Government interference in religious institutions and terrorism

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Abstract: Many states have adopted policies that monitor or attempt to control religious institutions in various ways. This ranges from limiting foreign born clerics to approving the sermons presented in these institutions. These policies are often justified as measures to limit religious strife or terrorism by minimizing extremism in the country. Are they effective? Or are they counterproductive, and promote resentment and violence? Using data from the Religion and State dataset and the Global Terrorism Database, I find that intensified government interference in religious institutions can lead to an increase in terrorism in a country.

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After the 2013 coup in Egypt, the new regime intensified state control of mosques throughout the country.[1] Government officials shut down mosques that did not have official approval and banned their clerics from preaching. The regime claimed the new policies were intended to counter extremist voices and prevent terrorist threats from arising (Economist 2014). Critics, however, saw these actions as infringements on human rights and a means to undermine political opposition (Economist 2014). The coup had conveniently removed the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood from power, and the new government was wary of Muslim organizations.

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Similar debates have occurred around the world; government claim increased control over religious institutions is an important way to stop terrorism, while critics are fearful of infringements on religious freedom. This raises a question for scholars of terrorism and religion and politics. Does government control of religious institutions have any effect on terrorist violence in countries? When governments fund religious institutions and limit the political activity of clerics, does this limit extremism and terrorism? Or does it increase grievances over government repression, leading to more terrorism?

In this article I conduct an inductive analysis using new data to answer this question. Drawing on the Religion and State Round 3 dataset, I use a variety of variables measuring different types of government control over religious institutions. I test whether these policies have an effect on violent extremism, using the Global Terrorism Database's (GTD) measure of the number of deaths from terrorist attacks. I perform numerous quantitative tests using these variables and a variety of control variables for existing explanations for terrorism.

I find that increases in government control over religious institutions can intensify the threat from terrorism. There are mixed results from existing government control over religious institutions. While certain specific policies are associated with more deaths from terrorism, many had little effect or even a negative effect. Yet, when government control over religious institutions increases, deaths from terrorism increase as well.

These findings suggest that government control over religious institutions is not a valid counterterrorism tool. In many cases, this control has little impact on terrorism. The cost of government interference in religious institutions, and the broader issues involved with limiting religious expression, thus do not appear to be worth it. Moreover, when governments intensify their control over religious institutions in response to extremist threats, this may actually be

counterproductive. In such cases, terrorism increases, likely due to a backlash over worsened repression.

These findings present implications for the study of both religion and politics and terrorism. For the former, this article expands on numerous others that find government religious policies can have significant impacts on the nature of politics within a state. Specifically, it supports those studies that argue increased government involvement in religion appears to be negative, increasing social tensions and instability. The article also contributes to terrorism studies' understanding of how political institutions affect terrorism. In addition to wide-ranging political repression and discrimination, relatively subtle policies like controlling and funding religious institutions can lead to greater terrorism violence as well.

This article also presents useful policy implications for the proper response to violent extremism. It may tempting to back regimes—like Egypt's—that crack down on houses of worship in response to terrorism or non-violent extremist movements. My findings suggest these policies are at best ineffective and at worst counterproductive. As many other studies have found, limiting religious freedom has significant negative impacts on societies.

I follow the definitions of the datasets I use in this article. For government interference in religious institutions, I refer to government policies that are intended to control and monitor religious institutions, exert some authority over their practices and personnel decisions, and otherwise connect religious institutions with the state. By religious institutions I mean houses of worship, religious clerics, and other religious services such as schools and charities. I use the relevant variables from the Religion and State dataset, including government policies that exert control over religious institutions, policies that restrict the ability of religious institutions to function free from government oversight, and government policies that fund and support

institutions. For the threat from terrorism, I define this as the number of deaths from terrorist attacks in a country. While other aspects of terrorism—such as the number of attacks or the number of active groups—may be relevant, the number of deaths captures the impact of terrorism on society. As I am using the Global Terrorism Database as a source for this data, I use its definition of terrorism: the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation (2007).

This article proceeds in five parts. First, I present existing debates on the desirability of government control over religious institutions, and hypotheses on these policies' effects on terrorism. I then discuss the research design, and present the findings. Following that, I discuss the implications of these findings before discussing broader conclusions.

Does Government Interference in Religious Institutions Minimize or Exacerbate Terrorist Threats?

Both the scholarly and policy communities are split on the desirability of government interference in religious institutions, with fears of spreading extremism contrasting with concerns over religious freedom and free expression. Governments interfering with the operation of religious institutions and funding religious services could decrease terrorism, by limiting extremist voices and promoting moderate elements of religious traditions. At the same time, it could exacerbate terrorism by increasing grievances among religious communities and subsequent support for terrorist groups. In this section I present an overview of the existing debate on this topic, and hypotheses on the possible effects of government interference in religious institutions.

Existing Research

There has been a good amount of scholarly research on the question of whether government interference in religion affects terrorism and other forms of political violence. Many states restrict religious practice and harass religious communities in an attempt to maintain control over their society. Scholars and human rights activists, however, argue that such restrictions are unethical and actually counterproductive, as they can increase grievances and instability. Accordingly, studies have tested the impact on these restrictions on violence.

