The Politics and Effects of Religious Grievance

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Summary and Keywords

Despite international guarantees to respect religious freedom, governments around the world often impose substantial restrictions on the abilities of some religious groups to openly practice their faith. These regulations on religious freedom are often justified to promote social stability. However, research has demonstrated a positive correlation between restrictions on religious freedom and religious violence. This violence is often thought to be a result of grievances arising from the denial of a religious group's right to openly practice its faith. These grievances encourage violence by (a) encouraging a sense of common group identity, (b) encouraging feelings of hostility toward groups imposing those regulations, and (c) facilitating the mobilization of religious resources for political violence.

Keywords: religious freedom, grievances, violence, regulation, repression, politics and religion

Despite national and international treaties forcing states to respect an individual's religious identity, restrictions on religious freedom limit the ability of many religious groups to publicly exercise their faith. For instance, though Article 64 of the Egyptian Constitution of 2014 specifies that an individual's freedom of religious belief is "absolute," non-Muslim religions, especially Coptic Christians, continue to face substantial religious discrimination, including physical assaults and killings (United States Department of State, 2016). Afghanistan's constitution states in Article 2 that all religions "are free to exercise their faith and perform their religious rites within the limits of the provisions of the law," but Article 3 states that "no law can be contrary to the beliefs and provisions of the sacred religion of Islam." This has allowed the government of Afghanistan to enforce strict prohibitions on religious conversion, including the death penalty (Grim & Finke, 2010).

Across much of the world, religious freedom is not guaranteed, and even if such protections exist on paper, they may not be respected in practice. Even established democracies generally limit religious freedom to some extent by imposing certain regulations of the abilities of various religious sects to practice their faith, proselytize, collect revenues, or build their houses of worship (Fetzer & Soper, 2005; Fox, 2016). In nondemocratic regimes, such restrictions may extend beyond restrictions on religious practice. Members of minority religious sects may encounter economic discrimination by being legally prohibited from attending schools or applying for jobs (Sarkissian, 2015). To the extent that

the burdens of these regulations fall disproportionately upon different religious groups, such groups become socially, economically, or politically differentiated from each other. If members of a repressed religious group cannot be employed in certain sectors, while other groups can, members of these groups are more likely to suffer higher levels of unemployment and poverty. If these religious divisions are relevant in explaining political, social, or economic outcomes across political regimes, these divisions may become fault lines for religious conflict (Grim & Finke, 2010; Toft, Philpott, & Shah, 2011).

Differences in religious groups' access to political, economic, or social power are directly responsible for contributing to the formation of religious grievances. The impacts of restrictions on religious freedom across religious groups arise from the way in which political authorities make and enforce law, command armies and police forces, codify religious practice and enforce cultural mores, and derive legitimacy from various religious traditions (Toft et al., 2011). Some religious groups enjoy politically advantageous positions due to long-held cultural practices within a given society, like Anglicans in Britain. Others, like Syria's Alawites, achieve socially dominant positions because governments legislate favorable policies for those groups, while passing laws to repress other religious groups. When repressed religious groups understand that their disadvantaged social position is directly attributable to policies that deprive them of political and economic equality, they can develop feelings of grievance.

This article explores the process through which these grievances form and how these grievances are, often violently, expressed. It argues that religious grievances are a necessary but not sufficient condition to explain outbreaks of religious violence. By highlighting new research into the causes of religious violence, this article considers current ambiguities in the literature by exploring how grievances combine with political opportunity structures to encourage religious violence. Emerging research suggests that opportunity structures offered by weak political institutions and religious groups' acceptance of violence as a means to achieve desired ends also explain when and where religious violence is more likely. This article proceeds in the following way: the next section discusses how denial of religious freedom can facilitate the formation of grievances among religious groups. The causal link between the development of these grievances and religious violence is discussed. After reviewing current theorizing regarding the grievance–conflict nexus, this article elucidates the ambiguities in this literature by demonstrating that grievances alone may explain some outbreaks of religious violence but that scholars should also devote their energies to understanding how grievances combine with opportunity structures offered by weak political institutions to encourage religious violence. Finally, the article offers suggestions for future research into the causes of religious violence.

