public life and succeeded in gradually implementing important elements of its religiously inspired vision.

Religious politics did not vanish from Mexican politics: Catholic bishops and activists continue to advocate and mobilize in favor of policies that reflect their distinctive faith commitments, ranging from abortion and same-sex marriage to education policy and indigenous rights. This activity frequently extends to the political arena, where the PAN has often provided them with reliable partisan allies. Turkey, in turn, did not become anything like an Islamic state: the AKP’s reforms in this area, such as loosening restrictions on the headscarf or expanding religious schools, have been shocking to a Turkish public used to assertive secularism but remain more akin to those promoted by conservative parties in Europe and North America than to those that characterize Iran or Saudi Arabia.
The consequences of religious mobilization for democracy have been notably uneven. In both countries, the electoral success of religious mobilizers was initially a boon for democracy. In Mexico, the victory of the PAN brought an end to single-party dominance by producing the first partisan alternation of executive power in seven decades. In Turkey, the AKP government initially pursued liberalizing reforms and stopped a long history of military intervention in political affairs. Since then, however, the picture has been far less rosy. Mexico experienced growing popular discontent with a democracy marred by political mismanagement, persistent corruption, and escalating violence. In Turkey, democracy was profoundly eroded as the AKP leadership became increasingly autocratic, concentrating power in very few hands and rolling back basic rights, such as freedom of the press.

Why did political parties in these countries adopt distinctive patterns of religious mobilization? What role did religious mobilization play in the evolution of electoral politics and democratic institutions? To what extent do their trajectories reflect broader trends in political Catholicism and Islam? What can a structured comparison of two critical cases tell us about the varieties of religious politics in the world today?

This book argues that different paths followed by religious parties in Mexico and Turkey are not due to essential doctrinal differences between Roman Catholicism and Sunni Islam or to the idiosyncratic preferences of individual party leaders. Instead, they are the result of changes taking place in religious communities and the political institutions that govern religious political engagement. The growing capacity and coordination of the Catholic hierarchy in Mexico, combined with political institutions that rewarded compromise and negotiation with the secular regime, raised the costs of assertive religious mobilization. In contrast, the fractured and contested quality of religious authority in Turkey, aided by political institutions designed to facilitate state intervention in religious affairs, increased the rewards for effective religious mobilization. Many of these features are broadly present across Catholic- and Sunni-majority countries and have thus played a prominent role in the broader evolution of political Catholicism and Islam in the last half century.

To explain these dynamics, the following chapters develop an original analytical framework that can be applied to a broad set of Catholic- and Sunni-majority countries. The balance of this Introduction presents the key ideas, arguments, and methods that give shape to the analysis. First, it sets out the puzzle of Catholic and Sunni divergence and surveys recent developments in the existing literature on religious parties. Then it explains the novel
approach used in this book to describe and explain variation among religious parties and briefly describes the methodology and case selection. It concludes by providing a brief overview of the rest of the book.

Religious Parties in Roman Catholicism and Sunni Islam

Sunni Muslims and Roman Catholics jointly account for almost a third of the global population, and approximately the same proportion of the world’s countries have either Catholic or Sunni majorities. The impact of these two traditions has long been a point of interest for scholars and has been proposed as a critical factor explaining patterns of global political and economic development. More recently, a substantial number of studies have emerged to explore the political impact of Catholicism on democratization and Islam on violence. This normatively charged distinction between a pro-democratic Catholicism and an antidemocratic Islam reflects in no small part the perceived depoliticization of the former and hyperpoliticization of the latter.

Religious parties in Catholic- and Sunni-majority states have undergone a far-reaching transformation over the last six decades. The shift has been so dramatic that it can be easy to forget what conditions were like in the 1950s. At that time, Catholic-inspired Christian Democracy was the dominant political force in much of Western Europe and a rising contender in Latin America. The intellectual ferment leading up to the momentous Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) initially appeared to reinforce this trend, with key documents calling on Catholics, from bishops to lay activists, to become more involved in the social, economic, and political debates of the time. However, over the course of the next four decades, political parties in Catholic-majority countries in Western Europe and Latin America increasingly seemed to eschew assertive religious mobilization. Even as pro-democracy movements empowered by the church proved strong enough to sweep military dictators from power, parties often drifted away from sectarian appeals, failed to maintain links with religious associations, and avoided framing their policy positions in terms of religious doctrine. Catholic political mobilization seemingly faded from the electoral arena, so religious parties gradually became less distinctive, less effective, or both.

