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Religion and Political Parties in South Africa: A Framework and Systematic Review

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The role of religion in political parties has been under-researched in South Africa. This study develops a novel theoretical framework for analysing political parties' use of religion, which distinguishes between parties' orientation towards religion (that is, religious or secular; inclusive or exclusive) across three domains: state law, the institutional rules of the party, and the informal norms that govern the actions of the party and behaviour of the party members. It uses systematic review methods to apply this framework to the scholarship on religion and political parties in South Africa. The framework and review challenge the narrative that the religious rhetoric used by the African National Congress (ANC) in the last decade has been a break with the party's secular past. On the contrary, the ANC has historically used religious rhetoric while supporting secular legislation and party rules concurrently. The review draws attention to how the National Party (NP) exercised religion during apartheid; although it worked closely with the Dutch Reformed Church, the party pursued a religious nationalism that progressively usurped the authority to determine the boundaries of authentic religious practices. Despite the religiosity of the electorate, few parties in post-apartheid South Africa advocate religious legislation, and these parties perform poorly in elections. These findings illustrate the importance of a theoretical framework that distinguishes between political parties' diverse uses of religion and secularism rather than their 'essential' orientation towards religion.

Keywords: secularism; systematic review; African National Congress; National Party; political parties; religion; South Africa; apartheid

Introduction

Political parties connect the public with laws and governance. Although one would expect democratic political parties in countries with a religious population to pursue a religious policy agenda, the relationship is rarely straightforward.¹ South Africa offers a clear illustration of this. While the public appear to be both very religious and socially conservative, members of parliament appear to be even more religious than the public, but

1 J. Fox, *Political Secularism, Religion, and the State: A Time Series Analysis of Worldwide Data* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 98.

less socially conservative.² Counter-intuitively, South Africa's laws and policies are among the most secular globally.³ Research on political parties is important for understanding how the public's orientation toward religion is represented or not in the state and public sphere.

The relationship between political parties and religion has not been widely studied. Luca Ozzano offers two reasons for this: the dominance of the secularisation paradigm, which assumed that religion soon would be irrelevant in the public sphere, and the lack of a comparative theoretical framework for investigating how parties engage with religion.⁴ The scholarly neglect of religion and political parties is acute for contexts outside North America and Europe, although there has been a growing body of research on political secularism in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia.⁵ Comparative research has highlighted differences in how religion and the state are conceptualised and has shown that concepts developed for application within North America and Europe are not necessarily universally useful. However, research on political secularism in sub-Saharan Africa remains thin.⁶

One aspect of this neglect is that religion is often overlooked in political analyses and historiographies, even in contexts where religion is important to most political actors. This is true of South Africa. Several authors note the surprising absence of religion in prominent scholarship on the anti-apartheid struggle, despite the public religiosity of many leaders and activists.⁷ Allan Boesak and Ineke van Kessel each suggest reasons for this: attributing it to either the secular bias of historiography in general⁸ or the political agenda of historians who sought to portray liberation struggle in South Africa as a modernising (and thus secular) movement.⁹

This article seeks to offer a comprehensive account of the role of religion in political parties in South Africa and to provide a novel framework for analysing how political parties use religion. It does so through a systematic review. A systemic review is a method of literature review that uses explicit and rigorous search and inclusion criteria and that aims to incorporate all publications that meet these criteria.¹⁰ This approach is warranted by the concern that religion has been neglected in prominent political scholarship on South Africa. It offers a comprehensive survey of all available research and, in so doing, includes studies that may otherwise be overlooked by traditional review methods. Systematic reviews also

2 H. Kotzé and R. Loubser, 'Christian Ethics in South Africa: Liberal Values Among the Public and Elites', *Scriptura*, 1, 117 (2018), pp. 1–10; H. Kotzé and R. Loubser, 'Religiosity in South Africa: Trends Among the Public and Elites', *Scriptura*, 116, 1 (2017), pp. 1–12.

3 Fox, *Political Secularism*, p. 162.

4 L. Ozzano, *The Masks of the Political God: Religion and Political Parties in Contemporary Democracies* (Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 2020).

5 See M. Kunkler, J. Madeley and S. Shankar, *A Secular Age Beyond the West: Religion, Law and the State in Asia, the Middle East and North Africa* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018).

6 See P. Landau, 'Moments of Insurgency: Christianity in South African Politics, from the 18th Century to Today', in M. Burchardt, M. Wohlrab-Sahr and M. Middell (eds), *Multiple Secularities Beyond the West: Religion and Modernity in the Global Age* (Berlin, De Gruyter, 2015), pp. 189–214; R. van Dijk, 'After Pentecostalism? Exploring Intellectualism, Secularization and Sentiments in Africa', in Burchardt, Wohlrab-Sahr and Middell (eds), *Multiple Secularities Beyond the West*, pp. 215–38.

7 A. Boesak, *The Tenderness of Conscience: African Renaissance and the Spirituality of Politics* (Glasgow, Wild Goose Publications, 2008); L. Graybill, *Religion and Resistance Politics in South Africa* (Westport, Praeger, 1995); I. van Kessel, *Beyond Our Wildest Dreams: The United Democratic Front and the Transformation of South Africa* (Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 2000); D. Leatt, *The State of Secularism: Religion, Tradition and Democracy in South Africa* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2017); P. Meth, 'Committees, Witchdoctors and the "Mother-Body": Everyday Politics in the Township of Cato Manor, South Africa', *Habitat International*, 39 (2013), pp. 269–77; I. van Wyk, 'Jacob Zuma's Shamelessness: Conspicuous Consumption, Politics and Religion', in D. Posel and I. van Wyk (eds), *Conspicuous Consumption in Africa* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2019), pp. 112–32.

8 Boesak, *Tenderness of Conscience*, pp. 106–11.

9 Van Kessel, *Beyond Our Wildest Dreams*, pp. 288–90.

10 D. Gough, S. Oliver and J. Thomas, *An Introduction to Systematic Reviews* (London, Sage, 2012).

provide the opportunity to analyse publications as primary data and thus allow the researcher to interrogate the assumptions and framing of the research.

This research makes four contributions to the study of religion and political parties. First, it develops a framework for analysing political parties and religion that is based on how parties engage with religion rather than essential party characteristics. Second, it uses this framework to demonstrate how political parties in South Africa use religious rhetoric while supporting secular policies. Third, it suggests a paradox within religious nationalism through which parties subordinate religious authorities. Fourth, the article systematises the literature of a relatively neglected field.

In the sections that follow, this article outlines the conceptual framework, research questions and methods, and offers a historical context of political parties in South Africa. The article then details the research findings.

Conceptual Framework

While there has been much research on religion and politics, and several typologies of political parties, there are few comparative frameworks on how political parties engage with religion.¹¹ Seymour Lipset and Stein Rokkan, for example, analyse religious–secular cleavages but focus on party systems rather than political parties.¹² Conversely, Martin Duverger’s typology of political parties gives little attention to religion.¹³ This is a substantial gap in the literature on political parties.

Ozzano identifies two exceptions to this oversight in a recent review of the literature on religion and political parties.¹⁴ The first exception is Otto Kirchheimer’s model of four types of party, based on ideology and support base. One of these is the mass-based denominational party, which is based on a particular religious identity.¹⁵ The second exception is Richard Gunther and Larry Diamond’s typology of 15 ‘species’ of political party, based on organisational method, programmatic goals and attitudes towards ‘democratic rules of the game’.¹⁶ Religious parties are distinguished by their commitment to ‘a set of religious beliefs’ rather than a secular ideology and are divided into ‘denominational-mass parties’ and ‘religious fundamentalist parties’ depending on their orientation towards pluralism.¹⁷

Both frameworks limit their focus on religion to narrowly defined ‘religious parties’. In doing so, Kirchheimer neglects differences in political agendas between denominational parties. Gunther and Diamond address this but overlook parties that might both maintain a significant religious identity and remain committed to a secular ideology. Both frameworks neglect religious parties that mobilise across diverse religious identities. Consequently, these frameworks regard religious parties as a category of ‘other’, defined chiefly by their contrast to ostensibly secular parties.

11 Ozzano, *Masks*.

12 See S.M. Lipset and S. Rokkan, *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives* (London, International Yearbook of Political Behavior Research, 1967); L. Karvonen and S. Kuhnle, *Party Systems and Voter Alignments Revisited* (London, Routledge, 2001).

13 M. Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State* (London, Methuen, 1954).

14 Ozzano, *Masks*, pp.48–9.

15 O. Kirchheimer, ‘The Transformation of the Western European Party Systems’, in J. LaPalombara and M. Weiner (eds), *Political Parties and Political Development* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1966), pp. 177–200.

16 R. Gunther and L. Diamond, ‘Species of Political Parties: A New Typology’, *Party Politics*, 9, 2 (2003), p. 171.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 182.

In contrast, Ozzano rejects the binary of a 'religious party' for a broader concept: the 'religiously orientated' party.¹⁸ Such parties may be formally secular and appeal to non-religious constituencies and yet have explicit religious values in their manifestos, significant religious factions and/or make explicit appeals to religious constituencies. Ozzano identifies five types of these parties: conservative, progressive, nationalist, fundamentalist and those focused on the interests of a religious minority. This is based on a party's ideology, electoral goals, attitude towards pluralism, organisational model, social base, and relationship with other organisations in civil society.