The Sources of Religious Grievance

Religious grievances can arise as a result of regulation of religious belief (Grim & Finke, 2010). Religious regulations are the "restrictions placed by the state on the religious

practices, clergy, or institutions of minority religions that are not placed on the majority religion" (Fox, 2016). Critical to this definition is that religious regulations are generally imposed upon minority religions rather than the socially dominant, majority religion. Restrictions on religious practice and belief can take many forms, both violent and nonviolent (Sarkissian, 2015). France prohibits the wearing of religious attire, a form of nonviolent regulation (Fetzer & Soper, 2005). The Chinese government has utilized violent repression of Muslim Uighurs in the Xinjiang province, including forced displacement and extrajudicial killings (Clarke, 2008). These two examples show religious regulation exists on a continuum, with some forms of regulation being repressive but not physically harmful, to others that are extremely repressive and are intended to inflict a large degree of suffering through violence and human rights abuses. In order to understand grievances, the variation in religious regulation across nations must be acknowledged.

Religious adherents rely on their religious beliefs to make sense of the world and especially politics (Fox, 2016). Because religious beliefs are all-encompassing, they can be especially useful to states seeking to legitimate their claim to power. When states rely on a particular religion to lend legitimacy to their rule, that religion will seek to utilize the coercive power of the state to regulate the religious freedom of minority groups because, by their nature, such groups pose a threat not only to the socially dominant religion but also the state itself (Stark, 2003). Of course, regulation of religious belief between states varies considerably, as do religion–state relationships (Grim & Finke, 2010).

Sarkissian (2015) has argued that variation in religious regulation can be traced to the nature of a country's political regime. While religious policy is often implemented in similar ways across both democracies and nondemocracies, the effects of such policies differ between these regimes. Democratic states design political institutions to constrain political power and to ensure individuals are protected against capacious executives who might otherwise use the power of their offices to limit the political power of potential political opponents (Levitsky & Way, 2010). Nondemocratic states design political institutions and craft public policy to limit the political power of the political opposition and ensure the continued survival of the ruling regime (Slater, 2010). In democratic states, even when a religion is closely allied with the state, as in England, that religion's political power is restrained by the same raft of institutions that restrain executive power, such as the courts, the legislature, and social mores against religious discrimination. In nondemocratic states, however, there are fewer constraints on the use of state power, and as a consequence, majority religions are able to lobby the government to restrict the freedom of religious minorities, or even utilize police and military forces to discriminate against religious minorities.

Autocratic rulers thus may utilize a particular religious tradition to lend legitimacy to their rule. By aligning with a powerful civil society institution, these rulers can bypass the need to gain public support and instead base their rule on the claim to divine authority (Iannaccone, Finke, & Stark, 1997). In so doing, however, not all religions are treated equally. While some religious groups achieve a politically advantaged position by allying with the ruling regime, other groups may have their religious freedom restricted. Auto-

crats regulate religion because it acts as a space of possible resistance against dictators who seek to forcefully impose their will upon society. Religions provide individuals with the wherewithal to engage in resistance to autocratic coercion in two ways: by providing adherents with resources, like physical meeting places, to foster collective action and by providing a legitimating ideological frame to mobilize, perhaps violently, against onerous regulations (Arikan & Ben-Nun Bloom, 2018; Djupe & Gilbert, 2008; Hale, 2015; Jelen & Wilcox, 2002). Further, the individuals who gather within these civic spaces share similar beliefs, which enables the development of a shared identity (Putnam, Leonardi, & Nanetti, 1994). Religious communities also have access to physical resources including money that can be used to facilitate collective action (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). Finally, religious groups have the ability to influence citizens' perceptions of the regime's legitimacy, preach anti-political messages, or criticize socially dominant religions (Sarkissian, 2015). By restricting the ability of these groups to spread their message, for instance by outlawing preaching by certain religious groups, authoritarian states hope to preempt ideological challenges to their rule.

Democratic countries, on the other hand, do not regulate religious freedom to the extent that autocratic states do because they rely more heavily upon secular factors to legitimate their rule. Thus, the power of even socially dominant religions to influence policy in democratic regimes is more circumscribed than in autocracies. Because the legitimacy of democratic regimes rests on the distribution of public goods among the population, rather than providing selective benefits to favored clientelist groups (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2005; Cheibub, Gandhi, & Vreeland, 2010), such regimes have less incentive to curry favor with majority religions by regulating the religious freedom of religious minorities. However, even some democratic states like Malaysia and Indonesia place significant restrictions on religious freedom, while autocratic states like Swaziland, Gambia, and Cameroon place relatively few restrictions on religious belief (Sarkissian, 2015). So, while regime type certainly explains a good deal of variation in levels of religious regulation, other explanations are warranted.

