Taming the Gods: How Religious Conflict Shapes State Repression

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Abstract

Despite a robust literature on general forms of state repression, the determinants of religious repression remain unclear. This article argues that a regime's experience with religious conflict will lead it to be more repressive of religious groups within its territory for three primary reasons. Religious conflict increases the behavioral threat posed by religious groups, lowers the cost of repressing these communities, and evokes vivid memories of past religious violence that underscore the role of the state in taming religion to maintain social order. New, cross-national data on religious conflict and repression from 1990 to 2009 show that religious conflict has a significant and positive effect on the level of religious repression for the time period under investigation, expanding the types and severity of government restrictions on religion in a country. Our findings point to the importance of studying the causes and nature of negative sanctions against religious communities, specifically.

Keywords

religious violence, political repression, civil wars, human rights

The Algerian civil war stands out as one of most violent conflicts of the post-Cold War era. For over a decade, Islamist rebel groups and state security forces regularly employed ruthless tactics against one another and civilians, evidenced by the massacre of entire villages and a death toll of more than 50,000 people (Kurtz 1999,

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106). Scholars, policy makers, and journalists have understandably paid a great deal of attention to this brutality (Addi 1998; Kalyvas 1999; Martinez 2000). Relatively less notice, however, has been taken of the increased civil rights restrictions that markedly characterized the Algerian government's consolidation of authority toward the conclusion of and shortly after the civil war.

One particularly notable area in which the state intensified its control was religion. In 2005, for instance, the regime stepped up its regulation of Islamic education and established a governmental body guiding Quranic education and the hiring of religious teachers. This built on a 2001 law that required government-approved Imams in mosques. The Algerian authorities also began to provide funds for mosques and Imam salaries.

Government restrictions on religion, however, were not restricted to the majority religious community in the country. They also extended to non-Muslim religious groups. In 2006, for example, the regime passed Ordinance 06-03, which limits the ability of non-Muslim religious groups to practice in public, strengthened punishments of proselytism to Muslims, and restricted the importation of Christian religious materials (U.S. Department of State 2005, 2007).

This example points to questions for scholars of both religious politics and political repression. Does a regime's experience with religious conflict lead it to be more repressive of religious groups? More broadly, does the type of conflict a regime faces affect the type of repression it enacts?

Despite the increased role of religion in global politics (Casanova 1994; Fox and Sandler 2004; Toft, Philpott, and Shah 2011) and the steady increase in government restrictions on religion over the past few decades (Grim and Finke 2010; Sarkissian 2015), scholars have paid relatively little attention to such questions. This neglect is due to, at least, two reasons. The first is theoretical. An extensive literature has developed on state repression, but certain types of persecution remain understudied (Davenport, Mueller, and Johnston 2005). Most notably, large-scale manifestations of repression have taken precedence over less obvious negative sanctions, such as legal restrictions that prohibit conversion or those that limit proselytization by specific faith communities. Furthermore, scholars have largely overlooked religion in favor of other ideational factors, such as race and ethnicity (Wald and Wilcox 2006; Philpott 2009). The second challenge is empirical. Until recently, data on religious violence and government restrictions of religion have been difficult to obtain, hindering our ability to test theoretical models and draw meaningful inferences.

This article addresses both gaps. Leveraging insights from religious studies scholars and the literatures on state repression in sociology and political science, we point to three complementary mechanisms that help explain why religious conflict leads to a greater probability of religious repression. Religious conflict increases the behavioral threat posed by religious groups, lowers the cost of repressing these communities, and evokes vivid memories of past religious violence that underscore the role of the state in taming religion to maintain social order. These factors make leaders

more likely to enact religiously repressive policies to both address the immediate threat to their authority and forestall future challenges to their rule.

We test these claims through a quantitative analysis of new, cross-national data on religious civil wars and repression from 1990 to 2009. A religious civil war refers to an armed dispute between state security forces and nonstate actors in which at least one party mobilizes supporters along religious lines or explicitly issues religious demands, such as to create a state ruled by religious law.[1] In keeping with recent studies on religious violence, we argue that religion plays a more active or central role in conflict when combatants fight for religious goals than when they merely organize along confessional lines (Pearce 2005; Toft 2006, 2007; Svensson 2007). To measure these dynamics, we draw on Svensson's (2007) and Toft's (2007) data sets on religious civil wars and other standard reference works, including the Conflict Encyclopedia.