However, all three frameworks are limited in two respects. First, each is concerned with essential characteristics of a party. Second, each assumes a level of clarity and coherence in parties' engagement with religion. This overlooks the role of ambiguity. Parties may equivocate to appeal to ideologically diverse constituencies and/or communicate to religious constituencies in contexts that prohibit religious political mobilisation. Such considerations are not unusual; one or both factors may be salient to many democracies.

Rather than assuming that parties are static and coherent, this article examines the diverse and sometimes contradictory ways in which parties engage with religion. To do so, I propose a new multidimensional framework. This framework entails two dimensions that relate to a party's orientation towards religion, which can be expressed by the party through three domains.

The first dimension of a party's orientation within a domain towards religion is whether the party primarily assumes a secular or religious outlook. If secular, the political party orients itself as essentially non-religious even if it engages with religious actors. If religious, the converse is true.

The second dimension is whether the party's approach to religion is exclusive or inclusive. If exclusive and secular, the party is hostile to religion and religious actors, either through marginalisation or repression. If exclusive and religious, the party welcomes one religious group or narrow set of religious groups but excludes or represses other religious groups. If inclusive and either secular or religious, the party engages with and encourages a range of religious actors.

A party's orientation can be expressed through three domains. The first concerns the law, which is codified at state level and enforced through a state apparatus. A party can, for example, advocate a state religion or the legislation of religious morality. The second domain concerns the formal rules of the party. These are codified, such as in a party's constitution, and are enforced through formal party institutions. For example, a party may have a chaplain and it may have institutional rules which discipline members through formal process for inappropriate behaviour. The third domain concerns the party's behaviour that is not formally codified but none the less maintains informal (or 'soft') norms. These might include, for example, informal conventions on the use of religious rhetoric in speeches or party members' public expressions of religion.

These three domains are not exhaustive. This article contends, however, that (1) parties might express different orientations across different domains; (2) in studying these divergences one can develop a nuanced profile of a party's engagement with religion; (3) these three domains are especially pertinent to such a profile. [Figure 1](#) represents the relationship between these two dimensions and three different domains.

This framework invites nuance in the analysis of political parties. For example, a religious nationalist party may evoke religious-inclusive soft norms in welcoming co-operation with other religious groups through political rhetoric, but none the less enforce religious-exclusive party rules (such as restricting party membership) and state laws. Alternatively, a religious party may evoke religious-inclusive rhetoric and pursue secular-inclusive legislation, and yet enforce religious-exclusive party rules by formally disciplining

18 Ozzano, *Masks*.

	Domain		
	Soft	Party rules	Legal
Secular-exclusive			
Secular-inclusive			
Religious-inclusive			
Religious-exclusive			

Figure 1. A framework for how political parties engage with religion.

party members if they do not publicly observe specific religious rules (such as not consuming alcohol).

A key aspect of this framework is that it analyses parties' engagement with religion rather than the essentialised nature of the party. This contrasts with Ozzano's approach, which is based on party characteristics. One corollary of focusing on parties' engagement rather than essence is that the framework can be used to analyse how ostensibly secular parties relate to religion. Furthermore, a framework that distinguishes between domains can examine how and why there may be change in a party's orientation in one domain but not others.

Although several studies identify different types of political party, the definition of a political party itself is often unstated. A minimal definition, drawing on Maurice Duverger,¹⁹ may be that a political party has a formal party membership distinct from – even if sometimes overlapping with – other roles (such as being a military officer), an internal structure, and an aim to have at least some degree of control over the state apparatus. The focus of this review is on parliamentary parties in the democratic era. However, as many parliamentary parties in contemporary South Africa could not contest elections for much of their existence, this review has been extended to include the activities of those parties prior to their presence in parliament.

This article poses two research questions (RQs). The first reflects on the conceptual assumptions of the literature: how has the relationship between religion and political parties been approached in the academic literature on South Africa? The second summarises the empirical findings: how have political parties in South Africa oriented themselves towards religion over time?

Historical Context

A brief historical context will aid readers in interpreting the findings that follow. The National Party (NP), which promoted Afrikaner ethnic nationalism, was founded in 1914. Promising to further institutionalise racial segregation and white political supremacy under a programme of 'apartheid', the NP won the 1948 national election and would continue to dominate parliament until 1989.²⁰ In response to sustained opposition to apartheid, the NP implemented reforms in the 1980s, including the establishment of a tricameral parliament intended to offer representation to 'Coloured'²¹ and Indian South Africans.²²

¹⁹ Duverger, *Political Parties*.

²⁰ D. O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years: The Apartheid State and the Politics of the National Party, 1948–1994* (Randburg, Ravan Press, 1996).

²¹ Recognising that race is a social construct, this article capitalises the use of racial categories. The term 'Coloured', although offensive in the US and UK, designates a distinct and self-identifying ethnic group in South Africa.

²² G.M. Gerhart and C.L. Glaser, *From Protest to Challenge, A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882–1990, Volume 6: Challenge and Victory, 1980–1990* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2010).

The South African Native National Congress (SANNC) was founded in 1912. It was reconfigured as the African National Congress (ANC) in 1923. In 1952, the ANC organised the Defiance Campaign, which was a non-violent mass campaign of civil disobedience against apartheid.²³ In 1960, after a police massacre of unarmed protestors, the ANC was banned and in 1961 undertook an underground armed struggle against apartheid. After preliminary negotiations with the ANC, the NP unbanned the ANC and other liberation movements in 1990.²⁴ From 1991 to 1994, multiple parties including the ANC and NP negotiated an end of apartheid and an interim constitution. In 1994, the ANC won South Africa's first democratic election with 63 per cent of the vote. The ANC would continue to win elections with a significant majority until the present day.

Methods

This review used search strings identifying articles relating to political parties and religion in South Africa (see Table 1) in four academic databases: Scopus, International Bibliography of Social Science, Web of Science, and Sabinet. The review did not limit the search to certain dates but excluded items not written in English and items that were not available through King's College London library or the Bodleian Library at Oxford University. The search excluded media articles as the focus of the review was scholarly publications, but included journal articles, books, chapters, conference proceedings, reports and dissertations. Excluding duplicates, 573 items were identified.

Each abstract was screened, and items were excluded if they did not concern both religion and political parties in South Africa: 101 items were included on this basis (see Figure 2). Each item was reviewed in full and included if it substantively concerned political parties' engagement with religion. Items were excluded, for example, if religion was only perfunctorily listed as a demographic characteristic. On this basis, 52 articles were included for full analysis.

Anticipating that African authors and monographs may be under-represented in the databases identified, further items were identified through the references of the items that had been screened in full. Forty-two items were identified and then screened. Of these, 31 articles were included for analysis. Although 'retrospective reference list checking' is a recognised systematic review method,²⁵ it is less exhaustive and reliable than the initial search of databases. While it is possible that this review may have missed several items, it is still likely to reflect a substantial proportion of the literature.

A total of 83 items were therefore included in the review. Each was reviewed in full, and relevant excerpts were coded by (1) political party, (2) type of domain, and (3) orientation towards religion (as outlined in Figure 1).

Findings: RQ1. How Has the Relationship between Religion and Political Parties been Approached in the Academic Literature on South Africa?

Very few articles define secularism or any other relationship between religion and politics. Dhammamegha Leatt offers the most explicit definition of secularism, arguing that it entails a three-part process of differentiating between religious and political institutions, separating out their different functions and defining a normative relationship between the two.²⁶

23 G.M. Carter and T. Karis, *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882–1964, Volume 2: Hope and Challenge, 1935–1952* (Stanford, Hoover Institution Press, 1973).

24 Leatt, *State of Secularism*.

25 Gough, Oliver and Thomas, *Systematic Reviews*, pp. 125–6.

26 Leatt, *State of Secularism*, p. 191.

Table 1. Search strings used in literature search.

Search topic	Search terms	Search field – Scopus, Web of Science, Sabinet	Search field - IBSS
1 Political parties ¹	politic* AND (party OR parties OR “agang” OR “al jama-ah” OR “aljama” OR “african christian democratic party” OR “acd” OR “african independent congress” OR “aic” OR “african national congress” OR “anc” OR “african people’s convention” OR “apc” OR “african transformation movement” OR “atm” OR “afrikaner eedheidsbeweging” OR “aeb” OR “azania people’s organisation” OR “azapo” OR “congress of the people” OR “cope” OR “democratic alliance” OR “da” OR “democratic party” OR “dp” OR “economic freedom fighters” OR “eff” OR “federal alliance” OR “freedom front plus” OR “ff+” OR “vf+” OR “independent democrats” OR “inkhatha” OR “ifp” OR “minority front” OR “mf” OR “national party” OR “np” OR “national freedom party” OR “nfp” OR “new national party” OR “nnp” OR “pan-african congress” OR “pac” OR “nfp” OR “united democratic movement” OR “udm”)	Title, abstract, keywords	Anywhere except full text (NOFT)
2 Religion	religio* OR church OR christian* OR muslim OR islam*		
3 South Africa	“South Africa”		

¹This list reflects all political parties which have won seats in the national parliament since 1994. However, most articles identified in this review (78% or 65 of 83 items) dealt with the apartheid and pre-apartheid eras, much of the analysis has included these periods.