This question—of government interference in religion's impact on terrorism—grows out of a large research program on the impacts of these government policies on politics. Fox has analyzed trends in this area in several books (Fox 2008, Fox 2015, Fox 2016). Grim and Finke catalogued the impacts of government restrictions on religious practice (Grim and Finke 2011). And Toft, Philpott and Shah used the nature of government interference in religion to explain a variety of outcomes, from civil war to democratization (Toft, Philpott et al. 2011). Others have attempted to explain the roots of government restrictions on religion, as seen in works by Gill, Kuru and Sarkissian (Gill 2008, Kuru 2009, Sarkissian 2015). Still others—like Buckley, Cesari and Driessen—have studied the complex relationships between religion and democracy (Cesari 2013, Driessen 2014, Buckley 2017). Several scholars have also looked at the impact of government interference in religion on issues ranging from interstate conflict to international systems change (Philpott 2000, Nexon 2009, Fox and Sandal 2010, Henne 2012, Henne 2013, Henne 2017).

Initial work on religion and terrorism focused on whether or not religion led to more severe terrorist violence. Classic studies by Crenshaw, Hoffman, and Rapoport discussed the nature of religious terrorism in historical and contemporary periods (Rapoport 1983, Hoffman

1995, Crenshaw 2008). Scholars like Pape and Bloom questioned religion's importance (Pape 2006, Bloom 2007). And numerous scholars identified the nuanced but powerful way in which religion intensified the violence of terrorist attacks (Asal and Rethemeyer 2008, Moghadam 2008/09, Piazza 2009, Henne 2012, Saiya and Scime 2014). At the same time, scholars have been examining the impact of political conditions on terrorist violence (Abadie 2004, Chenoweth 2010, Walsh and Piazza 2010, Dugan and Chenoweth 2012). These two research programs connected by focusing on how state policies involving religion influence terrorism.

Many studies have found that government interference in religion can lead to increased tensions. Some of the studies I mentioned above find that government restrictions on religion exacerbates tensions in society (Grim and Finke 2010; Toft, Philpott and Shah 2011). And many others have expanded on these insights, finding that increased government restrictions lead to more intense forms of terrorism and other violence (Finke and Martin 2014, Saiya and Scime 2014, Saiya 2016). Others have looked at discrimination against religious groups. Others have have found some impact on discrimination on outbreaks of rebellion and other forms of violence (Fox, James et al. 2009, Akbaba and Taydas 2011, Basedau, Pfieffer et al. 2016). Still others found that religious discrimination is connected to both forced migration and religious conflict (Kolbe and Henne 2014, Henne and Klocek Forthcoming).

Additionally, studies of counter-radicalization programs cast some doubt on the effectiveness of government interference in religious institutions. Governments around the world have instituted programs intended to counter radical messaging and either prevent individuals from joining terrorist groups or convincing them to leave once they have joined. Many of these programs focus on reforming captured terrorists in prisons (Horgan and Altier 2012). Others, however, emphasize outreach and interactions with houses of worship, often Muslim ones

(Klausen 2009). Scholars have raised concerns about government involvement in religious institutions' impacts on religious communities, and questioned the effect of religious education on terrorism in certain contexts (Brown 2008, Woodward, Rohmaniyah et al. 2010). Others have argued these efforts can increase resentment among target communities, intensifying radicalization (Rascoff 2012). And studies of de-radicalization indicate it usually occurs through tensions within terrorist groups, rather than efforts to "pull" groups out of extremism (Altier, Boyle et al. 2017).

Others, however, argue that government interference in religion does not necessarily lead to worsening political violence. A separate study by Basedau and colleagues found that religious discrimination does intensify grievances, but does not always cause violence to break out (Basedau, Fox et al. 2017). Similarly, Muchlinski argued that it is the opportunity for violence to break out—measured by weak authoritarianism—that matters more than religious restrictions (Muchlinksi 2014). Outside of religious conflict, there are also several studies that suggest harsh treatment by the government does not lead to more intense violence (Lyall 2009, Hazelton 2017).

Additionally, a few studies have argued that government control over religious institutions may be effective in limiting extremism and terrorism. One study found China maintains control over religious institutions, but still allows them some freedom (Wang 2016). Other studies have looked specifically at Morocco's recent reforms. El-Katiri argues that policy changes in Morocco that grant the state greater control over mosques have been useful in countering extremism (El-Katiri 2013). Similarly, Robbins and Rubin analyzed Middle Eastern states' post-Arab Spring policies towards Islam, suggesting that increased state involvement in religious institutions has been a useful counter-extremism tool (Robbins and Rubin 2017).

Policy Debate over Government Interference in Religious Institutions

There is a parallel debate in the policy world over this question: whether state control over religious institutions is an effective tool in counterterrorism strategies. In a study of Tunisia and Morocco, Feuer argued that state-controlled religious institutions are credible Islamic voices and effective in the struggle against extremism (Feuer 2016). Similarly, in a symposium the United States Institute of Peace organized for religious activists and government officials in Kenya, some saw government regulation of religious institutions as a useful means to counter terrorism (Kakar, Nozell et al. 2016). Likewise, an Atlantic Council study reported some in Egypt supported new government policies that placed mosques under the control of al-Azhar University as it was seen as a moderating influence (Beshay and Messieh 2013).

Yet, other policy analysts are concerned about such moves, and see them as counterproductive infringements on religious freedom. Linn and Linn argued that the aforementioned changes in Egypt may create underground mosques that could spread extremism (Linn and Linn 2015). Similarly, Benard argued that complete separation of religion and the state in Muslim countries would benefit both Islamic institutions and society (Benard 2008). And in a study on how religious freedom restrictions can intensify extremism, Henne, Hudgins and Shah argue that government control over religious institutions can actually favor extremist voices (Henne, Hudgins et al. 2012).

