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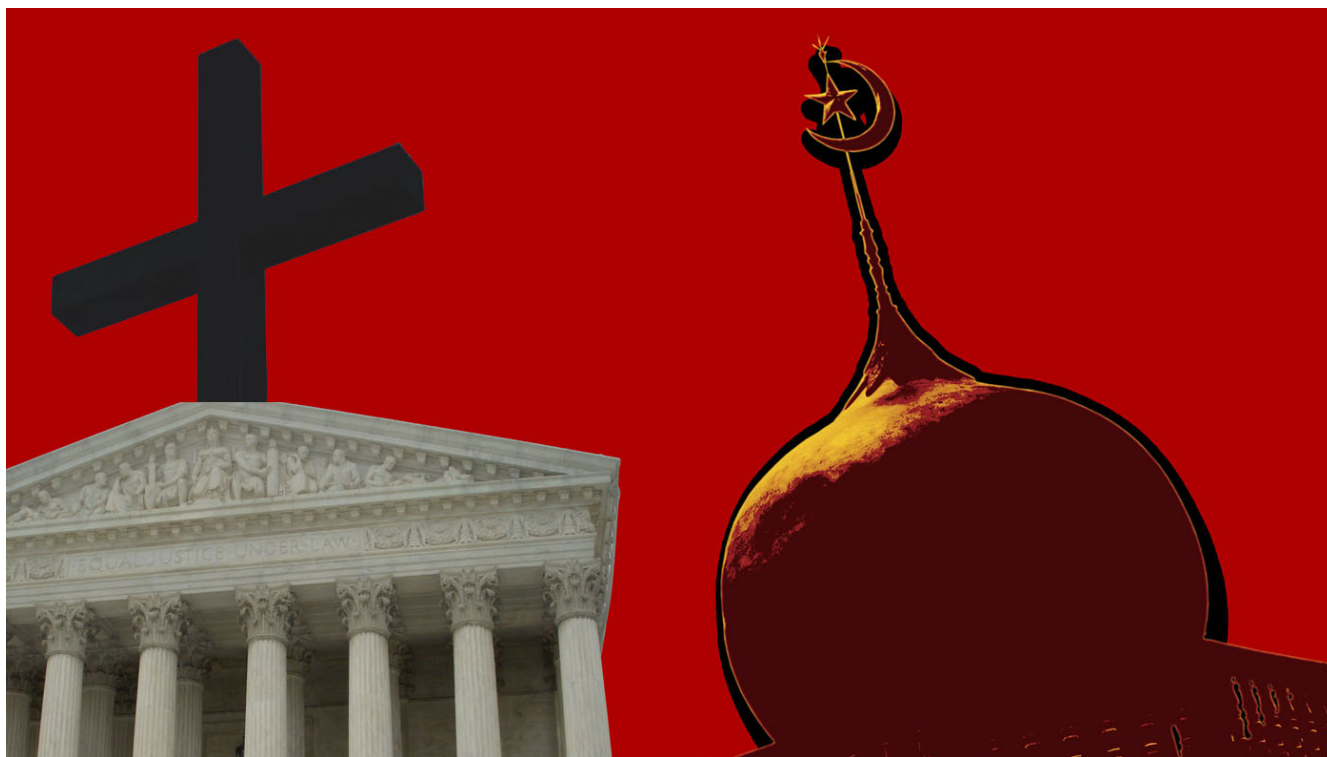
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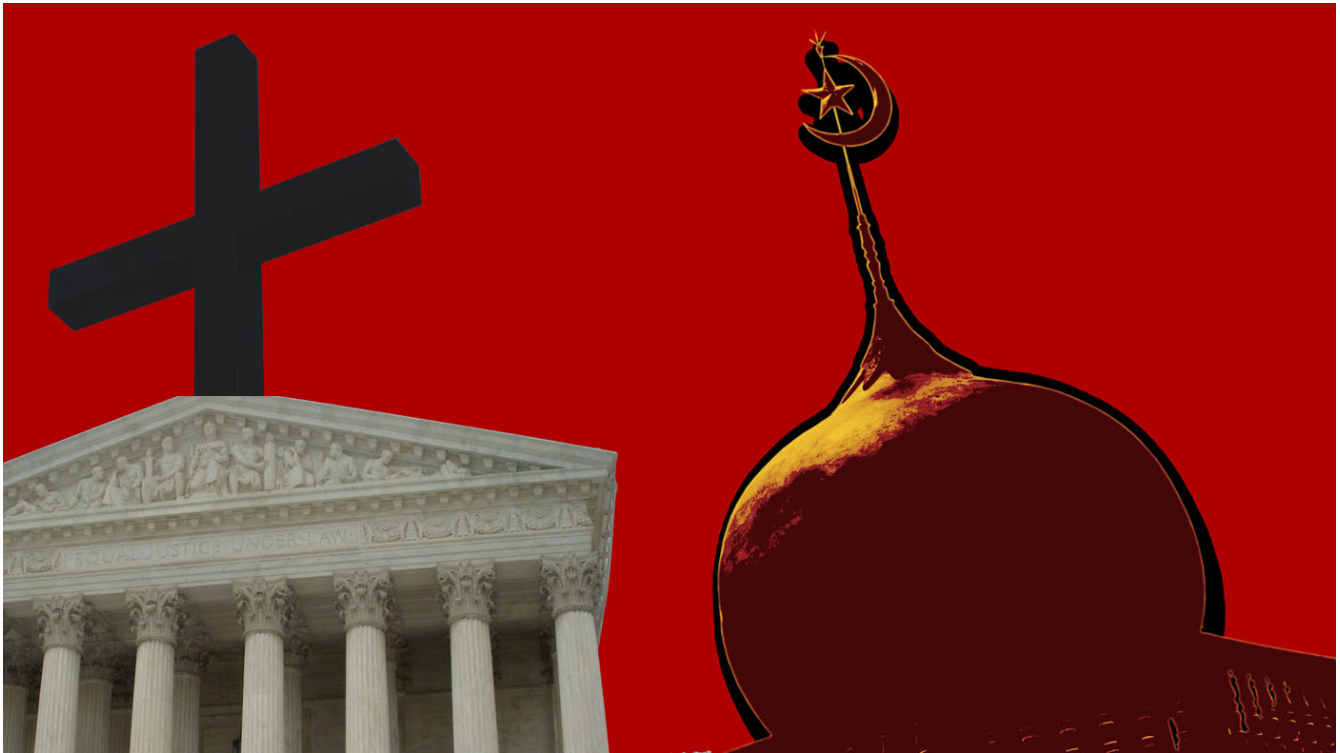
American Theocracy and Failed States