We focus exclusively on religious civil wars, rather than another type of religious violence, in our empirical analysis for three reasons. First, because civil wars involve an explicit incompatibility between dissident and government forces, they offer a relatively straightforward type of religious violence to observe. Second, they represent an increasingly prevalent and destructive form of religious violence (Juergensmeyer 2003; Fox 2004; Toft 2007, 2011). Third, previous studies that explore the connection between religious conflict and repression also focus on this type of violence (Fox 2002, 2004; Canetti et al. 2010; Grim and Finke 2010; Akbaba and Taydas 2011; Basedau et al. 2017; Basedau, Pfeiffer, and Vüllers 2016). This, therefore, enables a direct comparison between our findings and past research.

We draw on data from the Religion and State data set to evaluate state repression of religion, which we define as the nonviolent suppression of civil and political rights related to religion by a government.[2] This can involve a wide variety of government policies, actions, and legal codes, including "restrictions on religion's political role; restrictions on religious institutions; restrictions on religious practices; and other forms of regulation, control and restrictions" (Fox 2015, 5).

Consistent with our prediction, we find that religious conflict has a significant and positive effect on the level of religious repression for the time period under investigation, expanding the types and severity of government restrictions on religion in a country. These results hold up under numerous control variables and robustness checks.

Understanding religious repression is important because these coercive measures have been shown to influence a number of other political and social outcomes. Several studies, for instance, suggest a connection between religious repression and restrictions on additional freedoms (Farr 2008; Grim and Finke 2010; Marshall and Shea 2011; Sarkissian 2012). Another strand of research demonstrates that when religious repression is high, a country's economy is often weak (Grim 2008; Malloch 2008; Grim, Clark, and Snyder 2014). Still other scholars suggest that government regulation of religion is significantly correlated with various indicators of militarization and conflict, as well as humanitarian issues such as refugee crises (Grim and

Finke 2010; Henne 2012a, 2013; Philpott 2013; Kolbe and Henne 2014). Consequently, our findings have significant implications for the study of both religious politics and political order, more broadly.

Our article proceeds in five parts. In the first, we discuss previous studies that investigate the link between religious repression and armed conflict. This literature primarily focuses on how repression leads to political violence, rather than the reverse relationship. In the second section, we present our argument for why we should expect religious conflict to be a strong predictor of negative sanctions against religious communities. In the third and fourth sections, we discuss our research design and findings, respectively. The fifth section summarizes our robustness checks. We consider the broader implications of our study in the sixth, and concluding, section.

Previous Research on Religious Repression and Armed Conflict

The relationship between religious repression and armed conflict has emerged as an increasingly important field of study over the past decade. This burgeoning literature focuses primarily on the consequences of suppressing religious communities rather than the origins of such policies. Of particular debate has been the impact of religious repression on conflict initiation. Scholarship on this question typically advances one of the three positions.

The first argues that the repression of religious communities increases the likelihood of violence. Basedau, Pfeiffer, and Vüllers (2016), for instance, contend that grievances over religious discrimination help dissidents overcome collective action problems and, thus, make rebellion more likely (see also Fox, James, and Li 2009; Basedau et al. 2011). In support of these claims, they find that the risk of armed conflict more than doubled in developing countries between 1990 and 2010 when a religious community reported feelings of persecution. Akbaba and Taydas (2011), similarly, report religious discrimination increased the likelihood of armed rebellion by ethnoreligious minority groups between 1990 and 2003. And, Saiya and Scime (2015) show a relationship between restrictions on religious freedom and an increased number of faith-based terrorist incidents in a global sample of countries post-2001.

A second strand of research proposes the opposite causal claim. Hendrix and Saleyhan (2016), for example, argue that post-Cold War African regimes are more likely to suppress ethnically or religiously motivated dissidents than other types of opposition because they view such challenges as especially threatening to their support base. Sarkissian (2015) finds a connection between low-intensity religious violence in nondemocracies, namely, acts of intimidation and harassment, and state discrimination of religion. And, Grim and Finke (2010) argue that religious repression not only increases religious persecution, but also that religious tensions in society can increase religious repression.