Hypotheses on Government Control of Religious Institutions

This leaves scholars of government religious policies and terrorism with a bit of a puzzle. Numerous studies suggest government limits on religion increase instability, including terrorism. Yet, government interference in religious institutions seems like a useful counterterrorism tool,

as it can target extremist voices before they destabilize society. Is this form of government interference in religion effective in combating extremism, suggesting that in certain circumstances policies restricting religion may be acceptable? Or are proponents of these policies unwisely ignoring the warning from broader studies, and government interference in religious institutions will prove counterproductive?

In this article, I take an inductive approach to answering these questions. As this research program is still in the relatively early stages, there is not a large body of research on the effects of government interference in religious institutions to draw from. Therefore, I will be drawing on existing work in the broader topic of government religious policies and political violence to suggest competing hypotheses for the effects of government interference in religious institutions.

There are several reasons why government interference in religious institutions could intensify terrorism. When governments exert control over religious institutions, they may increase the grievances of the affected communities. Members of a religious community may adopt more extreme views of their government or religion, in reaction to their inability to completely control their worship. This could lead them to join or support terrorist groups. Even when governments fund religious institutions, they are still exerting some control. As Fox notes, "when a government supports a religion," that religion becomes to some degree dependent on the government and more susceptible to government control" (Fox 2015, 65). This could provoke anger—from the lack of complete independence—and may also strengthen extremist voices if the government chooses inappropriate religious actors to support. Additionally, government support for religious institutions could undermine their credibility, increasing the appeal of extremist groups. Thus, existing interference in a country could explain its levels of terrorism.

Additionally, newly implemented policies interfering with religious institutions could also lead to an increase in terrorism if they intensify grievances and increase support for terrorist groups.

> *Hypothesis 1: States with greater government interference in religious institutions will have greater levels of terrorism*
>
> > *Hypothesis 1a: Increases in government interference in religious institutions will lead to increased terrorism*

At the same time, there are reasons to think government control of religious institutions can lessen the threat from terrorism. If government interference in religious institutions excludes extremist clerics and strengthens mainstream ones, then it may succeed in limiting the spread of extremist messages. This could in turn lead to less terrorism as members of the society turn away from these groups. Likewise, the funding that often accompanies this interference could lessen grievances among religious communities by demonstrating the government's support. As with the above hypotheses, this could explain long-term trends in terrorism or sudden decreases in terrorism, if an increase in government interference lessens the threat from terrorism.

> *Hypothesis 2: States with more government interference in religious institutions will experience less terrorism.*
>
> > *Hypothesis 2a: Increases in government interference in religious institutions will lead to a decrease in terrorism.*

Of course, it is also possible government control of religious institutions has no impact at all on terrorism. Many things contribute to terrorism, from levels of economic activity to general political repression. Some could argue that government interference in religious has a minimal impact. Instead, other, more conventional explanations, matter more and government religious policies are neither effective nor counterproductive.

> *Hypothesis 3: Government interference in religious institutions has no impact on terrorism.*

Research Design

I test these hypotheses with a quantitative analysis using data on terrorist attacks and new data on government religious policies from round 3 of the Religion and State dataset.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable is the log plus one of the number of deaths from terrorist attacks in a country per year. The number of deaths from terrorist attacks reflects the extent of terrorist activity in a country, which can indicate the prevalence of violent extremism. A measure of public opinion or activity by extremist groups beyond terrorism would be useful, but such data can be difficult to find across countries. This variable, *Terrorist Deaths*, is semi-continuous, running from 0 to 9.47.

I draw on the Global Terrorism Database for this variable.[2] The Global Terrorism Database is one of the more widely-used publicly-available datasets on terrorism, and is maintained by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism. The data run from 1970 to 2015, although I only use a sub-set of this data (as I will discuss below). There may be some issues with this variable. It measures the number of deaths, rather than attacks; the number of deaths does capture the severity of terrorism, however. Additionally, there are other indicators of extremism beyond terrorism; data on broader extremism is difficult to capture, and may not cover all countries. Focusing on deaths from terrorism can generally measure this phenomenon. Finally, there may be issues with including all terrorist attacks, rather than differentiating by target and perpetrator. There are some data complications in addressing this, but I attempt to account for it in a robustness check, as I discuss below.

Explanatory Variables

[2] The Global Terrorism Database is available at https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/. (2017). Global Terrorism Database. N. C. f. t. S. o. T. a. R. t. T. (START).

The explanatory variables I use measure different aspects of government interference in religious institutions.[3] I draw on Round 3 of the Religion and State dataset, which includes information on numerous aspects of government policies towards religion around the world. The dataset runs from 1990 to 2014. While it does not include information on the Cold War era, it provides insight from the immediate post-Cold War era through the next few decades.

I draw on three sets of data from this dataset. The first measures government interference in minority religious groups' institutions. Many governments restrict the practice and autonomy of minority religious institutions, or attempt to monitor and control their activities. This is often an attempt to minimize threats from a potential opposition group—as with China's control over Christians—or disadvantage a group seen as undesirable, as in Pakistan's limits on Ahmadi Muslims. The Religion and State dataset includes variables measuring "religious discrimination against minority religions," categorized as "restrictions on religious practice," "restrictions on religious institutions and the clergy," "restrictions on conversion and proselytizing," and other restrictions. I included the variables from the sub-category of "restrictions on religious institutions and the clergy," as these best capture the focus of this article. These variables run from 0 to 3, with 0 indicating no restrictions and 3 indicating the relevant activity is prohibited. The variables I chose are:

- **mx13**: Restrictions on building, leasing, repairing and/or maintaining places of worship.
- **mx14**: Restrictions on access to existing places of worship.
- **mx15**: Restrictions on formal religious organizations.
- **mx16**: Restrictions on the ordination of and/or access to clergy.
- **mx17**: Requirement for minority religions (as opposed to all religions) to register in

[3] More information on the Religion and State dataset is available at http://religionandstate.org/.

order to be legal or receive special tax status.