Religious mobilization in Sunni-majority countries took a clearly different path during the same period. The 1950s were a low point for religious mobilization in many Sunni-majority countries across the Middle East, North Africa, and South and Southeast Asia. The most influential leaders of
the period, such as Egypt’s Gamal Abdel Nasser, promoted secular doctrines such as socialism and pan-Arabism. To most observers these secular projects seemed likely to remain dominant in the political arena. As late as 1969 one of the most insightful scholars of Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood described the object of his study as a movement whose moment of historical relevance had passed. Yet by the 1980s religious mobilization had become one of the most widely noted features of political contention in Sunni-majority countries. Appeals to religious identity became a staple of electoral competition, and even Nasser’s successor in Egypt, Anwar Sadat, fashioned himself as the “believer president.” Incumbent and opposition leaders formed and deepened ties to Islamic movements and associations originally aimed at nonpolitical ends such as provision of social services or the revival of religious mores. These ties provided them with a steady supply of cadres and voters. Candidates became adept at framing their policy proposals in explicitly Islamic terms—for example, by pointing to the importance of *shura* (consultation) for democratic reforms or by developing economic frameworks that could accommodate the religious ban on *riba* (interest-bearing loans). Assertive religious mobilization thus became a regular feature in electoral contests across an array of the Sunni-majority countries.

Few scholars have systematically explored these contrasting trends in a comparative perspective. The scarcity of empirical work comparing Catholic and Sunni political parties over time enables essentialist arguments about the inherent and inflexible differences between the two traditions. By recognizing that both Sunni and Catholic parties exhibit a great deal of variation among themselves and over time, historically and contextually sensitive comparisons can generate more convincing and robust causal arguments about the conditions that favor religious political mobilization. Critically, such an approach belies the notion that current patterns of religious political engagement are a product of essential qualities of the religions themselves.

A growing number of studies cast doubt on the notion that Islam is inherently political and that modern Catholicism is thoroughly depoliticized. Empirical case studies reveal substantial within-tradition diversity of policy proposals, mobilization styles, and framing efforts. Among Christian Democratic organizations, for example, some have strong roots in Catholic associations and social thought, while others are personality driven and lack distinctive doctrines. Similarly, Islamic parties range from loose coalitions of traditional authorities to highly centralized organizations led by urban professionals, and they vary dramatically in their religious policy preferences.
Yet these case studies lack a critical comparative dimension, as they are almost always formulated and evaluated within a single tradition. Thus, they rarely compare the behavior of parties linked to different faiths. When comparisons are presented, they tend to ignore the internal and historical dynamics of other religious communities, instead treating them as static comparison categories. The most robust comparative empirical work is usually restricted to a small number of cases, often separated by large spans of time. These comparisons provide important insights regarding broader patterns of religious political engagement but have difficulty isolating the conditions that lead to its emergence or shape its evolution.

As attractive as the prospects of comparing across traditions may be, there are significant conceptual and empirical lacunae that need to be addressed if a coherent and sustainable research program on religious parties is to emerge. There is a general scarcity of work comparing religious parties across traditions and over time. With some recent and notable exceptions, cross-country comparative studies tend to restrict themselves to cases within the same religious contexts. This can result in important misconceptions about the likely causes of religious phenomena. For example, scholars of Islamic politics often view it as uniquely salient, with little consideration given to similarities with Catholic activism earlier in the century.