A third set of studies draws attention to intervening factors that bolster or constrain the influence of religious repression on political violence. For instance, Fox (2002, 2004) suggests that religious grievances are linked to rebellion only when mediated by demands for autonomy. Basedau et al. (2017) finds that state discrimination of religion increases the grievances of a faith community, but not necessarily the likelihood of armed conflict. Canetti et al. (2010) note that in Israel grievances led to support for violence only when religious actors framed these disadvantages in provocative terms. And, still others argue that the risk of armed conflict increases when religious differences are reinforced by other identity differences, especially ethnicity (Stewart 2008; Selway 2011).

The above scholarship is to be commended for drawing attention to and advancing our understanding of an often-overlooked form of political repression. Nevertheless, the mixed findings suggest that the link between religious repression and armed conflict requires further study.

We suggest three ways, in particular, to advance this debate. The first involves expanding our theoretical focus. With the exception of the second group of studies discussed above, prior research primarily focuses on the motivations and behavior of dissidents. This is helpful in understanding the strategies and tactics of religious combatants. Broadening our scope to take into account, the interdependent strategies of state actors and dissidents, however, can help us analyze government incentives and constraints to repress religious groups in the first place.

The second involves more explicitly connecting studies of religious repression and conflict with studies of general political repression. As we discuss below, research into political repression points to several factors that help explain why states implement repressive policies. By combining these with insights on religious violence, we can leverage the strengths of both research programs to improve our understanding of each area.

A third way to advance our understanding of the link between religious repression and conflict is to more directly confront the inference problems associated with observational data. Existing studies point to the challenges posed by simultaneity bias and selection effects, in particular. The scholarship on religious repression would, therefore, benefit from leveraging the statistical methods used by scholars of other types of political violence to address these biases, such as instrumental variable analysis, treatment effects models, or propensity score methods.

In short, our current understanding of the relationship between religious repression and armed conflict suffers from important theoretical and methodological limitations. Most notably, we know too little about the motivations of governments to repress religious groups in the first place; there exists too sharp of a divide between studies on general political repression and religious persecution; and our empirical analysis needs to more directly address inference problems associated with observational data. We tackle each of these challenges in this study in order to advance the ongoing debate about the link between religious conflict and repression.

Why Religious Conflict Increases Religious Repression

Our argument builds on the work of a small but growing cohort of scholars interested in the determinants of religious repression. Their research, the majority of which adopts a rationalist approach, points to the importance of considering the costs and benefits leaders perceive repression to offer. For example, Sarkissian (2015) highlights how authoritarian leaders find the suppression of religious groups to be a particularly powerful tool for limiting dissent and maintaining political control. Likewise, Gill (2007) discusses leaders' incentives to repress religious groups or implement protections for religious freedom. Additionally, Fox (2000) points toward the importance of religious dynamics in understanding state policies discriminating against religioethnic groups.

We expand on these insights by investigating how a regime's experience with religious conflict influences its decision to repress or not. Civil war is a factor commonly used to explain other forms of state repression (Poe and Tate 1994; Davenport and Armstrong 2004; Carey, Gibney, and Poe 2010). However, recent work on the determinants of religious repression pays remarkably little attention to a government's experience with religious uprisings. This is especially surprising given the prevalence of violence in recent years. We draw on the rich scholarship on general political repression to address this omission.

State Response to Armed Conflict

Over the past four decades, the systematic study of state repression has advanced considerably. Scholars have identified a wide variety of coercive activities used by governments against those within their territorial jurisdiction (Davenport and Inman 2012). And, they have pointed to a range of factors that influence this decision to repress or not. Studies have, for instance, investigated the impact of economic development, regime type, population growth, and international treaties on the decision of elites to engage in repressive behavior (Henderson 1993; Poe and Tate 1994; Davenport 1995; Hafner-Burton and Tsutsui 2007). Others have explored the relationship between identity-based factors, especially race and ethnicity, and political repression (Walker and Poe 2002; Lee et al. 2004; Jakobsen and De Soysa 2009; Davenport, Soule, and Armstrong 2011).

This past research on general forms of political repression provides three important insights into how violent challenges can influence a regime's response. First, the behavioral threat posed by dissidents stands out as one of the most consistent predictors of the type and extent of state repression (Gupta, Singh, and Sprague 1993; Davenport 1995, 2007; Moore 1998).[3] The more organized and confrontational the tactics of dissidents, the more likely the state is to respond with negative sanctions (Earl, Soule, and McCarthy 2003; Soule and Davenport 2009; Earl 2011). This is because more aggressive challengers, especially those that rely on violent tactics, are perceived to entail the greatest danger to the political system. They threaten the lives

of civilians and undermine confidence in the government's ability to provide societal peace and order (Mason and Krane 1989). Moreover, political elites may interpret bellicose dissent as evidence that members of a particular community are well organized and able to also mount future challenges. For these reasons, then, states are likely to respond to violent uprisings with repressive tactics.