Secularism is being confounded at the point of differentiation in South Africa, insofar as what constitutes ‘religion’ and ‘politics’ is ill-defined and shifting.²⁷ Without defining secularism explicitly, several authors implicitly distinguish between religious and secular rationales or moral frameworks,²⁸ or identify cases in which state legislation interferes with the activities of religious institutions or in which religious leaders appear to have an undemocratic influence on the state.²⁹ Religion may also be categorised as one unit within a larger category, such as one part of civil society,³⁰ or one of many aspects of identity that is protected by the constitution, alongside language and sexual orientation.³¹ Alternatively, Preben Kaarsholm contrasts ‘the secular’ with ‘the ethnic’ and argues that a politics of

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

²⁸ J.W. de Gruchy and S. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa* (London, SCM Press, 2004); A. Tayob, ‘Islamic Politics in South Africa Between Identity and Utopia’, *South African Historical Journal*, 60, 4 (2008), pp. 583–99; J.P. Hendricks, ‘From Moderation to Militancy: A Study of African Leadership and Political Reactions in South Africa, 1936–1960’ (PhD thesis, University of Michigan, 1983).

²⁹ L. Korf, ‘Podium and/or Pulpit? D.F. Malan’s Role in the Politicisation of the Dutch Reformed Church, 1900–1959’, *Historia*, 52, 2 (2007), pp. 214–38.

³⁰ I. Sarakinsky, ‘Reflections on the Politics of Minorities, Race and Opposition In Contemporary South Africa’, *Democratization*, 8, 1 (2001), pp. 149–60; P. Kaarsholm, ‘Public Spheres, Hidden Politics and Struggles Over Space: Boundaries of Public Engagement in Post-Apartheid South Africa’, *Social Dynamics*, 35, 2 (2009), pp. 411–22.

³¹ T. Sisk, *Democratization in South Africa: The Elusive Social Contract* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2017 [1995]); Sarakinsky, ‘Reflections on the Politics of Minorities’.

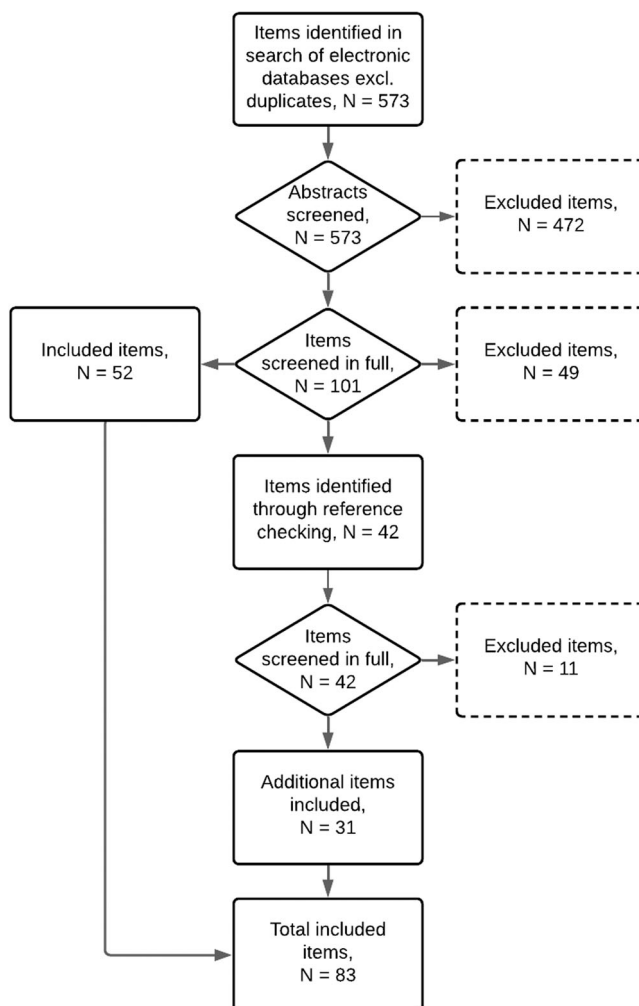


Figure 2. Literature screening and evaluation process.

‘secularism and modernism’ is distinct from a politics based on ethnic mobilisation – in this formulation, political mobilisation based on ethnicity is not secular.³²

Among the most significant debates about the definition of religion concerns the status of traditional practices. Jewel Amoah and Tom Bennet have argued that African traditional religions (ATR) are regarded as a cultural practice and are consequently not afforded the same protections and esteem as ‘mainstream’ religions.³³ Ritual animal sacrifice, for example, is debated within the framework of animal welfare rather than religious freedom. Leatt notes the similarities between traditional and religious leadership in South Africa – that is, that both seek to regulate social reproduction, are based on transcendental legitimacy and are a potential obstacle or resource in state formation and consolidation.³⁴ She argues, however, that while the post-apartheid state has carefully legislated to permit traditional

32 Kaarsholm, ‘Public Spheres’, p. 414.

33 J. Amoah and T. Bennett, ‘The Freedoms of Religion and Culture Under the South African Constitution: Do Traditional African Religions Enjoy Equal Treatment?’, *African Human Rights Law Journal*, 8, 2 (2008), pp. 357–75.

34 Leatt, *State of Secularism*, p. 120.

practices and affords considerable autonomy to traditional leaders, religious practices and leadership have been relatively neglected.³⁵ This is apparent in, for example, the recognition of customary but not Islamic marriages.³⁶ The conflation of religion and tradition is apparent in the naming of various commissions, such as the Commission for Religious and Traditional Affairs (CRATA) and the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious, and Linguistic Communities (CRL Commission).

Notably, none of the items reviewed argued that religion was not an important factor in South African politics and political history. This is surprising, as such articles would have been identified by the systematic search criteria. This would suggest that religion has not been excluded as part of a deliberative scholarly process; rather, the potential relevance of religion was not considered.

Methodologically, historical analysis or biography are the most popular approaches to studying religion and politics in South Africa. These methods are the primary methodology of 53 per cent of items included in this review (44 of 83). Conversely, only 16 per cent of items (13 of 83) collected primary contemporary empirical data, such as interviews or surveys. The remainder relied on contemporary secondary data sources, such as media articles, or were theological essays.

Findings: RQ2. How Have Political Parties in South Africa Oriented Themselves towards Religion?

African National Congress

Articles that include a focus on the ANC account for 78 per cent of the literature reviewed (65 of 83 items). Of these, 35 articles include a focus on the pre-apartheid and apartheid eras. Christianity was an important aspect of the ANC in the first half of the 20th century. This is reflected in organisational practices such as hymns and sermons,³⁷ many of the senior leadership being clergy,³⁸ a critique of racism based on an appeal to 'Christian values' and a commitment to multi-racialism and non-violence.³⁹ While many of the

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ D. Chidester, *Wild Religion: Tracking the Sacred in South Africa* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2012); M. Goedhals, 'African Nationalism and Indigenous Christianity: A Study in the Life of James Calata (1895–1983)', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 33, 1 (2003), pp. 63–82; P. Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa: The African National Congress, 1912–1952* (London, Hurst, 1970); A. Balcomb, 'From Apartheid to the New Dispensation', in T.O. Ranger (ed.), *Evangelicals and the Democratization of South Africa* (Oxford, Oxford Scholarship Online, 2006), pp. 191–224.

³⁸ M.A.M. Mkhondo, 'John L.M. Dube's Leadership: Evaluating Frank Chikane, Kenneth Meshoe, and Mmusi Maimane as Leaders', *Conspectus*, 31, 1 (2021), pp. 83–96; N. Mtshiselwa and S.S. Mthembu, 'Party Political Chaplaincy? Methodist Ministry to Political Parties', *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*, 74, 1 (2018), pp. e1–e10; Walshe, *Rise of African Nationalism*; H. Hughes, 'Doubly Elite: Exploring the Life of John Langalibalele Dube', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 27, 3 (2001), pp. 445–58; G. Mason, "'A Gift of Grapes': What Biography Reveals of the Uniquely Religiously-Based Friendship Between P.Q. Vundla and Nico Ferreira', *Journal for the Study of Religion*, 30, 2 (2017), pp. 228–56; B. Pogrand, 'The ANC example', *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture*, 10, 1 (2003), p. 99; J. Soske, *Internal Frontiers: African Nationalism and the Indian Diaspora in Twentieth-Century South Africa* (Athens, Ohio University Press, 2017); T. White, 'The Expulsion of Mary Calata: The Disturbance at St Matthews Missionary Institution, March 1945', *Historia*, 53, 1 (2008), pp. 82–101.