This lack of comparative work is matched by the scarcity of research examining religions’ “differential appeal, persuasiveness, and political salience over time.” For example, while scholars of theology and the sociology of religion have spent substantial time examining the dramatic change associated with Catholicism’s aggiornamento, the contentious process by which the church sought to bring itself up to date during the 1960s, political scientists have generally been hesitant to hypothesize about its impact. One reason is that changes in religious doctrines such as those associated with Vatican II are often assumed to apply evenly and immediately across a transnational religious community, while changes in political-religious behavior, such as shifts in willingness to engage in democratic advocacy, are rarely, if ever, observed to occur uniformly. But clearly the first assumption is flawed; there are numerous local dynamics and conditions that interact with doctrinal change to produce different effects. Equally important is the temporal dimension of doctrinal reform, which, even in the case of apparently bounded events such as Vatican II, unfolds over extended periods of time that can vary substantially across cases. For social scientists focused on short-term causation, the slow-moving character of religious change can disguise its significant causal impact.
Existing scholarship is thus moving in a constructive direction. However, to further advance the comparative study of religious political parties, some new conceptual foundations remain necessary.

Describing Religious Parties

A comparative analysis of religious parties requires a definition that identifies what makes these organizations distinctive and facilitates comparison across regions, regimes, and traditions. The definition must be flexible enough to encompass a broad range of organizations, note their differences, and articulate clear conceptual boundaries that distinguish between religious and nonreligious parties. To meet these requirements, this book takes as its starting point the classic, minimalist definition of political parties as organizations that field candidates to compete in elections. All political parties must therefore, at a minimum, be able to recruit candidates and appeal to voters for support. Religious parties are those that rely on religion to perform these basic tasks of electoral competition. I refer to the processes of recruitment and appeal as religious mobilization because they entail more than a passive inclusion of religion: relying on religion to compete in elections is an inevitably contested process that can profoundly alter religious communities.

Religious mobilization in the electoral arena can take place along multiple dimensions, reflecting the various ways in which party organizations can recruit candidates, voters, and supporters. The typology of religious mobilization developed in this book distinguishes between three dimensions: appeals to religious identity, cooperation with religious associations in civil society, and inclusion of religious doctrine in platforms and manifestos. The next chapter describes the three dimensions of religious mobilization in more detail, but they can be briefly delineated here.

The first dimension includes a range of appeals to religious identity, from the explicit, such as Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood’s “Islam is the Solution,” to the more subtle, such as the RP’s revalidation of Turkey’s Ottoman-Islamic heritage. In a Catholic context, use of labels such as “Christian Democracy” and symbols such as the cross or ichthys can also constitute such an appeal. In both traditions, regular reliance on recognizably religious rhetoric or candidates’ consistent displays of personal piety can play an important role in these efforts. The second dimension of mobilization consists of ties to religious associations in civil society. These can help secure crucial resources for political actors and endow them with a capacity to penetrate society greater than that of all but the most robust mass parties. In Mexico, links to Catholic Action allowed the PAN to appeal to activists and voters despite suffering
acute financial shortages during its first four decades. Sunni opposition parties managed to become powerful contenders in very challenging political circumstances partly as a result of their links with local mosques, Islamic charities, and religious brotherhoods. The third dimension—incorporation of religious doctrine into party manifestos and policy proposals—is present when parties claim that their positions are derived from the teachings of a particular tradition. A party that relies on Catholic doctrines regarding the sanctity of life from conception to articulate an antiabortion stance is mobilizing religion in its platform. An Islamic party that calls for financial-sector reform by invoking religious prohibitions on usury is doing the same. Each dimension of religious mobilization may play a more or less salient role in a party’s overall electoral strategy. The three can be mutually reinforcing but can also be used separately; that is, parties may use one, two, or all three to compete in elections.

Using this framework, scholars or analysts interested in classifying parties can set different thresholds for considering political parties religious. At a high threshold, one may require substantial religious mobilization along all three dimensions before a party is considered religious. This results in a clearly defined set of parties that are unambiguously reliant on religion to participate in elections. However, it substantially narrows the range of parties considered religious and excludes many organizations that local voters, activists, and analysts recognize as religious. Alternatively, at a low threshold, one can consider any party organization that relies on religious mobilization along any dimension to be religious. In that case, two parties may be classified as religious without sharing a specific attribute: a party that mobilizes voters primarily by highlighting its denominational identity but eschews elaborate doctrine counts as religious, as does one that draws on doctrinal principles but makes appeals across denominational boundaries. This means that, at a low threshold, religious parties may bear only a “family resemblance” to each other; that is, they may share some of a cluster of traits rather than a single defining characteristic.