Second, conflict in society can increase the opportunity for repression. Repressive actions are, of course, never without a price (Moore 2000; Shellman 2006; Davenport 2007). Most notably, they require enforcement, which can be costly in terms of both personnel and funds. In addition, they may backfire and lead to domestic criticism and popular unrest. Finally, because many types of rights, including religious, are protected under international law, repression can damage diplomatic ties and lead to potential sanctions (Hathaway 2002; Hafner-Burton 2005; Sarkissian 2015, 15). Despite these costs, however, leaders can also benefit from repression. In addition to the obvious advantage of weakening or silencing dissent, successfully levied sanctions can increase a government's legitimacy by demonstrating its ability to maintain safety and stability (Gurr 1988; Davenport 1995, 687).

Third, political elites often base their repressive strategies on their memory of recent and/or past, but acute, threats to their rule (Gurr 1988; Davenport 1996). Previous state-challenger interactions suggest strategic options are most successful at deterring particular threats (Tilly 1978; R. J. Goldstein 2001). And, these ideas can become embedded in formal and informal political institutions (J. Goldstein and Keohane 1993).

The above insights point to general expectations for government repression in the face of violent challenges to their rule. Armed conflict increases the threat to leaders, decreases the costs of repression, and evokes memories of powerful opposition movements, all of which make repression more likely. Why might we expect distinct effects from religious conflict? Why might we expect religious conflict to lead states to repress religious groups, in particular?

Religious Conflict and Threat Perception

We argue that religious conflict increases the likelihood of repression because of the perceived severity of religious violence. A number of studies have found that religious violence can be particularly dramatic. This includes historical studies of religion and conflict that highlight the tendency of religious groups to frame their struggle as a "cosmic war" that necessitates extreme acts against opponents (Rapoport 1984; Juergensmeyer 2003). Several studies have also found that religious aspects of civil wars can make such struggles longer, bloodier, and more difficult to resolve than other types of conflict (Fox 2004; Toft 2007; Svensson 2007; Hassner 2009). And numerous others have found that religious justifications can lead to particularly severe terrorist attacks and campaigns (Hoffman 1995; Cronin 2002; Asal and Rethemeyer 2008; Henne 2012b).

In this article, we hold with these studies on the severity of religious violence. But we also draw attention to how political elites' attitudes toward religious conflict shapes their understanding and response to such violence. Specifically, we argue that religious conflict is prone to trigger elites' suspicion, and subsequent repression, of religious communities due to what religious studies scholars refer to as the "myth of religious violence."

Described most notably by William Cavanaugh, the myth of religious violence is a founding assumption of the modern state system that construes religion as an irrational and bellicose force the state must tame in order to preserve social harmony (Cavanaugh 2009). Its roots date back to the "wars of religion" of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Europe and subsequent transfer of power from the church to the state. Pointing to a century of anarchy and carnage, political elites constructed a narrative that presented the early modern state as a peacemaker that could tame the disruptive influence of religion by relegating it to the private sphere (Cavanaugh 2009, 10).

The myth of religious violence, however, is not restricted to the past; it continues to permeate many aspect of modern political order. Most notably, it underlies of the core institutions of modern states. For example, it has frequently been invoked by the US Supreme Court to justify decisions on the Establishment Clause since the 1940s (Cavanaugh 2009, 185-86). In a similar way, we suggest that the myth of religious violence shapes political elites' reactions to contemporary religious violence, especially civil wars.

When rebels draw on religion during armed conflicts, they call up images of an era characterized by a century of chaos and bloodshed. The evocativeness of this violence, therefore, draws attention to religious divisions in society more than at other moments. The public debate that emerges around these conflicts also increases the level of religious enmity (Baumgartner and Jones 2002). This becomes increasingly pronounced the more central a role religion plays in a conflict. As religion becomes more salient, it reinforces the idea that combatants are fighting for religious—not political, economic, or social—reasons, and consequently, political elites construe dissidents as posing a substantial threat to both domestic and international order (Toft 2007).