³⁹ Chidester, *Wild Religion*; W. Mills, 'Millennial Christianity, British Imperialism, and African Nationalism', in R. Elphick and R. Davenport (eds), *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social, and Cultural History* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997), pp. 337–46; Hendricks, 'From Moderation to Militancy'; Walshe, *Rise of African Nationalism*; A. Odendaal, *The Founders: The Origins of the ANC and the Struggle for Democracy in South Africa* (Lexington, University Press of Kentucky, 2013); Goedhals, 'African Nationalism and Indigenous Christianity'; Graybill, *Religion, Resistance, and Politics*; J.R. Cochrane, *Servants of Power: The Role of English-Speaking Churches in South Africa: 1903–1930* (Braamfontein, Ravan Press, 1987).

founders of the ANC were associated with separatist (and non-European) religious movements, the ANC soon oriented itself more closely with mainline churches.⁴⁰ The reasons for this are disputed: either separatist churches became increasingly apolitical⁴¹ and/or the ANC leadership associated 'European' Christianity with modernity and civilisation.⁴² Despite the influence of Christianity, the ANC was an ideologically diverse organisation and included communists⁴³ and followers of Marcus Garvey.⁴⁴

The importance of religion to the ANC in the second half of the 20th century is disputed. Two publications argue that religious leadership was relatively muted in the 1950s.⁴⁵ Conversely, there are several indications that religion remained important during this period. These include the ANC's call in 1949 for an annual 'Day of Prayer' to remember 'Christ who is the Champion of Freedom',⁴⁶ the religious fervour of the Defiance Campaign in 1952,⁴⁷ the public religious stance of ANC President Albert Luthuli (in office 1952–67),⁴⁸ and the Interdenominational African Ministers' Federation (IDAMF), which included many senior ANC leaders.⁴⁹ The ANC's strategy would change markedly in 1960 after being banned. It received support from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) for an armed resistance, and increasingly espoused a Marxist-Leninist ideology.⁵⁰ Even so, the ANC continued to signal a religious orientation during this period, as ANC President Oliver Tambo (in office 1967–91) publicly identified with the 'unbroken' Christian heritage of the ANC,⁵¹ and, in 1976, the ANC called for a countrywide 'Day of Prayer for the Removal of

40 Chidester, *Wild Religion*; D. Chidester, *Religions of South Africa* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2014 [1992]); G.M. Carter and T. Karis, *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882–1964, Volume 1: Protest and Hope, 1882–1934* (Standard, Hoover Institution Press, 1972); R. Elphick, 'The Benevolent Empire and the Social Gospel: Missionaries and South African Christians in the Age Of Segregation', in R. Elphick and R. Davenport (eds), *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social, and Cultural History* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997), pp. 347–69.

41 Odendaal, *The Founders*.

42 S.T. Masondo, 'Why Do You Hate Me So Much? An Exploration of Religious Freedom from the Perspective of African Religion(s)', *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*, 73, 3 (2017), pp. e1–e8.

43 Goedhals, 'African Nationalism and Indigenous Christianity'; G. West, 'Jesus, Jacob Zuma, and the New Jerusalem: Religion in the Public Realm Between Polokwane and the Presidency', *Journal for the Study of Religion*, 23, 1/2 (2010), pp. 43–70; T.K. Ranuga, 'Marxism and Black Nationalism in South Africa (Azania): A Comparative and Critical Analysis of the Ideological Conflict and Consensus Between Marxism and Nationalism in the ANC, the PAC, and the BCM (PhD thesis, Brandeis University, 1983); M. Israel and S. Adams, "'That Spells Trouble': Jews and the Communist Party of South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 26, 1 (2000), pp. 145–62.

44 Chidester, *Wild Religion*; R.T. Vinson, "'Sea K*****@: "American Negroes" and the Gospel of Garveyism in Early Twentieth-Century Cape Town', *Journal of African History*, 47, 2 (2006), pp. 281–303; P. Walshe, *Black Nationalism in South Africa: A Short History* (Johannesburg, Spro-Cas Press, 1973).

45 T. Karis and G.M. Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge, Volume 3: Challenge and Violence, 1953–1964*, rev. ed. (Johannesburg, Jacana, 2013); P. Walshe 'South Africa: Prophetic Christianity and the Liberation Movement', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 29, 1 (1991), pp. 27–60.

46 Walshe, *Rise of African Nationalism*, p. 244.

47 Carter and Karis, *From Protest to Challenge, Volume 2*; Boesak, *Tenderness of Conscience*; P. Walshe, 'Christianity and the Anti-Apartheid Struggle: The Prophetic Voice within Divided Churches', in R. Elphick and R. Davenport (eds), *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Cultural and Social History* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997), pp. 383–99.

48 Boesak, *Tenderness of Conscience*; Graybill, *Religion, Resistance, and Politics*; D. Irwin, 'Awards for Suffering: The Nobel Peace Prize Recipients of South Africa', *Contemporary Justice Review*, 12, 2 (2009), pp. 157–70; Hendricks, 'From Moderation to Militancy'; Walshe, 'Christianity and the Anti-Apartheid Struggle'.

49 Boesak, *Tenderness of Conscience*; Karis, Gerhart and Glaser, *From Protest to Challenge, Volume 3*; Walshe, *Rise of African Nationalism*; Graybill, *Religion, Politics, and Resistance*; Irwin, 'Awards for Suffering'; Hendricks, 'From Moderation to Militancy'.

50 T. Karis and G.M. Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882–1990, Volume 5: Nadir and Resurgence, 1964–1979* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1997).

51 B. Bompani, "'Mandela Mania": Mainline Churches in Post-Apartheid South Africa', *Third World Quarterly*, 27, 6 (2006), pp. 1137–49; J. Jansen, 'Faith that Does Justice: The Public Testimony of Oliver Tambo', *Journal for the Study of Religion*, 31, 2 (2018), pp. 232–58.

Unjust Government’.⁵² From the 1980s, the ANC increased its formal engagement with religious institutions. This included the establishment of a department of religion,⁵³ public affirmation of liberation theology⁵⁴ and a joint communiqué stating shared objectives with church organisations.⁵⁵ The ANC-aligned United Democratic Front (UDF) within South Africa also received substantial support from Christian activists and churches,⁵⁶ and Peter Walshe argues that, by 1988, Christian activists were at the ‘forefront’ of the struggle.⁵⁷ Notwithstanding, within the geopolitical context of the Cold War, the ANC continued to be characterised by the NP as a ‘secular anti-religious organisation that aimed to eradicate any form of religious presence’.⁵⁸

Systematised through the conceptual framework of orientation and domains, this review suggests that, prior to the negotiated transition, the ANC maintained soft norms that varied between being religious or secular in emphasis but that remained inclusive. The ANC concurrently maintained secular and inclusive party rules as it welcomed an ideologically diverse membership and established formal channels for engaging with religious organisations while keeping these institutions distinct from the central command of the party.

Forty articles include a focus on the ANC in the transitional and post-apartheid eras. During the negotiated transition, the ANC advocated a state that did not favour any one religion, protected religious freedoms, and permitted the exercise of religious practices in public institutions provided that these were voluntary and religiously inclusive. The interim constitution of 1993, which would guide the end of apartheid until a new constitution could be drafted, predominantly reflects the ANC’s position on religion and the state. As Leatt summarises:

[t]here is no state religion or officially recognised or favoured religious denomination. Institutional relations subordinate institutions of religious authority to political authority in the state and state-sponsored public, but it is a very mild form of subordination and was based on the consensus that the arrangement is also in the best interests of religion. In contemporary South Africa, [...] it is the state that promises to guarantee religious freedom and autonomy. The state does not ‘do’ religion. It creates and legislates the space in which religion operates with some autonomy.⁵⁹

John de Gruchy and Steve de Gruchy and Samuel Paul interpret this position as an attempt to distance the new political dispensation from the religious exclusivism of apartheid and to replace ‘a particular form of Christian moralism’ with a discourse of human rights.⁶⁰

The ANC’s engagement with churches during the constitutional negotiations varied considerably. Mainline churches formally engaged in the process through the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCPR), which had maintained a long relationship with

52 Walshe, ‘Christianity and the Anti-Apartheid Struggle’, p. 394.

53 *Ibid.*

54 De Gruchy and De Gruchy, *Church Struggle*.

55 *Ibid.*; Walshe, ‘Christianity and the Anti-Apartheid Struggle’.

56 Boesak, *Tenderness of Conscience*; A. Boesak, ‘Testing the Inescapable Network of Mutuality: Albert Luthuli, Martin Luther King Jr and the Challenges of Post-Liberation South Africa’, *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*, 75, 4 (2019), pp. 1–12; Bompani, “‘Mandela Mania’”; M. Nthali, ‘The ANC Chaplaincy: A Religio-Political Perspective’ (PhD thesis, University of Pretoria, 2019).

57 Walshe, ‘Christianity and the Anti-Apartheid Struggle’, p. 393.

58 B. Bompani, ‘Old and New Alliances: Christian Churches and the African National Congress in South Africa’, in J. Haynes (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook to Religion and Political Parties* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2019), p. 26.