As the next chapter shows, scholars and analysts are already making these kinds of judgments. However, they are often made implicitly, complicating efforts to compare findings across countries, regions, and traditions. The approach developed in this book allows scholars to make these kinds of classificatory decisions explicitly and thus to avoid talking past each other. Chapter 1 demonstrates how significant these decisions can be: setting different thresholds for considering parties religious results in very different accounts of the factors that contribute to the presence and success of these organizations.
Beyond issues of classification, an important advantage of this approach is that it retains clear conceptual boundaries while providing enough flexibility to cover a diverse range of cases. Mobilization through religious identity, association, and doctrine can be observed across faiths and regime types. All three dimensions can be pursued by parties linked to any religious tradition, insofar as its members possess a shared sense of identity, a recognized corpus of doctrines, and some associational structure. All three can also be pursued wherever elections are held, even when these are far from free and fair. This enables comparisons across the spectrum of electoral regimes, from highly constrained authoritarian ones to established liberal democracies.

In addition, the framework is especially useful in describing how parties evolve over time. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 analyze shifting patterns of religious mobilization in Mexico and Turkey, examining how shifting opportunities and constraints led parties to adopt different styles of religious mobilization. The analysis therefore avoids getting bogged down in debates about whether particular parties are (or were) religious and instead examines the different ways in which these organizations have mobilized religion and how the importance of appeals to identity, doctrinal platforms, and associational linkages has varied in response to particular factors.

Explaining Religious Parties

This book argues that much of the divergence between Catholic and Sunni parties during the last half century can be explained by two factors: the structure of religious communities and the institutions governing political competition. The divergent evolution of community structures and political institutions in Catholic and Sunni contexts has generated very different constraints and incentives for religious mobilization in their electoral arenas. Analyzing the impact of religious community structures and political institutions allows this book to address critical questions about religion and politics without relying on static and essentialist notions of faith traditions or delving into the extensive debates about democratic compatibility that have shaped much of the scholarship on this subject. The analytical framework sketched here and developed in more detail in Chapter 1 centers on how religious community structures and political institutions affect the ability and willingness of partisan actors to mobilize religion as well as the forms that this mobilization is likely to take.

The term “religious community structure” refers to the patterns of relations among followers of a religion, particularly those that deal with authority and representation. Who has the ability to speak for the religious commu-
nity? How is formal religious authority organized, and what are its limits in practice? What are the intracommunal constraints on autonomous religious activism? Religious communities may be more or less centralized and hierarchical in practice. They may possess more or less specialized leadership. Members of the broader community may have more or less ability to shape the salience of particular issues and make their voice heard in doctrinal debates.

The structure of religious communities can either limit or facilitate religious political mobilization. I argue that, in addition to the overall mobilizing capacity of religious communities, which largely depends on the material resources available to them, the ease with which they can be mobilized depends to a great extent on the relative strength of professional clerics and lay activists. Well-organized clerical leaders can act as gatekeepers and contest the legitimacy of partisan religious claims in order to safeguard their authority. In contrast, communities led by lay activists are more disposed to cooperating with and joining political organizations. The ability of political entrepreneurs to mobilize religion, therefore, depends on the relative capacity of the clergy in relation to the laity. Crucially, I argue that the relative degree of coordination exhibited by clerical and lay actors is not determined by the canons and doctrines of a particular tradition. Although a strict theological perspective presents a sharp contrast between a hierarchical Roman Catholicism and an egalitarian Sunni Islam, this disguises a much more dynamic distinction between clergy and laity in each tradition. Clerical authorities can be found in both Catholicism and Sunni Islam and include bishops and ulema, papal representatives and Sufi leaders. As the case studies of Mexico and Turkey demonstrate, the relative power of clerical and lay groups in both traditions has varied substantially over time and must therefore be understood historically and contextually.