Religious minority groups that preach messages critical of the ruling regime are especially likely to be singled out for religious repression. Levels of discrimination against religious minorities typically are proportional to the perceived threat the religion poses to the socially dominant religion and, by extension, the ruling political regime (Fox, 2016). By placing restrictions on the ability of minority religious groups to gather, disseminate messages through preaching and publication of religious texts, and share information, autocratic states hope to preempt political challenges to their legitimacy (Arikan & Ben-Nun Bloom, 2018; Sarkissian, 2015; Toft et al., 2011).

The literature explains religious regulation as a function to two distinct factors: a state's political regime, which includes but is not limited to the relationship between the socially dominant religion and the government, and the perceived threat posed by religious minorities to this regime. This regulation fosters grievances among religious minorities (Fox, 2005B; Grim & Finke, 2010; Gurr, 1970). Without normal channels through which to appeal their treatment, repressed groups may resort to rebellion as their only effective

means of redress. Toft et al. (2011) and (Jenkins, 2004) discuss how regulation not only leads to violence but can also radicalize religious minority groups, causing the violence they perpetrate to become more severe. This argument is the most common across the literature, and its logic is intuitive. However, it has recently come under criticism. The next section reviews the logic of grievance and violence, addressing the need to consider political opportunity structures alongside grievances in explaining religious violence.

Religious Regulation, Grievances, and Religious Violence

Summarizing current theorizing regarding the link between religious regulation and religious conflict, Grim and Finke (2010) write, “restrictions placed on religion are the driving force behind higher levels of violent religious persecution and conflict” (p. 86). Grim and Finke mostly consider religious violence as religious persecution. That is, they consider the regulation of religious freedom placed upon religious minorities in the countries they study to be a form of violence perpetrated by the state and the socially dominant religious group. This is certainly one aspect of how religious regulation can influence religious violence. The regulations themselves are a form of violent persecution whereby one state—with the support of a socially dominant religion—enforces restrictions on religious freedom with physical violence. When restrictions on religious freedom are themselves enforced with violence, the causal arrow in the grievance/conflict formula runs from violence to the development of grievances.

Not all instances of religious conflict flow from overt attempts by the state to violate human rights by engaging in one-sided violence, however. As with other forms of political violence such as civil war, religious violence often requires two parties to be ready to engage in conflict. For these dyadic conflicts between religious groups, or between a religious minority and the state, there must be some factor causing a religious group to undertake violent activities. Violence is costly. It entails the mobilization of substantial resources on the part of a religious minority and carries significant risk of physical harm, if not death. Given these possible costs, why would religious minorities respond to restrictions on their religious freedom with violence? It must be because the costs of engaging in violence are perceived as being less than the costs of continuing to accept such regulations (Fox, 2016; Toft et al., 2011).

There are two reasons why religion may prime individuals to engage in violence. According to the first line of reasoning, religious identities predispose individuals to engage in conflict with adherents of other religions because religion provides individuals with an exclusive understanding of the way society should be ordered and gives justifications for seeking to impose that order, including through the use of violence (Huntington, 1996; Juergensmeyer, 2017; Varshney, 2003). Religious identities are part of an individual’s most deeply held beliefs, and, as a result, religions tend to be intolerant of other religions (Fox, 2016). According to this “civilizational” reasoning, religious identifiers chafe at restrictions on their freedom because it prevents them from realizing their preferred form

of social organization. Religion is a violent ideology (Harris, 2005), and conflict is the natural outcome of competition between different religions that exist within the same physical space.

The weight of evidence, however, does not line up behind this reasoning. Religious groups are often no more violent than other groups in society (Finke & Harris, 2012; Grim & Finke, 2007, 2010). Studies examining whether interreligious, or "civilizational" conflicts have increased in intensity since the end of the Cold War—a critical prediction of Huntington's theory—have consistently found little evidence to support this claim (Fox, 2004, 2005A, 2005B). Moreover, some have found that conflict is more common between members of the same religion than other religions (De Soysa & Nordås, 2007). If religion as a system of belief does not explain religious violence, what does?