- **mx18**: Restricted access of minority clergy to jails compared to the majority religion.
- **mx19**: Restricted access of minority clergy to military bases compared to the majority religion.
- **mx20**: Restricted access of minority clergy to hospitals & other public facilities compared to majority religion.

The second set of variables measures government interference in the majority religion's institutions. In addition to restricting minority religious groups, many governments put in place policies interfering with the institutions of majority religious groups as well. Sometimes this is an attempt to favor a certain official interpretation of the majority religion at the expense of other approaches, such as Saudi Arabia's strict control over Muslim worship in that country. Other times it is a secular government's attempt to limit the powerful of potential religious threats, as with Kemalist Turkey's control over Muslim religious institutions. The Religion and State dataset includes variables measuring "regulation of and restrictions on the majority religion or all religions," categorized as "restrictions on religion's political role," "restrictions on religious institutions," "restrictions on religious practices" and other regulations. As with the above set of variables, I chose the sub-categories most relevant to this article: "restrictions on religion's political role" and "restrictions on religious institutions." These variables run from 0 to 3, with 0 indicating no restrictions and 3 indicating the activity is illegal. They include:

- **nx01**: Restrictions on religious political parties.
- **nx02**: Restrictions on trade associations or other civil associations being affiliated with religion.
- **nx03**: Restrictions on clergy holding political office.
- **nx04**: Restrictions or monitoring of sermons by clergy. (this generally applies to political speech)

- **nx05**: Restrictions on clergy/religious organizations engaging in public political speech (other than sermons) or propaganda or on political activity in or by religious institutions.
- **nx06**: Restrictions/harassment of members and organizations of the majority religion who operate outside of the state sponsored or recognized ecclesiastical framework (do not code arrests for activities that are commonly considered criminal unless these charges seem to be pretexts).
- **nx07**: Restrictions on formal religious organizations other than political parties
- **nx08**: Restrictions on access to places of worship.
- **nx09**: Foreign religious organizations are required to have a local sponsor or affiliation.
- **nx10**: Heads of religious organizations (eg. Bishops) must be citizens of the state.
- **nx11**: All practicing clergy must be citizens of the state.
- **nx12**: The government appoints (code as 3) or must approve (code as 2) clerical appointments or somehow takes part in the appointment process (code as 1).
- **nx13**: Other than appointments, the government legislates or otherwise officially influences the internal workings or organization of religious institutions and organizations.
- **nx14**: Laws governing the state rel. are passed by the government or require the government's approval.

The final group measures government funding of religious groups. This may seem like a benefit rather than governmental control, but such funding connects religious groups to the state, granting the state some control over the groups. For example, Egypt funds al-Azhar University, a prestigious school that trains many Muslim clerics. This does benefit the school, but it also leaves religious figures wary of criticizing the Egyptian state. Likewise, Hungary provides funding for officially approved religious institutions but uses this funding mechanism as a way to control churches' activities. The Religion and State dataset includes several variables measuring "religious support," categorized as "legislating religious precepts," "institutions or laws which enforce religion," "funding religion," "the entanglement of government and religious institutions" and other forms of support. I used the variables from "funding religion" and "the entanglement of government and religious institutions," as these were most relevant to this article. These variables use a 1 to indicate the support is present. These variables include:

- **lx27**: Government funding of religious primary/secondary schools or religious education programs in non-public schools.

- **lx28**: Government funding of seminary schools.
- **lx29**: Government funding of religious education in colleges or universities
- **lx30**: Government funding of religious charitable organizations including hospitals. Specify:
- **lx31**: Government collects taxes on behalf of religious organizations (religious taxes).
- **lx32**: Official government positions/salaries/other funding for clergy excluding salaries of teachers.
- **lx33**: Direct general grants to religious organizations (this does not include above categories).
- **lx34**: Funding for building, maintaining, or repairing religious sites.
- **lx35**: Free air time on television or radio is provided to religious organizations on government channels or by government decree.
- **lx36**: Funding or other government support for religious pilgrimages such as the Hajj.
- **lx37**: Funding for religious organizations or activities other than those listed above.
- **lx38**: Some religious leaders are given diplomatic status, diplomatic passports, or immunity from prosecution by virtue of their religious office.
- **lx39**: Presence of an official government ministry or department dealing with religious affairs.
- **lx40**: Certain government officials are also given an official position in the state church by virtue of their political office (ie the Queen of England is also head of Anglican Church.).
- **lx41**: Certain rel. officials become government officials by virtue of their rel. position (ie as in Iran).
- **lx42**: Some or all government officials must meet certain religious requirements in order to hold office. (This excludes positions in religious ministries, head of state church, or the like).
- **lx43**: Seats in Legislative branch/Cabinet are by law or custom granted, at least in part, along rel. lines.

I also created composite measures of each of these types of government control over religion. These variables were the sum of a country's score for each of the groups of variables: *Minority Interference*, *Overall Interference* and *Support.* These represent the overall extent of government control over each set of religious institutions. I also generate measures of change in each of these composites, which are the difference between the current year and the previous year; *Change_Minority*, *Change_Majority*, and *Change_Support.* Additionally, I used factor analysis to create alternate versions of each of these composites, in case weighting each component equally was not valid. I used these in alternate version of the below models.