59 Leatt, *State of Secularism*, pp. 82–3.

60 De Gruchy and De Gruchy, *Church Struggle*, p. 241; S.A. Paul, *The Ubuntu God: Deconstructing a South African Narrative of Oppression* (Eugene, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009), p. 226.

the ANC.⁶¹ Conversely, African independent churches (AICs) remained disengaged. While two bodies representing AICs were members of the WCPR, neither of these represented the largest AICs, such as the Zionist Christian Church (ZCC).⁶²

Alongside their secular approach to the constitution, the ANC also advocated access to abortions, rights protecting homosexuality, and an end to capital punishment. These positions were met with some unease within the ANC and received public criticism from civil society, which led to the ANC reiterating its Christian heritage.⁶³ The ANC's election campaign in 1994 reflected both messages: in different adverts, the ANC promised access to abortions⁶⁴ and featured religious leaders who stated that 'the Gospel was the only framework for establishing full political inclusion and social justice'.⁶⁵

The Constitution of 1996 foregrounded the protection and promotion of tolerance and diversity and included religion within this framework.⁶⁶ This mandated the establishment of the CRL Commission, which advises parliament on policy development.⁶⁷ The ANC also invited religious institutions, and especially churches, to work with the state. Several fora were established, including the Commission of Religious Affairs in 1995, National Religious Leaders Forum (NRLF) in 1997, National Interfaith Leaders Council (NILC) in 2009, as well as direct engagements with members of the national parliament, the state president and provincial governments.⁶⁸

The membership of the ANC has remained predominately religious, and several senior members also have roles as religious leaders, including Reverend Frank Chikane (director-general in the Office of the President), Mathole Motshekga (chief whip of the ANC) and President Jacob Zuma.⁶⁹ Ordinary members interviewed by Micah Nthali narrate the centrality of Christianity in their engagement with politics.⁷⁰ Witchcraft appears to cause tension within the ANC. Although witchcraft is not a judicial offence and the ANC national executive has forbidden accusations of witchcraft, ANC councillors need to engage with constituents who believe in witchcraft and who expect the state to intervene against witches.⁷¹ Moreover, many members of the ANC may themselves believe in witchcraft.⁷² Concerning other faiths, the ANC has appointed several Muslim MPs: Muslims are consequently over-represented in parliament relative to their share of the population.⁷³

61 Leatt, *State of Secularism*.

62 *Ibid.*

63 *Ibid.*

64 S. Guttmacher, F. Kapadia, J. te Water Naude and H. de Pinho, 'Abortion Reform in South Africa: A Case Study of the 1996 Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act', *International Family Planning Perspectives*, 24, 4 (1998), pp. 191–4.

65 Chidester, *Wild Religion*, p. 69.

66 J. Beyers, 'Religion as Political Instrument: The Case of Japan and South Africa', *Journal for the Study of Religion*, 28, 1 (2015), pp. 142–64; Paul, *Ubuntu God*; Sarakinsky, 'Reflections on the Politics of Minorities'; West, 'Jesus, Jacob Zuma, and the New Jerusalem'; Chidester, *Wild Religion*.

67 P. Coertzen, 'Freedom of Religion: From the Church Order of Dordt (1619) to South Africa (2018)', *In Die Skriflig*, 52, 2 (2018), pp. 1–10.

68 Boesak, 'Testing the Inescapable Network of Mutuality'; Bompani, 'Old and New Alliances'; S. Kumalo, *A Prophetic Church in the Democratization of the South African Society: A Myth or Reality* (Durban, Diakonia Council of Churches, 2007); Leatt, *State of Secularism*; Nthali, 'The ANC Chaplaincy'; J. Urbaniak and T. Khorommbi, 'South Africa's Jacob Zuma and the Deployment of Christianity in the Public Sphere', *Review of Faith and International Affairs*, 18, 2 (2020), pp. 61–75.

69 Mkhondo, 'John L.M. Dube's Leadership'; Mtshiselwa and Mthembu, 'Party Political Chaplaincy?'; Chidester, *Wild Religion*.

70 Nthali, 'The ANC Chaplaincy'.

71 I.A. Niehaus, E. Mohlala and K. Shokaneo, *Witchcraft, Power and Politics: Exploring the Occult in the South African Lowveld* (London, Pluto Press, 2001).

72 Meth, 'Committees, Witchdoctors and the "Mother-Body"'.

73 M. Salih, 'Islamic Political Parties in Secular South Africa', in M. Salih (ed.), *Interpreting Islamic Political Parties* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 191–206; P. Kaarsholm, 'Islam, Secularist Government,

Despite the religious beliefs of many of its members, the ANC remains reticent about public displays of religion.⁷⁴ A 2007 ANC discussion document, the ‘Reconstruction and Development Programme for the Soul’, is critical of what it identifies as ‘right-wing fundamentalism’ – understood as Pentecostalism – as being a barrier to development.⁷⁵ In contrast, the document favours a universalist religious view that draws on what is common to multiple traditions, while remaining critical of ‘western forms of knowledge and practice’.⁷⁶ Senior members of the ANC continue to address church congregations during election campaigns.⁷⁷

The ANC has remained comfortable with two uses of religious discourse in the public sphere. The first is the use of biblical references in rhetoric,⁷⁸ such as during the state of the nation debate in 2006, in which the ANC and several major parties quoted from the Bible throughout the debate.⁷⁹ The second is charging religion and religious institutions with responsibility for promoting moral regeneration and family cohesion in support of the ANC’s development agenda.⁸⁰ This has entailed an ambivalence towards the legitimacy of religious institutions in criticising the ANC⁸¹ and denial of the role of religious actors in the anti-apartheid movement and contemporary service delivery.⁸²

True to their positions in the early 1990s, the ANC has subsequently passed several bills perceived to be at odds with conservative religious values, such as enabling access to abortions and legalising same-sex marriages.⁸³ Despite some opposition within the party to these policies, the leadership of the ANC required that MPs support this legislation.⁸⁴ There has been little research on how these efforts are interpreted by ordinary ANC members. One study by Nthali is an exception: while his interviewees regard these laws as ‘immoral’, one interviewee erroneously explained that, as a Christian organisation, the ANC had permitted MPs to vote with their conscience.⁸⁵

and State–Civil Society Interaction in Mozambique and South Africa Since 1994’, *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 9, 3 (2015), pp. 468–87.

- 74 C. Twala and L. Barnard, ‘Winkie Direko – a Political Leader in Her Own Right?’, *Journal for Contemporary History*, 28, 3 (2003), pp. 134–51; Boesak, *Tenderness of Conscience*; G. West, ‘Thabo Mbeki’s Bible: The Role of Religion in the South African Public Realm After Liberation’, in D. Brown (ed.), *Religion and Spirituality in South Africa* (Durban, University of Kwazulu-Natal Press, 2019), pp. 78–106; Meth, ‘Committees, Witchdoctors and the “Mother-body”’; Balcomb, ‘From Apartheid to the New Dispensation’.
- 75 G. West, ‘The ANC’s Deployment of Religion in Nation Building: From Thabo Mbeki to “RDP of The Soul” to Jacob Zuma’, in M.R. Gunda and J. Kügler (eds), *The Bible and Politics in Africa Series, Vol. 7* (Bamberg, University of Bamberg Press, 2012), pp. 131; West, ‘Jesus, Jacob Zuma, and the New Jerusalem’.
- 76 West, ‘Jesus, Jacob Zuma, and the New Jerusalem’, p. 48.
- 77 A. Butler, *Cyril Ramaphosa: The Road to Presidential Power* (Woodbridge, James Currey, 2019).
- 78 J. Punt, ‘Popularising the Prophet Isaiah in Parliament: The Bible in Post-Apartheid, South African Public Discourse’, *Religion and Theology*, 14, 3/4 (2007), pp. 206–23; Boesak, *Tenderness of Conscience*; Urbaniak and Khorommbi, ‘South Africa’s Jacob Zuma’; West, ‘Thabo Mbeki’s Bible’; A.H. Jazbhay, ‘Civil Religion in South Africa: Mandela Through the Lens of Machiavelli and Rousseau’ (PhD thesis, University of Johannesburg, 2016).
- 79 Punt, ‘Popularising the Prophet Isaiah in Parliament’.
- 80 Boesak, *Tenderness of Conscience*; Leatt, *State of Secularism*; Nthali, ‘The ANC Chaplaincy’; Urbaniak and Khorommbi, ‘South Africa’s Jacob Zuma’; West, ‘Jesus, Jacob Zuma, and the New Jerusalem’; West, ‘Thabo Mbeki’s Bible’; Chidester, *Wild Religion*.
- 81 Boesak, *Tenderness of Conscience*; Boesak, ‘Testing the Inescapable Network of Mutuality’; Mtshiselwa and Mthembu, ‘Party Political Chaplaincy?’; West, ‘Jesus, Jacob Zuma, and the New Jerusalem’.
- 82 Boesak, *Tenderness of Conscience*; Meth, ‘Committees, Witchdoctors and the “Mother-Body”’.
- 83 Kotze and Loubser, ‘Christian Ethics in South Africa’; K.T. Resane, ‘Response of Public Theology to the Voices of the Voiceless in Pluralistic South Africa’, *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 40, 1 (2019), pp. 1–7; Guttmacher *et al.*, ‘Abortion Reform in South Africa’; P. Sidley, ‘South Africa Plans to Liberalise Abortion Law’, *British Medical Journal (Clinical Research Ed.)*, 313, 7064 (1996), p. 1034; Leatt, *State of Secularism*.
- 84 Guttmacher *et al.*, ‘Abortion Reform in South Africa’; Leatt, *State of Secularism*.
- 85 Nthali, ‘The ANC Chaplaincy’, p. 158.