When religious restrictions are imposed upon religious minorities, these restrictions often affect more than a minority group's religious freedom. Such regulations can also impact economic opportunities by preventing adherents of the minority faith from obtaining certain jobs, or these regulations may shut such groups out of access to political power (Sarkissian, 2015). By influencing the distribution of economic and social opportunities, as well as the distribution of political power among religious groups, these regulations influence feelings of relative deprivation among religious minorities (Gurr, 1970). Relative deprivation can be defined as lack of access to resources necessary to sustain the lifestyle, amenities, or activities that an individual or group feels they require or are accustomed to in order to sustain activities that allow them to express their preferred standard of living. Relative deprivation is inherently relational: one group feels deprived to the extent that it perceives its lack of access to resources puts it at a lower standard of living compared to other, often socially dominant, groups. Feelings of relative deprivation manifest as grievances. These grievances facilitate collective action by instilling a sense of group identity and solidarity among religious minorities. When this identity becomes activated, religious minorities mobilize institutional resources in pursuit of redress of their aggrieved status.

Such mobilization is often violent (Fox, 2016; Gurr, 1970; Toft et al., 2011). Aggrieved religious minorities are likely to behave violently toward other groups that are the source of those grievances (Stewart, 2016). Because of their lack of access to political power, and because restrictions on the religious freedom of such groups is legislated by the state with the tacit agreement of socially dominant religious groups, it is unlikely that religious minorities can affect a change in their status through traditional political means. Because religious minorities perceive that normal channels of political power are closed and cannot be used to affect a change in their status, they may decide that only violent mobilization can convince the state or other dominant religious groups that the costs of continuing such regulation are unacceptably high.

A Modest Critique of the Existing Literature

While grievances are indeed a crucial factor in explaining religious violence, emerging research suggests that they are necessary but perhaps not sufficient for such violence to emerge (Arikan & Ben-Nun Bloom, 2018; Basedau, Fox, Pierskalla, Strüver, & Vüllers, 2017; Fox, Bader, & McClure, 2017; Schleutker, 2016). One can imagine a regime so ruthless in its repression of minority religious groups that none dare speak out regarding the denial of their religious freedom for fear of violent persecution. Even if the minority's religious beliefs encouraged adherents to violently oppose such oppression, it is possible that an extremely coercive regime could, through extensive surveillance networks, threats of extreme violence, or other means, simply cow religious minorities into obsequiousness. However, what happens when states are less powerful? Research into the causes of civil war has long recognized that this kind of conflict is more common in weak states that cannot repress rebellious groups into submission or accommodate their demands for greater freedom through normal political channels (Hegre, 2001). Recent research examining the effects of religious grievances on violence also suggest a similar mechanism may assist in explaining religious violence.

Arikan and Ben-Nun Bloom (2018) provide evidence demonstrating that extensive repression reduces the likelihood of religiously motivated violence. Their study shows religious minorities that suffer extensive restrictions on their liberty are less inclined to engage in political protest, while protest by religious minorities increases to the extent that system-level opportunities exist for these groups to express their political opinions. Kim and Choi (2017) and Muchlinski (2014) have shown that religious violence is most likely in political regimes that are neither extensively authoritarian and thus able to quash dissent nor democratic enough to accommodate these minorities' preferences through legislation. That is, opportunities for conflict offered by weak political regimes also have important effects for explaining religious violence. Grievances, being a psychological state of mind, are difficult to measure. Most quantitative research that has analyzed the effects of religious grievances on religious violence has tended to utilize measures of regulation as a proxy for grievances, under the assumption that more onerous limitations of religious freedom imply greater feelings of grievance. This is undoubtedly true in many instances. However, most studies leave this assumption implicit rather than testing it directly. There are some important limitations in such an approach to measuring grievances. First, grievances are assumed when coding such a variable, rather than measured directly. While a long line of research has established that restrictions on a group's political freedoms do indeed foster grievances (e.g., Gurr, 1970), it is possible that, in some instances, regulations may fall on aspects of religious practice that adherents do not deem to be of vital importance. For instance, a religious denomination may be prohibited from constructing houses of worship in certain neighborhoods, or individuals may be banned from wearing outward displays of their religious faith in publicly owned buildings like courthouses or public universities. Second, regulations on religious freedom may be so extreme that they completely decimate the potential for collective action. If a government imprisons the vast majority of a religious sect, or otherwise makes it extremely costly for individuals to profess, publicly

or privately, adherence to such a regulated faith, it may be exceedingly difficult for a religious minority to organize for the purpose of rebelling against the state.