There may be some concerns about the appropriateness of using so many different variables. One issue is that this could give rise to a type of data mining, in which I run analyses on numerous different variables in an attempt to find one that is significant. I discuss this further below, but I address this by attempting to report and analyze consistent patterns of findings, as opposed to isolated significant variables. An additional concern may be whether all of these variables equally measure government interference in religious institutions; some may question, for example, my inclusion of government funding or restrictions on political parties. As I discuss below, I run separate tests with the variables to avoid any issues of inappropriate composite variables.

Control Variables

I also use a variety of control variables to deal with alternative explanations for terrorist violence. I use Polity scores (*Polity)* to measure the extent of repression in a country, which can contribute to outbreaks of terrorism (Marshall and Jaggers 2007). Additionally, I use the log of the gross domestic product *(GDP)* the log of the population (*Population)* and the log of the total land area of the country *(Land*); economic development is often connected to terrorism, while larger or more populous countries may experience greater risks of terrorism.[4] I also control for Ethnic fractionalization *(Ethnic),* religious fractionalization *(Religion)* and majority Muslim population *(Muslim).*[5] More diverse countries—either in terms of religious or ethnic groups—may experience greater tensions and more terrorist violence. Likewise, Muslim societies have experienced more terrorism in recent years. Additionally, government control over religious institutions is more common in Muslim countries (as I will discuss below) so this may be an

[4] Data from the World Bank. https://data.worldbank.org/.
[5] Fractionalization data is from Alesina *et al,* while Muslim population data is from the Religion and State dataset. Alesina, A., A. Devleeschauwer, W. Easterly, S. Kurlat and R. Wacziarg (2003). "Fractionalization." Journal of Economic Growth **8**: 155-194.

important confounding factor. Finally, I use the results of the factor analysis rather than the additive scales—as discussed above—as alternate explanatory variables.

Methods

Because I am using panel data, I use a random effects regression. Each model uses all of the control variables, and I run separate models using each of the explanatory variables I discussed above. One of the major methodological challenges involves simultaneity bias. As states may attempt to increase control over religious institutions to limit violent extremism, it is possible that greater control is present in states with more terrorist violence. The usual way to deal with this is through an instrumental variable regression, which uses a variable that would affect the explanatory variable but not the outcome. It is difficult to think of such a variable in this case, however. I therefore use a one year lag of the number of deaths from terrorism as an additional control variable. There are issues with using a lagged dependent variable in panel data, which I address through alternate versions of the models.

I also run several robustness checks to address potential issues with these models. I include several alternate versions of these models to deal with potential issues.[6] I use a regular ordinary least squares regression to assess the impact of using the lagged dependent variable. I also use a fixed effects regression and a random effect regression with maximum likelihood estimation to ensure the results are not due to the specific model. Additionally, I run models with *Ethnic*, *Religion* and *Muslim* included separately in case of multicollinearity among these variables. I run similar models separating *Population* and *Land,* and another removing *Polity* in case of multicollinearity with the RAS variables. I also run a model including only deaths from attacks on government targets.

[6] I report robustness checks in the online appendix for the model using *Change_Majority* as this was the most consistently significant test.

Findings

In this section I present the findings from the statistical analysis. The findings suggest that a few types of government control over religious institutions affect terrorism, but the results are mixed. Yet, an increase in overall control over religious institutions does appear to contribute to a rise in terrorist violence.[7]

The results were inconsistent for the individual measures.[8] Among the government religious policies that interfered with minority religious institutions, only a few variables were weakly significant. *Mx16,* measuring restrictions on the ordination of the minority religion clergy, was weakly significant and positive. That is, these restrictions corresponded to increases in terrorist violence. By contrast, *Mx19,* restrictions on minority religious clergy access to military bases—such as military chaplains—was weakly significant and negative. This restriction actually corresponded to a decrease in terrorism. [See Figure 1]

There was less of an impact among the government religious policies interfering with all religious institutions. Only *NX01* was significant, with a positive sign; this variable measures restrictions on religious political parties. This was highly significant, however, suggesting we can be relatively certain that interference with the ability to form political parties based on religion corresponds to increases in terrorism.

More effects on terrorism were apparent in the government religious policies that supported religious institutions. Government funding for religious charitable organizations (*LX30),* government tax collection on behalf of religious organizations (*LX31),* and government support

[7] Due to the large number of tests I run, I only include tables of results for the variables measuring change in government interference, and figures representing coefficients of the significant variables. All other tables and figures are in the online appendix.

[8] Descriptive statistics and the results from robustness checks, are available in the online appdendix.

for religious pilgrimages *(LX36)* were all weakly correlated with increases in terrorism. When religious requirements for holding office were in place, however (*LX42)* there was a strong statistically significant relationship with increases in terrorism. By contrast, when the government funds religious schools (*LX27)* there is a statistically significant negative relationship with terrorism. [See Figure 3]

There are thus some apparent impacts of government interference in religious institutions on terrorism. For the most part, the effect appears to be one of increasing the threat from terrorism. Restricting religious parties, restricting the ordination of minority religious clergy, funding certain religious institutions and imposing religious requirements for office all seemed to contribute to greater deaths from terrorism. Yet, some of these effects were weakly significant, leading to uncertainty about their true impact. Additionally, other restrictions—restricting minority clergy access to military bases and funding religious schools—seemed to decrease terrorism.