President Zuma (in office 2009–18) is the subject of more articles included in this review than any other individual in the post-apartheid era (14 of 83 items). A significant focus of this literature is Zuma's public association with Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches (PCCs),⁸⁶ his embrace of traditional religious and cultural practices⁸⁷ and his use of religious rhetoric, such as ambiguous quips that people who do not vote for the ANC will go to hell.⁸⁸ The constitutional implications of Zuma's public association with religion cause concern for several authors, as he has expressed homophobic personal views⁸⁹ and implied, while campaigning, that the death penalty (abolished since 1995) and the legality of abortion may be put to referendum.⁹⁰ Despite these concerns, Zuma did not enact these changes during his tenure⁹¹ and instead maintained an inclusive discourse, reiterating that freedom of religion was constitutionally protected and that the ANC 'celebrates and supports all beliefs of its broad membership and support base'.⁹² Several authors attempt to situate Zuma's religious rhetoric within an historical narrative of the ANC. These contrast Zuma's embrace of 'conservative Christian populism' with the communist history of the ANC,⁹³ the apparent secularism of Mandela and Mbeki,⁹⁴ the religious ethics of prior leaders of the ANC⁹⁵ or the ANC's historic association with mainstream churches.⁹⁶

In contrast to the ample research on Zuma, very little research has been conducted on how Zuma's successor, President Cyril Ramaphosa, engages with religion. Two articles outline his history as a prominent Christian activist⁹⁷ and lack of public engagement with churches during his initial consultations as president.⁹⁸ Further research might explore Ramaphosa's rhetoric of voluntarism in the 'Thuma Mina' ('Send Me') campaign; a phrase used in a popular song by Hugh Masekela and repeated in Ramaphosa's speeches immediately after Masekela's death. In an opinion piece referenced by several scholars,⁹⁹ Tinyiko Maluleke argued that the phrase is popular in many churches and resonant of Isaiah 6:8.¹⁰⁰ While it is very likely that Ramaphosa was aware of the association,¹⁰¹ the extent to which the biblical reference is important to ordinary members of the ANC is unclear. For

86 Van Wyk, 'Jacob Zuma's Shamelessness'.

87 Masondo, 'Why Do You Hate Me So Much?'

88 Beyers, 'Religion as Political Instrument'; T. Maluleke, 'Between Pretoria and George Goch Hostel: God in South Africa in 2015', *New Agenda: South African Journal of Social and Economic Policy*, 59 (2015), pp. 35–9; Urbaniak and Khorommbi, 'South Africa's Jacob Zuma'; Van Wyk, 'Jacob Zuma's Shamelessness'; West, 'Jesus, Jacob Zuma, and the New Jerusalem'.

89 Chidester, *Wild Religion*; Urbaniak and Khorommbi, 'South Africa's Jacob Zuma'.

90 Leatt, *State of Secularism*; G. van Onselen, *Clever Blacks, Jesus and Nkandla: The Real Jacob Zuma in His Own Words* (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 2014).

91 Leatt, *State of Secularism*.

92 Urbaniak and Khorommbi, 'South Africa's Jacob Zuma', p. 65.

93 Beyers, 'Religion as Political Instrument', p. 158.

94 Bompani, 'Old and New Alliances'; Leatt, *State of Secularism*; West, 'Jesus, Jacob Zuma, and the New Jerusalem'.

95 K. Shai, 'A Critical Analysis of the ANC's Christianity-Driven Morality as Political Theology Through the Lens of Ahmed Kathrada', *Ubuntu*, 8, 1 (2019): pp. 121–35.

96 Urbaniak and Khorommbi, 'South Africa's Jacob Zuma'.

97 Butler, *Ramaphosa*.

98 Bompani, 'Old and New Alliances'.

99 T. Mashau and M. Kgatle, 'Thuma Mina: A Critical Discourse on the Prospect of a Ramaphosa Presidency Through the Lenses of Isaiah 6:8', *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 42, 1 (2021), pp. e1–e7; J. Beckmann, 'Thuma Mina and Education: Volunteerism, Possibilities and Challenges', *South African Journal of Education*, 39, suppl. 1 (2019), pp. s1–s8; A. Göranzon, 'Thuma Mina! Who Sends Whom? How South Africa as a Rainbow Nation Has Been Perceived in the Church of Sweden', *Alternation*, 26, 1 (2019), pp. 174–93.

100 T. Maluleke, 'The Deep Roots of Ramaphosa's "Thuma Mina"', AllAfrica.com, 21 February 2018, available at <https://allafrica.com/stories/201802210001.html>, retrieved 1 July 2022.

101 Göranzon, 'Thuma Mina!'.

example, a 24-page handbook published by the ANC in 2019 for members working on the *Thuma Mina* campaign does not make any reference to religion or the Bible.¹⁰²

Contrary to accounts of historical change within the ANC, the framework and this review identifies a continuity. The leadership and membership of the ANC has historically evoked a religious and inclusive rhetoric. The ANC has also historically established secular-inclusive party rules that include multi-faith religious actors within party institutions, while keeping those institutions separate from the central command of the party. The ANC has consistently maintained secular legislation that nevertheless welcomes religious diversity. These positions have continued in the transitional and post-apartheid eras, as the ANC continues to use religious-inclusive soft norms alongside secular-inclusive party rules and laws.

The ANC none the less maintains ambiguity. This is both in the contrast between its religious-inclusive soft norms and secular-inclusive party rules and laws, and in the extent to which the ANC's rhetoric varies between religious-inclusive and secular-inclusive. The ambiguity may be deliberate. Jonathan Jansen argues that the ANC purposely minimised public discussion of religion during the struggle against apartheid to maintain unity within an ideologically diverse organisation. He notes that, to do so, the ANC relegated religion to individuals' private beliefs rather than as a matter of 'public testimony' or organisational policy.¹⁰³ This has remained true in the democratic era.

National Party

The NP receives the second most attention in the literature reviewed, accounting for 34 items (41 per cent). Of these, 30 items include coverage of the apartheid or pre-apartheid eras. The beliefs that the Afrikaners were chosen by God and that God mandated the separate development of different 'nations' formed the basis of a civil religion endorsed by the NP since the early 20th century.¹⁰⁴ This was supported by a close relationship with the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) in South Africa, which was credited – including by NP prime minister Hendrik Verwoerd – as having provided the ideological basis for apartheid policies.¹⁰⁵ Prior to the NP's electoral victory in 1948, the party promoted an Afrikaner Christian nationalism that was exclusively Afrikaner and Protestant, explicitly hostile to Catholicism and Judaism¹⁰⁶ and critical of English South Africans.¹⁰⁷

The nature of the relationship between the DRC and the NP after 1948 is disputed. One narrative emphasises close partnership. The NP advanced legislation that framed South

102 African National Congress, *Thuma Mina (Send Me) Campaign Nelson Mandela and Albertina Sisulu Volunteers' Handbook* (November 2019); in fieldwork that I conducted in the Eastern Cape in 2022, members of the ANC whom I interviewed primarily associated the phrase with Hugh Masekela rather than as a religious reference.

103 Jansen, 'Faith that Does Justice', p. 234.

104 Leatt, *State of Secularism*; De Gruchy and De Gruchy, *Church Struggle*; T.D. Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid, and the Afrikaner Civil Religion* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1975); Boesak, *Tenderness of Conscience*; Paul, *Ubuntu God*; Korf, 'Podium and/or Pulpit?'; J. Lazar, 'Conformity and Conflict: Afrikaner Nationalist Politics in South Africa, 1948–1961' (PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 1987); W.A. de Klerk, *The Puritans in Africa: A Story of Afrikanerdom* (London, Collings, 1975); A. Greer, 'Religion and Politics: The Rise and Decline of Two Protestant Fortresses', *Mankind Quarterly*, 35, 3 (1995), pp. 173–228.

105 Boesak, *Tenderness of Conscience*; Bompani, 'Old and New Alliances'; S. Burman and M. Huvers, 'Church Versus State? Divorce Legislation and Divided South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 12, 1 (1985), pp. 116–35; H. Giliomee, 'The Making of the Apartheid Plan 1929–1948', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 29, 2 (2003): pp. 373–92; T.D. Moodie, 'The Dutch Reformed Churches as Vehicles of Political Legitimation in South Africa', *Social Dynamics*, 1, 2 (1975): pp. 158–66.

106 F. Hale, 'The Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Apartheid', *Journal of Church and State*, 48, 4 (2006), pp. 753–77; Chidester, *Religions of South Africa*; J. Brain, 'Moving from the Margins to the Mainstream: The Roman Catholic Church', in R. Elphick and R. Davenport (eds), *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Cultural and Social History* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997), pp. 195–210.