15 July, 2022 • [Ani Zonneveld](#)



People rally in support of the impeachment of US President Donald Trump in front of the US Capitol, as the House readies for a historic vote on December 18, 2019 in Washington, DC. - President Donald Trump faces becoming only the third US leader ever to be impeached on December 18, 2019 with the House of Representatives set for a historic vote that would trigger his trial in the Senate. On the morning of the vote, Trump once again insisted that he had done "nothing wrong," following the release of a letter in which he likened the proceedings to an "attempted coup" and a witch trial. (Photo by Olivier Douliery / AFP) (Photo by OLIVIER DOULIERY/AFP via Getty Images)

PRIVACY



What happens when the Supreme Court overrules the separation of church and state?

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Ani Zonneveld

Since 1802, when Thomas Jefferson stated that “a wall of separation between Church and State” was a foundational element of American democracy, the Supreme Court of the United States has repeatedly cited Jefferson’s words as justification to uphold the principle that secular law trumps the teachings of any individual faith. In the last few years, however, the deployment of “religious freedom,” alongside the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which empowered citizens to ignore anti-discrimination laws if they felt these laws conflicted with their religious beliefs, has systematically diverted America from its identity as a secular state to one of a theocracy, which justifies the use of virulent, discriminatory practices as a religious right.

As the leader of a Muslim organization, I recognize all too well the trappings of religious laws and have repeatedly challenged human rights abuses that have gone unchallenged — abuses justified in the name of Islamic “sharia law.” Sharia law — manmade laws claiming to be “God’s law” — governs most Muslim societies. In essence, these laws are the extrapolation of **cisgender men’s** understanding and interpretation of the sacred texts of Islam, often rooted in misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia.

Frequently, sharia laws violate the most basic human rights. Following the historical path of their theocratic pre these countries are all predictably failed states, rife with human rights abuses and corruption.