It may be possible that individual policies interfering with religious institutions do not affect terrorism, but the overall extent of interference matters. None of the composite measures—*Minority Interference, Majority Interference, Support*—were statistically significant, however. That is, none of them had a definite impact on terrorism, to either increase or decrease deaths from terrorist attacks. It is likely that the many insignificant government religious policies undermined the impact of the few significant ones, leaving little overall effect.

[Figure 1 about here]

The effects of government interference in religious institutions on terrorism is thus rather unclear. Some specific policies seem to correspond to increases in terrorism, although many are weakly correlated. Others, however, seem to correspond to decreases in terrorism. Due to these inconsistencies, the above results should be viewed as tentative.

More dependable findings involve the effect of changes in government interference in religious worship. Neither changes in government interference in minority religious institutions nor changes in support for religious institutions had a statistically significant effect on terrorism. Changes in government interference in majority religious institutions did have a statistically significant and positive effect on terrorism, however. That is, increasing interference in religious institutions corresponded to an increase in deaths from terrorism. This suggests that while existing government policies interfering with religious institutions may not consistently affect terrorism, when government intensify this interference terrorism may increase. This result held up under the robustness checks I ran (discussed above).[9] [See Figure 2 and Table 1]

[Figure 2 and Table 1 about here]

Increases in government interference appeared to have substantively significant effects on terrorism. I test the impact of *Majority Change* by assessing how much deaths from terrorism attacks increased after *Majority Change* increased significantly.[10] That is, we know that a significant increase in government interference with religious institutions leads to more deaths from terrorism, but how much of an increase occurs? I found that a significant change in *Majority Interference* results in approximately a four percent increase in deaths from terrorism.[11] Thus, increased government interference with religious institutions would not result in widespread terrorist activity, but it could have a noticeable impact on the stability of a country. [See Figure 3]

[Figure 3 about here]

[9] See the online appendix for the results of robustness checks.
[10] A substantive change in *Majority interference* is moving from 6 to 25, which is approximately a move from one standard deviation below the mean to one standard deviation above the mean.
[11] As *Terrorism Deaths* is a logged variable, the increase is not the same as the change in coefficient, but this is an approximate interpretation of the change in the logged variable.

There are some caveats to this finding. The first is that many of the specific government policies had little effect on terrorism. This suggests that government interference in religious institutions does not inevitably intensify terrorism, which I discuss below. Additionally, the large number of tests may raise concerns about data mining. I attempt to avoid this pitfall by focusing on more consistent results; while I present the findings from the specific types of government policies, I believe the more robust finding concerning changes in government interference are more significant. Additionally, I do not assess whether the increase deaths from terrorist attacks are due to attacks by religious terrorist groups. This is partly due to the lack of a robust ideological category variable in the data source. Yet, it is also not clear that extremism as a result of government interference in religious institutions would lead only to attacks by religious groups. The interference may intensify grievances among all aspects of society, so we may see intensified terrorism beyond religious terrorist groups.

Conclusion

Does government interference in religion affect terrorism? Will increased government oversight of mosques, and the funding of hopefully mainstream clerics, lead to lessened extremism and a drop in terrorism? Or will this government involvement in religion intensify grievances against the state, proving counterproductive? This question has significant implications for the study of government religious policies and their impact on politics. It can also provide insights to policymakers hoping to develop effective counterterrorism strategies.

My findings suggest that government interference in religious institutions is not a useful counterterrorism strategy, as it seems to increase the threat from terrorism. A few types of government interference in religious institutions seem to increase terrorism, such as restricting the ordination of minority religious clergy, restricting religious political parties, and religious

requirements for holding office. At the same time, other policies seemed to inhibit terrorism, such as restricting minority religious figures from military bases and funding religious schools. Additionally, numerous policies had no apparent effect. Moreover, composite measure of each type of government interference—minority religious institutions, majority institutions, and government support—had little impact on terrorism. At the least, this suggests that counterterrorism is not a valid excuse for states infringing on religious freedom.

A more substantial and consistent effect, however, was apparent in changes in the extent of government religious interference. When government interference in majority religious institutions increased, so did terrorism. The finding held up to a variety of robustness checks, and had a substantively significant increase on deaths from terrorism in a country. This is rather significant, as this sort of policy change corresponds to the majority of examples policy and scholarly debates focus on: Middle Eastern states increasing control over mosques in an attempt to minimize terrorist threats.

The specific variables that were significant provide preliminary indications for how interference in religious institutions affects terrorism. The variables that were statistically significant in their increases on terrorism had to do with political access. Restrictions on the ability to form religious parties and religious requirements to hold office corresponded to increases in terrorism. These restrictions limit the ability of disfavored religious communities to participate in politics, and thus may intensify grievances. At the same time, government funding of religious schools corresponded to a decrease in terrorism. As such funding often goes to schools run by religious institutions, this may take the form of granting greater freedom to religious communities, decreasing their grievances.

Beyond this, it is admittedly difficult to determine how this increase in government interference affected terrorism. Intensified government control over and management of religious institutions could have increased the grievances of the majority religious community, angering them and inspiring them to turn to terrorist groups for expression. It may also have inadvertently strengthened extremist voices, if the government drove mainstream clerics critical of the regime from the public sphere. Future research could analyze this relationship more closely, to determine the nature of government policies' impact.