The second factor in the analytical framework is the institutional arrangement that governs religious participation in elections. The political strategies available to religious parties, as organizations that straddle the world of faith and politics, are regulated by two clusters of institutions: those that govern the public activities of religious actors and those that set the rules of electoral competition for political parties. The former include regulations that directly impinge on religious partisan activity, such as bans on religious political parties, and those that indirectly alter incentives for mobilization, such as reliance on state funding for religious activities. More restrictions on religion and more reliance on state support can increase the risks faced by those who seek to mobilize religion in politics but also raise the stakes of political contests and increase potential rewards. This book finds that the
presence of interventionist institutions tends to encourage assertive religious political engagement. Notably, this is true whether or not the institutional arrangements are designed to support or undermine religious communities.

Electoral institutions, such as the magnitude of electoral districts and vote thresholds, play a critical role in determining how feasible it is for religious parties to gain representation in national legislatures. The role of these rules in shaping political parties is well-known and has long constituted one of the most fertile areas for comparative institutional scholarship on parties and party systems. However, analyses of electoral institutions are often absent from comparative discussions of religious politics, which tend to limit their focus to the distinction between authoritarianism and democracy even though authoritarian rulers increasingly rely on electoral rules to manipulate religious oppositions. In broad terms, restrictive electoral rules encourage religious mobilization through large, mainstream parties and discourage the emergence of small, niche-oriented competitors. Less restrictive electoral environments make it feasible for religious activists to pursue niche-party strategies by establishing strong links with smaller, more devout constituencies. However, as the case studies in this book demonstrate, electoral rules can interact in complex ways with other institutions and community structures to generate complex webs of incentives and constraints for religious political engagement.

The case studies of Mexico and Turkey demonstrate how religious community structures and political institutions interact with each other and with other factors that affect the strategic calculations of key actors in the electoral arena. In addition, the case studies demonstrate that these factors have a powerful independent influence on actors’ choices and operate in similar ways across varied traditions and regimes, making them a cornerstone for a research program on religious parties.

Methods and Cases

Describing and analyzing the development of religious parties across faith traditions pose a number of empirical challenges. In response, this book adopts a two-pronged approach. First, it presents a cross-national statistical analysis of religious mobilization across a range of Catholic- and Sunni-majority countries. This provides a bird’s-eye view of patterns of religious mobilization and allows a preliminary assessment of competing causal arguments. Second, the bulk of the book develops a comparative historical analysis of religious parties in Mexico and Turkey that examines the causal mechanisms that link structures and institutions to religious political mobilization and provides an
opportunity to observe how Catholic and Sunni parties have evolved over a longer span of time.

The statistical analysis, developed in Chapter 1, relies on an original data set of religious mobilization that covers every election held in twenty-two Catholic-majority and eighteen Sunni-majority countries between 1990 and 2012. The data set draws on a variety of primary and secondary sources to describe the extent to which political parties in these countries mobilize religion along each of the three dimensions, the overall salience of their religious mobilization, and the degree of electoral success they achieve. The countries represent a majority of Catholic- and Sunni-majority countries, drawn from around the world and with a wide range of outcomes in regard to religious political mobilization. Regression analyses based on this panel data set allow a more precise measurement of patterns of religious mobilization in Catholic- and Sunni-majority countries than has been previously available.

Given the many differences that exist between Catholic- and Sunni-majority environments, the comparative historical analysis takes advantage of important parallels between the Mexican and Turkish experiences to trace the effects of shifting community structures and political institutions on patterns of religious mobilization by Catholic and Sunni political parties. In that way, the study leverages the unique advantages of paired comparison, a technique that allows for the kind of sustained attention to specific cases that is usually beyond the scope of all but the most expansive multicountry studies. It thus enables the systematic evaluation of contextual differences and similarities and explicitly addresses concerns about the validity of findings.