Recognizing that not all instances of religious regulation may directly cause groups to react violently against the source of their grievance, recent research has turned to examining how opportunities for collective action may assist in explaining religious violence. The results are surprising. New evidence suggests that the link between religious discrimination and the formation of grievances is more complex than previously thought. For instance, Fox et al. (2017) measured religious discrimination using data from the World Values Survey and found no correlation between higher levels of discrimination and either religious grievances or organizing activity on the part of religious minorities. Another recent study (Basedau et al., 2017) demonstrates that more religious discrimination does indeed correlate with more religious grievances but that neither grievances nor discrimination are correlated with religious violence. According to this study, over 400 religious groups were both subjected to regulations on religious freedom and developed grievances because of these regulations. Of the 400+ groups only just over 20 chose to engage in violence either toward the state or toward other non-state groups. More than 80% of religious groups that were both subject to restrictions on their religious freedom and aggrieved chose to not engage in violence. The authors concluded that opportunities for rebellion on the part of religious groups plays an important role in explaining this non-finding:

> Generally, autocracy rather than democracy seems to reduce conflict in these 10 countries—which is not surprising, as heavy discrimination is generally predominantly found in autocratic regimes. Yet we do not find more convincing evidence of a substantial role for democracy in reducing conflict risks. Apparently, successful repression limits the opportunity to rebel.
>
> (Basedau et al., 2017, pp. 233–234)

Grievances and Opportunities: A Way Forward

While grievances can be a motivating factor in explaining why some religious groups engage in violence (Basedau et al., 2017; Kim & Choi, 2017; Muchlinski, 2014; Sarkissian, 2015; Toft et al., 2011), emerging research suggests grievances alone are not the only factor motivating religious minorities to engage in violence against the state or against other religious groups. And while most studies of political violence have ignored religious violence (Fox, 2008), or treated it as an ephemeral phenomenon that would disappear given sufficient economic modernization (Norris & Inglehart, 2011), religious violence remains an important phenomenon to understand. But is it also possible that the study of religious conflict has also become too insular and has ignored important theoretical developments that help explain secular conflicts.

A nearly 20-year debate among scholars of secular conflicts appears relevant to the debate over the impact of grievances on religious violence. Until the early 2000s, it was commonly thought that secular conflicts, like civil wars and rebellion, were caused by grievances developed as a result of perceptions of relative deprivation among minority groups. A series of papers (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Hegre, 2001), however, challenged this assumption, showing that civil wars were more likely caused by factors that favored the development of insurgencies or decreased costs to engaging in rebellion. Rather than ethnic diversity—a proxy for ethnic grievances—civil wars were significantly correlated with endemic national poverty, large populations, and rugged terrain, all factors that facilitated technologies of rebellion. In response, some scholars (e.g., Cederman, Gleditsch, & Buhaug, 2013) realized that ethnic diversity in and of itself did not accurately measure ethnic grievances. These scholars developed new measures of political grievances by measuring the access different ethnic groups have to political power at the level of the ethnic group, rather than at the level of the nation-state. These measures of ethnic exclusion from power were not only more accurate measures of grievance than simple ethnic diversity as measured by Fearon and Laitin (2003) but were also found to be significantly correlated with the onset of civil war cross-nationally, reviving the debate regarding the role of grievances in secular conflicts like civil wars.

A similar debate now appears to be ongoing in the literature on religious grievances and religious conflict. Recent empirical findings across multiple studies demonstrate that opportunity structures including the autocratic character of many regimes, and the tolerance religious groups have for engaging in violence, are at least as important as grievances in explaining outbreaks of religious violence. De Juan, Pierskalla, and Vüllers (2015) document the pacifying effect of community ties on interreligious violence in Indonesia. Due to their close proximity to local religious communities, local religious leaders studied by De Juan and his colleagues are able to stay informed about various grievances that may develop within their communities. These leaders are able to utilize their moral authority as leaders of these communities to settle disputes among various religious groups before they erupt into conflict. Isaacs (2016), further, finds that militant group leaders who invoke religious rhetoric are better able to recruit more fighters and mobilize resources for their violent campaigns. Basedau and Koos (2015) polled over 100 religious leaders in South Sudan and discovered that leaders who were less tolerant of religious differences were more likely to encourage their followers to behave violently toward other religious groups. They also found that horizontal linkage networks among citizens that increased interreligious group contacts increased support for peaceful conflict resolution.