State Response to Religious Conflict

The above insights, combined with our knowledge of general political repression, point to three complementary mechanisms that explain why religious conflict can increase the likelihood of negative sanctions against religious communities. First, it increases the level of threat political elites construe from religion (Toft 2007; Hendrix and Salehyan 2016). Religious conflict leads to a greater probability of religious repression because the seriousness of these challenges highlights that faith communities present a credible and imminent threat to political order.

Even during periods of stability, elites often remain suspicious of faith communities' ability to serve as important sites of political activity, including dissent (Ford 1993; Tarrow 1998; Warner 2000; Wittenberg 2006). This has led some analysts to conclude that the potential for dissent alone is a primary reason that political elites target religion (Sarkissian 2015).

Yet, religious groups are not the only civil society actors characterized by the above traits. A broad range of advocacy and interest groups—ranging from labor unions to environmental organizations to civil rights movements—possesses the will and means to engage in contentious collective action. And, states will not necessarily respond in a uniform way to each of these nonstate challengers. Rather, decision makers prioritize threats and respond accordingly (Arreguín-Toft 2005, 38). The behavioral threat model, therefore, provides useful insight into why elites at certain times and in certain places feel more pressure to regulate religious groups than during other periods or in different locales.

Second, religious conflict increases the opportunity for repression by reducing the perceived cost to political elites. We argue this is especially true for religious conflicts due to the above-mentioned myth of religious violence. This shift in attention does not necessarily change people's understanding of the seriousness of the issue, but it does change decision makers' calculations about the willingness of allies to become involved and opponents to remain silent (Baumgartner and Jones 2002, 27-28). Most importantly, it may lead elites to anticipate less domestic criticism because they believe that the majority of citizens also view the taming of religion as a necessary evil to restore an idealized separation between religion and public life (Esposito 1999, 258; Gutkowski 2011, 349). This expectation can create momentum for repression as elites predict the cost of new policies to be low.

Third, religious conflict constrains which strategies political elites consider as a response to such violence. The previous two mechanisms point to how episodes of religious violence alter the cost–benefit calculation to repress or not. It is also important, however, to consider the broader repertoire of sociopolitical control structures that leaders can select from to establish and maintain political order. Of particular note for this study is the manner in which ideas about religion influence the organizational design of the state's coercive apparatus. Drawing on similar insights discussed above regarding the myth of religious violence, we argue that negative sanctions against religion are a well-established response by modern states to armed religious conflict.

In sum, religious conflict increases the likelihood of religious repression in three significant ways. Episodes of religious violence influence the interest-based calculations of political leaders by increasing the level of threat construed from religion while at the same time reducing the perceived cost of repression against faith communities. In addition, religious conflict constrains which strategic options political elites consider as a response in the first place. These mechanisms can theoretically influence government response to a number of types of religious violence, including interstate disputes and terrorist activities. However, as discussed above, our

empirical focus is on religious civil wars because they are a straightforward type of religious violence to observe, they are increasingly prevalent, and they offer a direct comparison to previous scholarship on the link between religious violence and repression. It is this relationship that we investigate in the following section.

Research Design

We test our argument through a quantitative analysis of cross-national data on religious civil wars and repression from 1990 to 2009.[4] Our data set includes all intrastate, armed conflicts identified in the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Data Set (v.4-2013) for the time period under investigation. Our data on religious mobilization and demands are an extension of Svensson's (2007) *Fighting with Faith* data set (based on the Uppsala Conflict Data Program) and Toft's (2007) study of religious civil wars.

We draw on the Religion and State data set for our dependent variable. We use an additive index of three of the composite measures included in the index, *SCX* (official restrictions on religions), *MX* (restrictions on minority religions), and *NX* (restrictions placed on religious practice). These variables are the sum of a series of variables from the Religion and State data set. Our index is the sum of these three variables set to 0 to 10 using the min–max method. We also use a variety of other measures of religious repression in robustness checks, including the three Religion and State variables separately, an unscaled version of our composite, and an alternate version of our composite in which we scale each component variable first before combining it into the religious repression variable. Additionally, we create an alternate index based on the Pew Research Center's religious restrictions index.[5]