This article presents several implications for the study of religious policies' impact on politics. Most broadly, they show that government interference in religion can significantly shape the nature of a country's politics, in this case by increasing the threat from terrorism. This article also suggests the negative impact of interference in religion, as increased government interference in religious institutions can increase terrorism. At the same time, the findings present a complex picture. Government interference in religious institutions does seem to lead to more terrorism, but only in certain situations; some policies actually seem to lessen the threat from terrorism. Scholars analyzing the impact of government interference in religion would thus be advised to be wary of grand claims that would be stymied by complex findings such as those in this article.

The article also presents useful policy implications for counterterrorism strategies. Generally, increased control and involvement in religious institutions by the state is not an effective way to prevent extremism and terrorism. These policies are tempting—as a way to exclude extremists from religious communities—but may very well backfire and increase the threat from terrorism. Some discrete policies—namely funding for religious schools—may help in countering terrorism by increasing religious communities' goodwill towards the government. It

may be difficult to implement only effective policies, so governments may be better off promoting freedom of religion as a long-term strategy to combat terrorism.

Tables

	(1)	(2)	(3)
change_m	0.02		
	(0.06)		
L.logdeaths	0.54***	0.54***	0.54***
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)
EMAJISLA	0.12	0.11	0.12
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)
logland	-0.06+	-0.06+	-0.06+
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Int_maxyear	0.94***	0.93***	0.94***
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
polity2_	0.00	0.00	0.00
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
loggdp	-0.12***	-0.11***	-0.12***
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
logpop	0.18***	0.19***	0.18***
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Ethnic	0.33+	0.36+	0.33+
	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)
Religion	-0.13	-0.13	-0.13
	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)
change_n		0.23***	
		(0.07)	
change_l			-0.00
			(0.11)
Constant	-0.77	-0.87	-0.78
	(0.57)	(0.57)	(0.57)
Observations	944	944	944