In addition to variations in the interpretation of religious ideology and religious leadership characteristics, national-level opportunity structures also can explain where religious violence occurs. A study by Sørli, Gleditsch, and Strand (2005) found that factors that are highly correlated with the occurrence of secular conflicts, like level of political and economic development and regime type, also explain outbreaks of religious violence, a finding also supported by Muchlinski (2014). Karakaya (2015) found that religious conflict across much of the Middle East is primarily caused by militias seeking to loot easily

extractable resources, a mechanism that also drives civil war onset (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004).

These studies suggest that the nature of a country's political regime has varied effects on the likelihood of religious violence. Like secular forms of conflict, religious violence is most likely in regimes that are neither fully authoritarian nor fully democratic. Fully consolidated authoritarian states have the ability to effectively identify sources of dissent and dismantle civil society organizations that facilitate it, while democratic states are able to legally guarantee religious freedom to all religious groups, thus eliminating the main source of potential grievances. It is those regimes that are institutionally weak and low in political legitimacy that may choose to rely on a powerful social institution, like religion, to shore up their political authority. Such regimes are more likely to support official state religions and more likely to repress the rights of minority religious groups. Therefore grievances are likely to develop among minority religions in these countries. And while grievances may also develop in countries with more severe restrictions on religious freedom, weakly institutionalized anocratic regimes lack the ability to forestall violent challenges to their rule. Thus it is easier for religious minorities to mount violent challenges to the authority of anocratic states and socially dominant religions. Recent studies (Arikan & Ben-Nun Bloom, 2018; Basedau et al., 2017; Basedau, Pfeiffer, & Vüllers, 2016; Fox et al., 2017) have begun to examine this relationship more closely and, as a result, have developed new theoretical tools and data to answer this ambiguity in the literature.

Another welcome development within the recent literature regarding religious violence is enhanced data quality that allows scholars to more accurately probe the relationship between grievances, collective action, and group-based religious violence. Most data used to examine the effect of grievances on religious violence has been aggregated at the level of the nation-state, while most theory regarding the role grievances play in fostering violence centers on group or individual-level dynamics (Fox et al., 2017; Østby, 2008). It is unlikely that all religious groups in a given nation are subject to the same level of regulation. Religious majorities seek to form alliances with political elites in order to ensure the continuation of their socially beneficial position. In doing so, majority religions impose greater regulations on minority groups than they do on themselves. Using a single measure of religious regulation that assumes constant regulation across all religious groups throughout the country is likely to obscure important group-based variation among religious majority and minority groups.

These new data allow researchers to measure objective measures of religious regulation across religious groups, giving scholars the ability to more accurately assess the causal relationship between religious regulation, religious grievance, and violence. Developing new measures of grievance at the group level represents an important step forward in research on religious violence, especially given that outbreaks of religious violence often emerge from local conditions, including local experiences of government harassment and marginalization (Dowd, 2015).

Critical to making more valid quantitative and even qualitative inferences regarding the effect of regulation on religious violence is the development of new measures of religious conflict that measure conflict across group dyads rather than aggregating religious violence at the level of the nation-state. Recent data sets developed by Basedau et al. (2017), Isaacs (2016), and Svensson and Nilsson (2018) all analyze religious conflict among religious groups. If grievances produce feelings of relative deprivation by creating horizontal inequalities across religious groups, minority groups should be expected to engage in conflict with other, more advantaged, groups. In order to test this hypothesis, group-level data is required. The subfield of religious conflict is beginning to realize this, as these group-level data sets have all appeared in the last two years. Such data sets can incorporate measures of grievance among and between minority–majority dyads, providing researchers with data that can more clearly elucidate the mechanisms linking grievances to group-based religious violence.

Conclusion

Far from fading into the dustbin of history, religion's influence on political violence appears to have grown considerably since the end of the Cold War. Research on the link between the denial of religious freedom and religious violence makes clear that scholars cannot ignore religion's effect on the likelihood of political violence. Religion remains a powerful social institution across much of the world, facilitating collective action for violent activity by providing ideological justifications, institutional resources, and mobilization capacity for violence. The grievances that develop from restrictions on the religious freedom of minority religious groups are powerful catalysts promoting religious violence. There is substantial evidence that, rather than promoting social stability, restrictions on religious freedom are destabilizing and violence inducing. Scholars of religious violence are right to recognize this and encourage international liberalization of restrictions on religious belief.