Mexico and Turkey are a uniquely useful pair of cases with which to conduct context-sensitive comparative research on religious political parties. There are, of course, very many differences between them, which the case-study format allows me to take into account. However, the countries also share useful similarities. Mexico and Turkey have populations of comparable size and similar levels of economic development and religious diversity. Both are located on the edges of major centers of economic and political power with which they have well-established but complex relationships that have often spilled into the political and religious arenas. Yet the most notable similarity between the two cases lies in their parallel historical trajectories. Until the early nineteenth century, both were led by monarchies with deep ties to their dominant religious tradition. They then experienced large-scale, contentious attempts to implement liberalizing reforms during the mid-nineteenth century, many of which were aimed at asserting the dominance of the state apparatus over the religious establishment. These efforts laid the grounds for modernizing dictatorships late in the nineteenth century and for
revolutionary struggles during the beginning of the twentieth. These devastating conflicts, each of which cost millions of lives, ended with the imposition of single-party regimes committed to assertive secular policies. During this period, a variety of laws endowed political authorities with the power to regulate public worship and other expressions of faith while prohibiting political activism by religious groups and individuals. These laws aimed to secure state autonomy from the influence of established religious groups, to promote the emergence of an enlightened and privatized religious faith, and to encourage the spread of secular worldviews. Anticlerical and secularist reforms triggered violent and unsuccessful reactions in the 1920s, exemplified by the Sheikh Said Rebellion in Turkey and the Cristero War in Mexico. The violent suppression of these movements established the supremacy of the secular state but also demonstrated the high cost of insisting on the effective application of secularist projects. This realization paved the way for political liberalization and increased religious tolerance in the 1940s and 1950s, although religious tolerance often took the form of informal shifts in policy enforcement rather than full-fledged reform. The 1980s witnessed further liberalization, most notably in the economic realm, where it strengthened often conservative business sectors but also had implications for long-fought battles over the role of religion in education.

Key differences between these similar cases make the comparison particularly fruitful. Critically, there have been significant differences between Mexico and Turkey in regard to their political institutions and religious community structures. In regard to institutions, Mexico, despite an avowed commitment to multiparty competition, long combined a profoundly uneven playing field with a highly disproportionate electoral system, ensuring overwhelming majorities for the ruling party for several decades. Changes to the institutional status quo were always gradual and tentative, and only by the 1990s could these adjustments be construed as a real step toward democratization. In regard to religious institutions, an informal pact between the secular regime and the Catholic Church denied any formal recognition of the church until the 1990s but ensured that the anticlerical provisions of the constitutions remained effectively in abeyance. In effect, it left few channels open by which the state could directly influence the religious community and thus made room for the consolidation of autonomous clerical authority.

Political reforms in Turkey were both more dramatic and less consistent. The introduction of multiparty elections in the late 1940s quickly led to the defeat of the secularist establishment at the hands of a conservative opposition party, and elections remained extremely competitive. However, the secularist elite remained entrenched in the core institutions of the state:
the military, judiciary, and bureaucracy. Over the next four decades, these
groups regularly intervened to constrain the power of elected officials, most
dramatically through recurrent military coups. The Turkish state remained
profoundly involved in regulating religion, most notably through the power-
ful Directorate of Religious Affairs. For decades, this body, along with the
courts and the military, has guided and constrained a broad range of religious
activities, not least those potentially associated with political activism.

There were also important differences in religious community structure.
In Mexico, as in much of the Catholic world, the Second Vatican Council
encouraged the emergence of myriad lay Catholic groups and discourses,
resulting in an often vibrant but structurally fragmented and doctrinally
diverse lay associational sphere. At the same time, Vatican II also encour-
aged the reorganization and expansion of clerical institutions. After decades
of leading a skeletal existence, the Mexican Episcopal Conference gained a
new vitality, setting the stage for much more assertive and coherent stances
by bishops regarding the pressing social and political questions that shaped
Mexican politics from the 1970s onward. Even as political openings created
new opportunities for religious political mobilization, bishops were usually
cautious and wary of explicit partisan alliances.