107 Korf, 'Podium and/or Pulpit?'; Moodie, *Rise of Afrikanerdom*.

Africa as a Christian nation pursuing divinely sanctioned segregation.¹⁰⁸ The DRC consulted the prime minister directly, received funding from the state for its international propaganda efforts and had access to information about internal security affairs that had not been made available to parliament.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, many members of both the NP and white opposition parties were former DRC ministers or active congregants.¹¹⁰

Conversely, an alternative narrative argues that the NP subordinated the DRC.¹¹¹ The NP's legislative agenda entailed considerable control over the activities of churches, including the DRC. The Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 prevented churches from marrying interracial couples, while the Native Laws Amendment Act of 1952 required special permission from the state for multiracial congregations. As 'arguably the most significant factor in the secularisation of South Africa', the Bantu Education Act of 1953 removed subsidies for church-run schools and nationalised those schools that could not be financed independently.¹¹² While several churches, including the DRC, objected to these measures as state overreach, the NP ultimately prevailed.¹¹³ Ultimately, the NP saw the state as responsible for the promotion of Christian nationalism, both as the official education policy and through the state broadcaster.¹¹⁴ The NP was hostile towards religious actors who were critical of apartheid, within the DRC and other churches. This entailed arresting church leaders, investigating and threatening politically involved churches, banning or publicly chastising critical DRC clerics and expropriating church property.¹¹⁵ To legitimise these actions, the NP explicitly demarcated the legitimate role of churches as being apolitical personal worship.¹¹⁶ The repression of anti-apartheid religious institutions and clerics was thus narrated by the NP as being not against churches but rather against political activists who used religion to mask anti-establishment, anti-Christian activities.¹¹⁷

There are various reasons for this development in the relationship between the DRC and the NP. To broaden its electoral base, the NP shifted its rhetoric of Christian nationalism from Afrikaner and Calvinist exclusivity to white supremacy.¹¹⁸ Once established, apartheid became routinised and bureaucratic and no longer relied on charismatic religious authority.¹¹⁹ In response to perceived threats from liberation movements, the NP grew primarily concerned with security, realpolitik and anti-communism rather than a religious ideology.¹²⁰ Under NP prime minister and later president P.W. Botha (in office 1978–89), apartheid became an 'armed religion' defending Christianity with a religious legitimacy

108 Leatt, *State of Secularism*; S.M. Klausen, *Abortion under Apartheid: Nationalism, Sexuality, and Women's Reproductive Rights in South Africa* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015); De Gruchy and De Gruchy, *Church Struggle*; Sisk, *Democratization in South Africa*; Cochrane, *Servants of Power*; J. Seekings, 'The National Party and the Ideology of Welfare in South Africa Under Apartheid', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 46, 6 (2020), pp. 1145–62.

109 De Gruchy and De Gruchy, *Church Struggle*; Burman and Huvers, 'Church versus State?'; J.H.P. Serfontein, *Apartheid Change and the NG Kerk* (Emmarentia, Taurus, 1982).

110 Serfontein, *Apartheid Change*; Burman and Huvers, 'Church Versus State?'; K.I. Paasche, 'Education in South Africa: Self-Definition and Definition of the "Other"', (PhD thesis, Colombia University, 1996).

111 Coertzen, 'Freedom of Religion'; Moodie, *Rise of Afrikanerdom*; Chidester, *Wild Religion*; Chidester, *Religion of South Africa*.

112 Elphick, 'The Benevolent Empire and the Social Gospel', p. 365.

113 J. de Gruchy, 'The Relationship between the State and Some Churches in South Africa, 1968–1975', *A Journal of Church and State*, 19, 3 (1977), pp. 437–55.

114 L.S. Scharnick-Udemans, 'A Historical and Critical Overview of Religion and Public Broadcasting in South Africa', *Journal for the Study of Religion*, 30, 2 (2017), pp. 257–80; Walshe, 'Christianity and the Anti-Apartheid Struggle'.

115 De Gruchy, 'The Relationship between the State and Some Churches'; De Gruchy and De Gruchy, *Church Struggle*; Moodie, *Rise of Afrikanerdom*.

116 De Gruchy and De Gruchy, *Church Struggle*.

117 De Gruchy, 'The Relationship between the State and Some Churches'.

118 Moodie, *Rise of Afrikanerdom*; Korf, 'Podium and/or Pulpit?'; Chidester, *Religions of South Africa*.

119 Moodie, *Rise of Afrikanerdom*.

120 *Ibid.*; Chidester, *Religions of South Africa*.

independent of churches.¹²¹ This is reflected in an unusual incident concerning Islam.¹²² Although Botha had described Islam as a terrorist threat, his attempts to reform apartheid included the establishment of Coloured and Indian houses of parliament that included several Muslims in 1984. The legitimacy of these reforms (already contested) was threatened when the DRC passed a resolution in 1987 that Islam could not be recognised as a genuine religion. In response to opposition both within parliament and internationally, Botha apologised publicly for this resolution and confirmed that the constitution guaranteed freedom of religion, albeit within a Christian state.

Twelve articles in this review include coverage of the NP or its successor, the New National Party (NNP), in the transitional and post-apartheid eras. In the negotiated transition, the NP conceded that the state would be secular and that there would be no national church, but that the state would 'create the opportunity and space for different religions to exist, practice, and flourish'.¹²³ The NP sought to protect minority rights, if not explicitly through race then through proximate identities such as language or religion. During the 1994 election, the NP positioned itself as a party of minorities, inclusive of religious minorities and religious conservatives.¹²⁴ In the 1999 election, the NNP ran an advertisement attacking the non-religious character of the leader of another opposition party.¹²⁵

To summarise: before 1980, the NP maintained political rhetoric, party rules and laws that were consistently religious and exclusive of religious groups other than the DRC. This is apparent in the NP's belief in the religious legitimacy of their cause, their formal commitment to advance Christian nationalism and their pursuit of religiously inspired legislation. In the 1980s, this may have softened to a religious-inclusive stance, although Protestant Christianity remained the favoured religion. After 1990, the NP/NNP reversed its position in favour of secular and inclusive legislation and religious-inclusive soft and party rules by identifying itself as a party of religious minorities and conservatives.

Moreover, the literature reviewed reveals an important paradox in religious nationalism. While religious nationalism appears to rely on a religious rhetoric for legitimacy, a religious nationalist party, once in power, may delineate the appropriate role of religion in the public sphere and subordinate religious authorities to the state. In doing so, the NP had superseded the church as the arbitrator of religious legitimacy.

Other Political Parties

Only 22 per cent of items reviewed (18 of 83) concern political parties other than the ANC or NP. During the apartheid era, the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), a breakaway from the ANC, rejected collaboration with multiracial churches and worked closely with black separatist churches instead.¹²⁶ The Conservative Party (CP) broke away from the NP in 1982 in opposition to liberal reforms and became the official opposition in parliament in 1987. The CP, led by a former minister in the DRC, maintained that separate development was required by scripture and, during the negotiated transition, argued that Afrikaners would

121 Chidester, *Religions of South Africa*, pp. 59–61.

122 Gerhart and Glaser, *From Protest to Challenge, Volume 6*.

123 Leatt, *State of Secularism*, p. 64.

124 Sisk, *Democratization in South Africa*.

125 L. Fourie and J. Froneman, 'The Dilemma of Ethical Political Communication in South African Elections', *Koers: Bulletin for Christian Scholarship*, 72, 3 (2007), pp. 405–22.

126 G.M. Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1978); L.S. Graybill, 'Christianity and Black Resistance to Apartheid in South Africa: A Comparison of Albert Lutuli, Robert Sobukwe, Steve Biko, and Desmond Tutu', (PhD thesis, University of Virginia, 1991).

not be able to live in a non-Christian state.¹²⁷ The CP's successor, the Freedom Front Plus (FF+), positions itself as a 'Christian-orientated political party' that aspires to 'a political system based on Christian values' but does not propose explicitly religious legislation.¹²⁸ In national elections, the FF+ has won between 0.8 and 2.4 per cent of the vote.

Political parties that pursue religious-exclusive laws have received little electoral support in the post-apartheid era. The opposition party in the post-apartheid era that was most frequently covered by articles in this review was the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP). The ACDP positions itself as resisting liberalism in parliament and offering policies based on the Bible.¹²⁹ The ACDP is led by Pastor Kenneth Meshoe, who is also the founder of a Pentecostal church.¹³⁰ During the negotiated transition, the ACDP argued against access to abortion, the legalisation of pornography, and rights concerning sexual orientation. Although the ACDP mobilised some degree of public protest on these issues, it failed to attract support from other political parties in the negotiations.¹³¹ The ACDP has subsequently performed poorly in elections and has won at most 1.6 per cent of the vote.¹³² Islamic political parties have received little scholarly attention.¹³³ The most successful of these, Al Jama-ah (AJ), foregrounds secular issues during election campaigns (such as a universal basic income) and proposes policies that are sensitive to all religious faiths, but is also committed to the introduction of Sharia.¹³⁴ Although Muslims comprise 1.6 per cent of South Africa's population, AJ has won, at most, only 0.18 per cent of the national vote. Attempts to pass Muslim Personal Law in South Africa have been driven by the ANC, which has engaged directly with extra-parliamentary religious leadership.¹³⁵

Of the other opposition parties in the post-apartheid era, the Democratic Party and later Democratic Alliance (DP/DA) is primarily discussed by articles in this review because of its parliamentary leader, Mmusi Maimane (in office 2014–19), who is also a pastor in a Charismatic international church.¹³⁶ The DP/DA is a classic liberal party, which has been the official opposition since 1999 (and in 2019 won 20.8 per cent of the national vote). Although Maimane expressed political views in his sermons (such as a desire for South Africa to be led by Christians) prior to leading the party, he has subsequently made few comments on religion, and these typically reiterate his support for the Constitution.¹³⁷ As noted previously, the DP/DA was among the major political parties that quoted from the Bible in a 2006 parliamentary debate.¹³⁸ Both the Congress of the People (COPE) and the PAC have parliamentary leaders who are also religious leaders, although both parties espouse secularism.¹³⁹ In summary, each of these parties maintain secular and inclusive

127 Chidester, *Religions of South Africa*; De Gruchy and De Gruchy, *Church Struggle*; Serfontein, *Apartheid Change*; Leatt, *State of Secularism*.