This article has explored the conditions under which denial of religious freedom is likely to promote religious grievances, which then cause religious violence. States that do not derive political legitimacy through democratic means, like elections, must rely on other socially powerful institutions to ensure their political survival. Religion is an attractive source of legitimacy because it claims to have access to universal truths about the way society should be structured. Religion gives legitimacy to otherwise unaccountable rulers by imbuing them with a divine mandate. For those states that rely on religious doctrine to lend legitimacy to their political rule, a plurality of religious beliefs can be dangerous. Because each religion claims to know universal truths, there can be no compromise between competing ideologies. When religious authority becomes intertwined with political authority, any challenge to the socially dominant religious doctrine becomes a challenge to the authority of the state. Through regulation of religious belief, states attempt to preempt challenges to their rule. By imposing restrictions on how adherents of minority religious faiths can worship, preach, and even obtain employment, some states attempt to

ensure members of minority religious groups can never become politically powerful enough to challenge the legitimacy of the state.

This strategy of repression, however, is not always successful. Religious violence is unfortunately common across the world. Sectarian conflicts across Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, Nigeria, and other countries demonstrate that minority religions do not always peacefully accept their social subjugation. Yet in other states that also severely repress religious freedom, religious violence is more limited. As recent studies (Basedau et al., 2017) have demonstrated, repression can be a successful strategy to outbreaks of this kind of violence.

Studies examining religious violence are beginning to recognize this. New studies have begun to pay attention to systemic opportunity structures that can offer religious minorities a better chance of contesting state power. Weak political institutions that fail to halt violent rebellions, opportunities for mobilization offered by religious organizations, and the effects of religious ideology in legitimizing violence have all recently been discovered to have significant effects on religious violence. Religious minorities must have a reason to engage in violence. Grievances provide such a justification. But these groups must also be able to mobilize resources, gather a critical mass of adherents, and disseminate their message of revolt in order for their strategy of violence to have any chance of redressing their disadvantaged social status. While grievances are a necessary component of religious violence, they are insufficient on their own in explaining why this violence occurs.

Scholars of religious violence are not wrong to focus on religious grievances as a source of religious violence. However, new data and the introduction of a new theoretical focus on systemic opportunities for rebellion have exposed an ambiguity in the literature with which future research must contend. Theories regarding the dynamics of conflict are relational. Each actor must have a reason to engage in such violence, but current data measures only one aspect of this relationship. By measuring societal levels of religious regulation and assuming the impact of these regulations are constant across all religious groups in society, current studies obscure variation in the impact of these regulations across groups. New data measuring how regulation of religious freedom affect religious dyads can potentially bring a more nuanced understanding to this debate. By providing information regarding the impact of regulations on religious freedom across each minority group, this new data can assist scholars to more accurately measure grievances. These measurements, in turn, can facilitate a better understanding regarding the conditions under which grievances do or do not facilitate religious violence.

Rather than viewing religious and secular conflicts as opposed, scholars of religious and secular forms of conflict should seek to pool their collective knowledge to better understand the mechanisms that drive religious violence. The study of religious violence has long been kept in the antechamber of the field of conflict studies. Scholars of secular conflicts, like civil wars, have ignored possible religious dimensions to these conflicts. But perhaps scholars of religious violence have tended to view religious conflict as unique, driven by factors that cannot explain other, secular, conflicts. While understanding how

the denial of religious freedom impacts religious violence is undoubtedly important, perhaps scholars of religious violence are beginning to understand that they cannot ignore theoretical developments in other fields of conflict studies. Mirroring debates in the literature on secular conflict, scholars of religious violence are now mindful of the important effects that religious elites, political regimes, and other opportunity structures play in affecting the severity of religious violence. No longer are grievances considered to be the only cause of religious violence, though research is continuing into the links between religious regulation, grievances, and religious violence.

There is no one-size-fits-all recommendation as to where future research should focus its attention. Clearly the exploration of how grievances contribute to religious violence must proceed, for grievances certainly contribute to outbreaks of religious violence. Perhaps because it has been ignored for so long by other scholars of conflict, research into the causes of religious violence still pales in comparison to studies published on the causes of civil wars, insurgencies, and rebellion. Scholars of religious violence should continue to cast a wide net in exploring the religious dimensions of religious violence. But they should also be aware that secular factors can still explain significant variation in this kind of political violence.

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