While religious communities in Turkey experienced no event of equiva-
 lent magnitude, the religious sphere ultimately underwent a no-less-striking
transformation. Religious associations began to expand rapidly in the 1940s.
Although initially restricted to local associations, there were several larger
beneficiaries from this process, perhaps most notably the communities led by
Said Nursi and the Nakşibendi Sufi order. The expansion of these groups cre-
ated a new crop of committed religious activists who, despite generally prefer-
ing to work outside the political arena, nevertheless dramatically expanded
their communities’ capacity for religious political mobilization. The Milli
Görüş (MG; National Outlook) movement, led by Necmettin Erbakan, drew
on these resources to forge an explicitly political project, but other religious
associations also forged more or less explicit alliances with political parties.
The increasingly well-coordinated groups were generally unfettered by cleri-
cal establishments, which remained beholden to and strictly supervised by
the state. Thus, when economic liberalization expanded the resources avail-
able to members of these religious networks, these resources reinforced vi-
brant networks and politically engaged religious associations.

These divergences shaped the strategies adopted by politicians, activists,
and candidates and thus go a long way toward explaining the divergent pat-
terns of religious mobilization in Turkish and Mexican elections throughout
the second half of the twentieth century. Restrictive electoral institutions in
Mexico led well-organized lay activists to coordinate their efforts around the PAN and prevented the formation of an effective niche competitor until the 1980s, by which time an increasingly well-coordinated clerical organization acted as a substantial impediment to assertive religious mobilization. In Turkey, the initial weakness of lay activists combined with a restrictive electoral system to discourage politicians from aligning themselves with religious causes, resulting in low levels of religious mobilization until the late 1960s, at which time growing lay coordination and a shift to less restrictive electoral rules resulted in the rise of a successful niche party that engaged assertive religious mobilization. The return to restrictive rules after 1980 and the existence of increasingly powerful lay associations led party leaders to transform their organization into a mainstream party, but one that remained capable of robust religious mobilization.

Overview of the Book

This Introduction provides a broad overview of the theoretical foundations, general arguments, methods, and cases used throughout the book. Chapter 1 develops a definition of religious parties that explicitly draws on and synthesizes the existing literature on Catholic and Islamic politics. It goes over the three dimensions of religious mobilization in detail and proposes a strategy for measuring them in practice. Then it elaborates the causal arguments that constitute the core of the book’s analytical framework. It presents the data set that describes 220 elections in thirty-eight Catholic- and Sunni-majority countries, explaining the process used to create the data set, with particular emphasis on the coding of qualitative historical data. Then it uses multivariate panel regressions to assess real differences in levels of religious political mobilization in Catholic and Sunni countries, finding that these remain significant even after accounting for causal factors associated with alternative theories.

Chapter 2 frames the historical case studies of Turkey and Mexico by systematically comparing their religious demography, levels of religiosity, economic development, regime type, and geopolitical situation. It then describes the interaction of religion and politics during the century leading up to the formation of religious parties. It pays particular attention to the rise and fall of clerical authority and the emergence of lay sectarian associations, as well as to evolving patterns of religion-state relations that set the stage for later institutional developments. Most important, it shows how comparable religious community structures and political opportunities gave rise to initially similar party organizations and patterns of religious mobilization.
Chapters 3 and 4 discuss the evolution of religious parties in Mexico and Turkey from the 1940s to the 1990s, paying particular attention to how changes in political institutions and religious community structures gradually or suddenly modified the patterns of mobilization adopted by party leaders and other key actors. Each chapter explores particular periods, punctuated by major shifts in religious and institutional contexts. Through a systematic consideration of the incentives and constraints produced by the interplay of institutions and structures, I apply and test the analytical framework to explain prevailing patterns of religious political mobilization.

Chapter 5 compares the development of key parties in both countries after they reached power at the turn of the millennium. It demonstrates how institutional and structural continuities led to the endurance of many prior trends despite the impact of electoral victories at the local and national levels. At the same time, it shows how the very different institutional arrangements governing religion-state relations in each country played a central role in enabling the AKP to pursue meaningful religious politics, while the absence of such arrangements hindered the PAN’s ability to manage the expectations of religious constituencies.

The Conclusion presents four broad lessons drawn from the quantitative and qualitative analyses and explores how these can be applied to cases in four countries characterized by different faiths and political institutions: Brazil, India, Iraq, and the United States. These tentative extrapolations demonstrate the usefulness of the framework developed in this book as a tool for enabling broader conversations about religious politics across boundaries of region and tradition.