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For the past few decades, citizens of the United States have seen lawmakers legislate their understanding of the Bible into law, while unelected judges interpret laws and the U.S. Constitution through the prism of their Christian religion, or the beliefs they associate with Christian teachings. Supreme Court Justice Amy Coney Barrett famously opined that, “a legal career is but a means to an end...and that end is building the Kingdom of God.” How is this view any different than the zealots who legislate from the Islamic sharia courts? Theocracy, regardless of religious affiliation, promotes the superiority of one group over another, a practice that breeds moral corruption and permits — indeed, at times promotes — a system that denies basic human rights to individuals who do not follow the state religion, or the “correct” interpretation of this religion. Three Supreme Court cases easily present themselves as evidence to that effect.

To establish whether America is now a Christian theocracy, one simply has to look at the latest decisions made by the Supreme Court’s conservative supermajority. In *Kennedy v. Bremerton*, SCOTUS undermined the religious freedom of public school students by ruling that a football coach at a public school in Washington was permitted to pray on the 50-yard line during and after games. This decision represents a seismic shift in law, eroding the separation of church and state in public schools. For 60 years, Christian extremists have worked to bring school-sponsored prayer back to public schools, a practice which violates the religious freedom of the students, their parents, and the taxpayers who fund these schools. After 60 years and with the help of six unelected judges, the religious extremists succeeded.

In another pivotal case, *Carson v. Makin*, the same Roberts Court forced the state of Maine to fund private religious schools, regardless of whether these schools and their curricula meet state academic standards. This case is part of a larger effort by Christian extremists and anti-public education advocates, like Betsy DeVos, who seek to privatize America’s education system. In its decision, the six conservative justices conveniently ignored a common practice at these charter schools — the use of religion to discriminate against students, parents, and teachers. The private religious schools at issue demonstrated systemic discrimination in hiring and admissions practices at the expense of non-Christians and LGBTQ people. For example, the Temple Academy in Waterville, Maine not only bars admission to LGBTQ students but also refuses to admit students with LGBTQ parents. At Bangor Christian School, in Bangor, ME, students who come out as LGBTQ are forced to undergo “counseling” and must renounce their sexual orientation or gender identity, or face expulsion.

Then, of course, there is the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, which effectively eliminated the constitutional right that American women, transmen, and nonbinary individuals, have held for 50 years to safe, legal, and accessible abortions. This decision, and the empowered individuals who made it, was a direct result of decades of campaigning from Christian Right to establish footholds in every branch of the federal government for the singular purpose of eliminating an individual’s right to choose.

The Christian Right believes that life begins at conception, but for Muslims, Jews, some Christians, and other faiths, it doesn’t.

As Louisiana was drafting its landmark anti-abortion legislation, Rabbi Robert Loewy [testified](https://forward.com/news/507585/rabbi-abortion-loewy-louisiana-roe-wade/) < <https://forward.com/news/507585/rabbi-abortion-loewy-louisiana-roe-wade/>> at the House committee that, “Jews do not believe that life begins at conception,” contradicting the assertions of the bill’s sponsor. Rather, Rabbi Loewy explained, “a fetus gradually acquires more rights as it develops” according to Jewish tradition. Similarly, Islam is very liberal on matters of abortion, elevating a mother’s right to health, prosperity, and self-determination above all else. Muslims for Progressive Values has developed a series of infographics to educate the public about Islam’s position on abortion, family planning, and bodily autonomy, which you can view [here](https://www.mpvusa.org/issues) < <https://www.mpvusa.org/issues>> .

The Supreme Court’s decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson* to eliminate the constitutional right to an abortion violates the rights of non-Christian Americans’ right to live according to their own religious or non-religious beliefs.

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There are many common denominators between the Islamic sharia courts and the Christian rightwingers who comfortably reign over today’s Supreme Court. Perhaps the most pervasive and dangerous is that neither of these institutions hold any regard for justice or freedom, particularly when it comes to bodily autonomy, reproductive rights, the rights of LGBTQ+ people, and the right of any individual to live free from the grasps of radical and restrictive interpretations of religion.

Let us not be fooled. The conservative Supreme Court justices are not motivated by constitutional duty, rather they are compelled by a political Christianity that has taken hold over previously secular and democratic institutions. This virulent strain of politics has converted a secular America into the latest Christian theocracy, a well trodden path that ultimately leads to a failed state.



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