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, +p<0.1

Figures Figure 1: Specific types of government interference and terrorism deaths

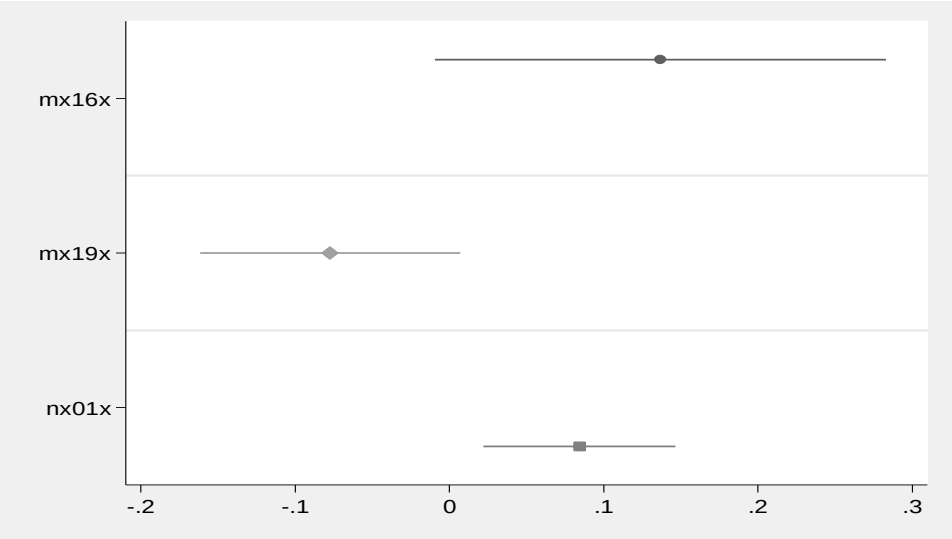

Figure 1a: Minority Restrictions and Majority Restrictions

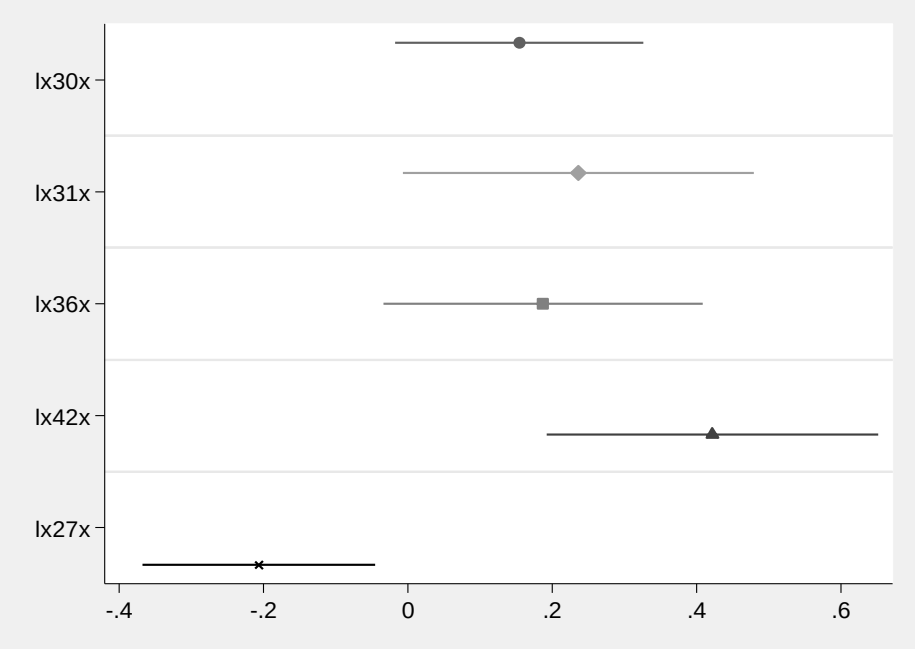

Figure 1b: Government support and terrorism deaths

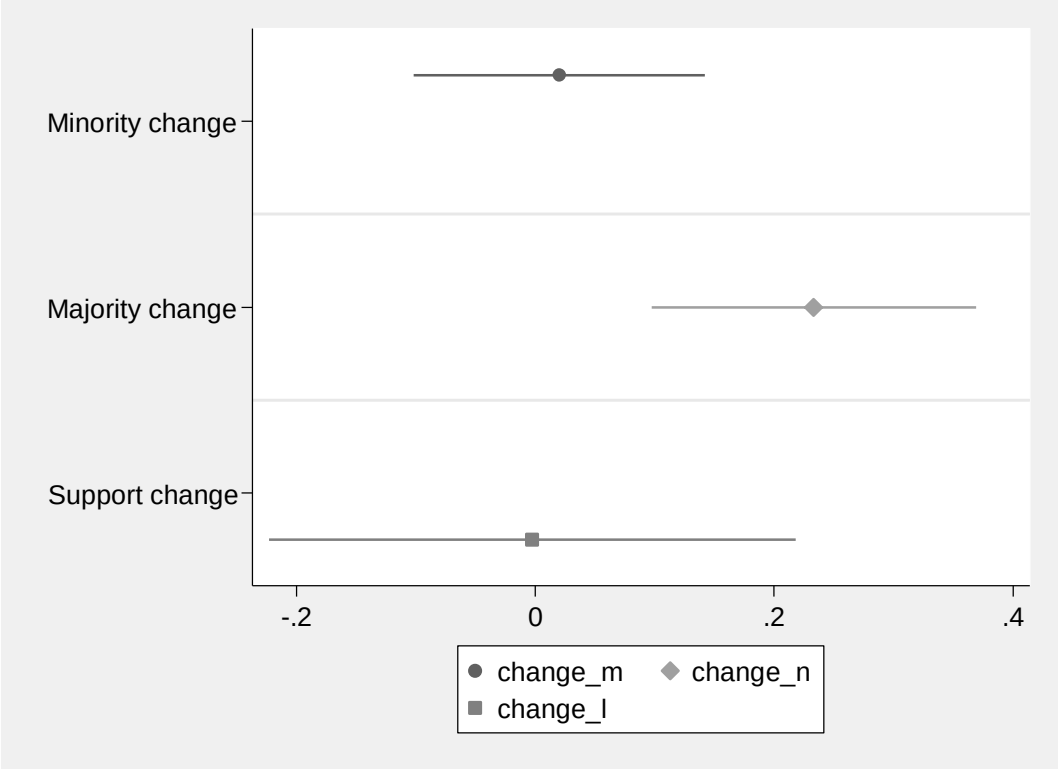

Figure 2: Changes in government policy and terrorism deaths

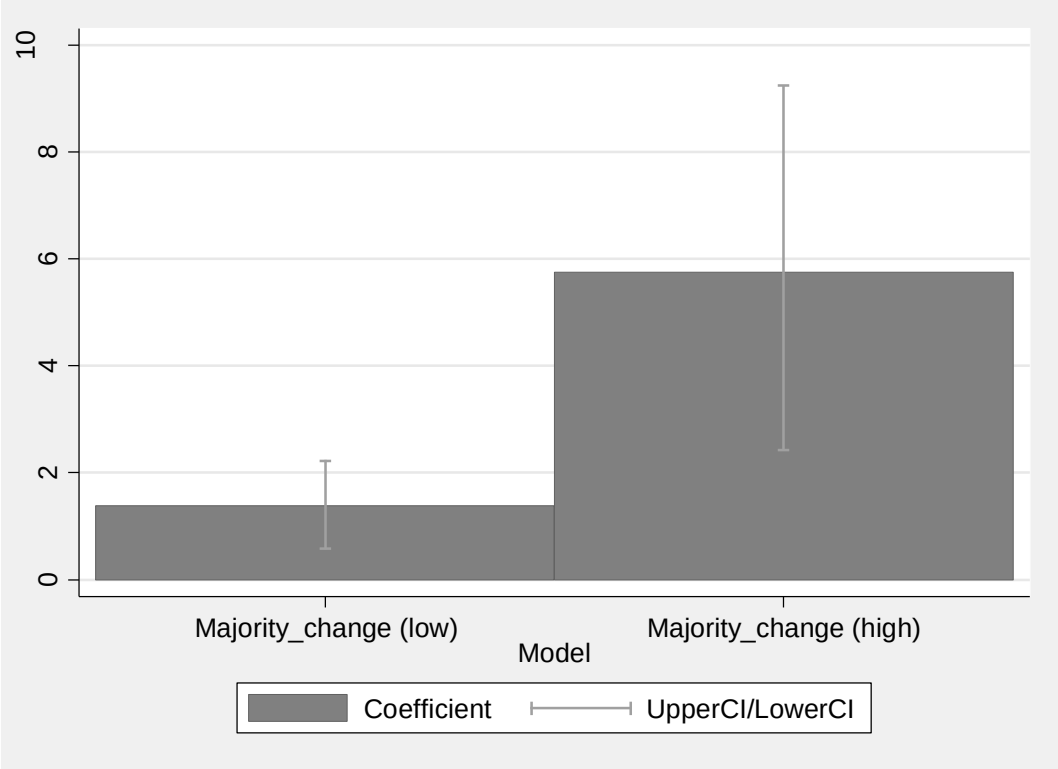

Figure 3: Substantive effect of changes in majority religious institutions

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