128 Punt, 'Popularising the Prophet Isaiah in Parliament', p. 217; Freedom Front Plus, 'Fight Back Manifesto 2019 Election', VF Plus (n.d.), available at <https://vfplus.org.za/content/2019-election-manifesto>, retrieved 8 August 2022.

129 De Gruchy and De Gruchy, *Church Struggle*; Balcomb, 'From Apartheid to the New Dispensation'; B.M. Trout, 'The (Mis)Interpretation of the Bible in South Africa: Towards a Better Hermeneutic', *In Die Skriflig*, 55, 3 (2021); Mkhondo, 'John L.M. Dube's Leadership'; Chidester, *Wild Religion*; M.B. Rapanyane, 'An Afrocentric Exploration of Jacob Zuma's Anti-Apartheid Stance: The Question of Israeli–Palestinian Struggle', *Journal of Public Affairs*, 20, 2 (2020).

130 Mkhondo, 'John L.M. Dube's Leadership'.

131 Leatt, *State of Secularism*.

132 *Ibid.*; De Gruchy and De Gruchy, *Church Struggle*.

133 Tayob, 'Islamic Politics in South Africa'; Salih, *Islamic Political Parties*.

134 *Ibid.*

135 Leatt, *State of Secularism*.

136 Mkhondo, 'John L.M. Dube's Leadership'; Maluleke, 'Between Pretoria and George Goch Hostel'.

137 Van Onselen, *Clever Blacks, Jesus and Nkandla*.

138 Punt, 'Popularising the Prophet Isaiah in Parliament'.

139 Leatt, *State of Secularism*; Mkhondo, 'John L.M. Dube's Leadership'; Mtshiselwa and Mthembu, 'Party Political Chaplaincy?'

orientations across each domain. It is notable that this review did not identify any articles that concerned the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), which has been the second largest opposition party since 2014.

Finally, the so-called ‘homelands’ under apartheid present an ambiguous case for this review. These were nominally independent conclaves established by the NP for different ethnic groups. Although not democratic political parties, the leadership of these homelands were none the less required to navigate religion, popular support and political legitimacy. Ciskei president Lennox Sebe espoused a religious nationalism combining ATR and Christianity, which included a sacred history and biblically inspired shrines.¹⁴⁰ Mangosuthu Buthe, then chief minister of KwaZulu, held prayer breakfasts at the opening of the KwaZulu legislature.¹⁴¹ Buthe would later lead the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) in parliament in the democratic era. Traditional leaders were also limited by the NP in their control over religious practices; in particular, the NP forbade traditional leaders from recognising witchcraft or adjudicating accusations of witchcraft.¹⁴²

Discussion

The conceptual framework used by this review yields important insights into how parties engage with religion. The framework demonstrates the value of analysing parties based on their orientations to religion across different domains rather than their essence as a party. The review demonstrates that distinguishing between parties’ engagements with soft norms, party rules and state law offers a nuanced framework for analysing and comparing parties. While a party may evoke religious soft norms, this does not necessarily entail the same orientation towards party rules and state law. A party’s positions across all three domains are relevant for understanding a party’s relationship to secularism.

As illustrated by this review, the ANC uses religion in diverse but consistent ways. The ANC has frequently evoked religious-inclusive soft norms while maintaining secular-inclusive party rules and laws. This is a continuity throughout the ANC’s history and offers context for Zuma’s rhetoric. Zuma’s remarks were religious, and sometimes religious-exclusive, but he did not alter the ANC’s position on party rules and laws. The use of ambiguity in this way has also been a consistent feature of the ANC historically. Although this may originally have been a strategy to maintaining an ideologically diverse liberation movement, it has evolved into an electoral strategy in the democratic era. While the ANC may change its position on party rules and laws in the future, these findings may add nuance to efforts to interpret religious rhetoric in the ANC. A framework that acknowledges that parties may adopt different orientations across different domains is necessary to recognise these nuances.

In contrast to the ANC, the NP maintained a religious-exclusive position across each type of domain, although this softened progressively in the last two decades of the 20th century. While both the ANC and the NP evoked soft norms that emphasised personal faith, their orientations towards party rules, state laws and inclusivity differed significantly. In the democratic era, many opposition parties adopt a secular-inclusive orientation across all domains. While some parties also pursue a religious-exclusive orientation towards state laws, these parties have thus far performed poorly in elections, despite South Africa having a notably religious population. Figure 3 visually reflects these findings within the conceptual framework.

¹⁴⁰ Chidester, *Religions of South Africa*.

¹⁴¹ P. Denis, ‘Seminary Networks and Black Consciousness in South Africa in the 1970s’, *South African Historical Journal*, 62, 1 (2010), pp. 162–82.

¹⁴² Niehaus *et al.*, *Witchcraft, Power and Politics*.

	Domain		
	Soft	Party rules	Legal
Secular-exclusive			
Secular-inclusive	DA/COPE/PAC	DA/COPE/PAC ANC	DA/COPE/PAC ANC NNP
Religious-inclusive	ANC (Later) NP NNP AJ	(Later) NP NNP	(Later) NP
Religious-exclusive	(Early) NP ACDP AJ	(Early) NP ACDP AJ	(Early) NP ACDP AJ

Figure 3. Political parties mapped against orientation and domain.

This complexity is overlooked by current typologies of religion and political parties. These typologies focus prohibitively on whether the party as a whole is religious, rather than examining parties' diverse orientations towards religion. While it would be impossible to conclude whether the ANC was an 'essentially' religiously oriented party, several factors shape how the ANC engages with religion. It has many very religious leaders and members and yet is also a 'broad church', with members of diverse ideologies. It is a mass-based party in a very religious country, yet also operates in a secular-liberal constitutional order. In such contexts, ambiguity and equivocation may well be a sensible political strategy.

By developing a comparative framework that distinguishes between how parties engage with religion, this article offers directions for research in similarly complex contexts. Similar to the ANC, ideologically diverse liberation movements have come to govern highly religious populations in many other African countries. Like South Africa, several of these countries prepared their first democratic constitutions at end of the 20th century, and these may have been influenced by a liberal consensus following the fall of the USSR. Further afield, both the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP) in Turkey and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India attempt to mobilise religious voters within countries that are nominally (and sometimes militantly) secular. In contrast to the ANC, these parties might adopt secular-inclusive soft norms while pursuing religious-inclusive or religious-exclusive party rules and laws. There is potential for rich and comparative research in the study of religion and political parties.

This review also offers several avenues for theorising the secular within South Africa. Drawing on Asad's insight that 'religion' and 'the secular' are mutually defining, the NP offers a complex study of religious nationalism.¹⁴³ The NP was the arbitrator of religious legitimacy and in demarcating the role of religion. Although closely associated with the DRC and legitimised by a religious narrative, the NP would define Christian nationalism, pursue legislation that governed church activities and demarcate the appropriate role of churches in public life. Concurrently, the NP defined their response to political opposition as a struggle in defence of Christian values. What is at stake in defining the secular within the NP is not where 'religion' begins and ends but rather how the state – which was not understood by the NP as a religious institution in an ordinary sense – became a religious authority. This is a paradox that may be shared by other religious nationalist parties once they are in government.

The party's complex relationship to AICs, PCCs and mainstream churches may be important in understanding how the ANC defines the boundaries of religion. The ANC has maintained a close association with mainstream churches historically, and much of the ANC's religious rhetoric – including Mbeki's use of the Bible in parliament – has been informed by these traditions. Conversely, the ANC has been comparatively more distant from AICs and actively suspicious of PCCs. This may have been a factor in the absence of AICs from the constitutional negotiations. It is also possible that criticism of Zuma's

143 T. Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2003).

association with PCCs as a threat to constitutional secularism reflects a continued unease with non-mainstream Christianity from several public commentators and some members of the ANC. In this vein, mainstream Christianity is regarded as compatible with a secular state and public sphere, while PCCs and AICs are identified as threats to secularism.

Finally, this review identified several gaps in the literature. There is relatively little empirical research on religion and political parties in South Africa, especially with ordinary members rather than party elites. Political parties that are not explicitly religious, such as the DP/DA and the EFF, are also under-researched. Little research has been conducted on religions other than Christianity. Despite its theoretical relevance, the relationship between traditionalism, religion and secularism is also relatively neglected, especially as the boundaries between what is ‘cultural’ and ‘religious’ in traditional practices are unclear.

Conclusion

The findings of this review make an important contribution to two under-researched fields: the relationship between religion and political parties and the study of political secularism in sub-Saharan Africa. This article offers a novel and versatile framework for analysing how parties engage with religion. In doing so, it focuses on parties’ diverse engagements with religion rather than their essence. It maps how parties can adopt different orientations towards religion across different types of domains, such as political rhetoric, party rules and law. The review also notes a surprising paradox within religious nationalism: that, once in power, religious nationalist parties may eventually usurp the authority of religious institutions to determine the boundaries of authentic religious practices. Finally, this framework has rich comparative potential and will be useful in analysing how political parties engage with religion globally.

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