Measuring Religious Conflict

Our measure of religious armed conflict, *Religious Conflict*, incorporates two components, religious mobilization and religious demands.[6] Religious Conflict is a four-level ordinal variable made up of these two aspects of religious conflict: 0 indicates there was no religious conflict, 1 indicates religious mobilization, 2 indicates religious demands, and 3 indicates both religious mobilization and demands. In keeping with recent studies on religious violence, we argue that religion plays a more central role in civil wars when combatants fight for demands anchored in a faith tradition than when they merely organize along confessional lines (Pearce 2005; Toft 2006, 2007; Svensson 2007). This is because religious demands represent a central incompatibility of the conflict, whereas mobilization indicates that combatants identify with a specific tradition, but not that they are necessarily fighting for a religious cause. We also include dichotomous measures of religious mobilization and religious demands in alternate models and an alternate calculation of Religious Conflict that does not rank religious demands above religious mobilization in a robustness check.

The first component of Religious Conflict, religious mobilization, indicates whether or not the combatant group mobilized supporters along religious lines in that year. Recruitment strategies comprise of group leaders making promises or appeals to shared religious identities or beliefs, the use of religious symbols and rhetoric to promote a cause, or the recruitment, or attempts to recruit, from sacred spaces (e.g., mosques, churches, and temples). Examples include the mixed strategy of payments and calls to jihad used by the Armed Islamic Group to enlist disenfranchised youth during the Algerian civil war and the heroic myths and magical rites employed by the Kamajor group in Sierra Leone. Groups that made appeals to a shared ethnic identity (e.g., the Karen National Liberation Army and the Balochistan Liberation Army) or a Marxist-Leninist ideology (e.g., the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army and the People's Liberation Army of Manipur) without also making reference to religious beliefs or practices were not coded as mobilizing along religious lines.

In terms of alliances, we are primarily interested in the interaction of rebel groups with other actors in the conflict or external sources of aid. On the former, we consider a group to mobilize along religious lines if it forms, or at least observably tries to form, coalitions with other rebels groups in the conflict that share, even nominally, a religious identity or objective. In addition, an organization is considered as having attempted religious mobilization if it seeks and/or receives support from foreign sources that share, even nominally, a religious identity or objective. Examples of the former include the coalition of Islamic rebel groups, primarily led by Ansar Dine, which formed in northern Mali starting in 2012, and of the latter include groups like the Allied Democratic Forces in Uganda, which has received foreign assistance from the government of Sudan, and al-Shabaab, which has accepted financial support from al-Qaeda. Rebel groups that received transnational support from diaspora communities based on ethnic, rather than religious, ties, such as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, or communist organizations abroad, such as the New People's Army in the Philippines, were coded as not religiously mobilized. Because we restrict our analysis to the post-Cold War era, relatively few groups in our study fall into the latter category.

While several cross-national studies have explored the use of ethnic identities to recruit members and form alliances, we remain unaware of any that specifically isolate those cases that draw explicitly on religion for the time period under investigation (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Forsberg 2008; Eck 2009; Cederman, Wimmer, and Min 2010). Therefore, we independently coded each case based on information found in a variety of standard reference materials, including case histories, the UCDP Conflict Encyclopedia, and the START Terrorist Organization Profiles project.[7]

The second component measures whether a combatant group issued religious demands as part of its struggle. This refers to groups that explicitly announced aspirations to create a state, or a region within the state, ruled according to a specific religious tradition. Examples include the Forces of the Caucasus Emirates, which

pursued their stated goal of creating an Islamic state in the region, and the Lord's Resistance Army, which announced an objective to create a theocratic state in Uganda based on the Ten Commandments. In contrast, groups that fought for the self-determination of a particular ethnic group, like the Kurdish People's Defense Force, or to establish a Marxist state, like the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army in northeast India, were coded as not issuing a religious demand.

To measure this variable, we drew on recent studies by Svensson (2007) and Toft (2007), which examine how religious objectives influence various civil war outcomes. Since these data sets only cover cases up to 2004, we updated information for missing cases using the same sources cited for our coding of religious mobilization.

Control Variables

We used a variety of control variables to account for alternative explanations and confounding factors. Many studies on conflict point to population size, economic development, size of the country, and ethnic diversity to explain the conflict; all of these factors would conceivably extend to religious conflict and may be better explanations for the level of religious repression. We therefore controlled for the size of the population, the gross domestic product, and the total amount of land in a country using World Bank data.[8] We also controlled for ethnic and religious fractionalization using data from Alesina et al. (2003).[9] The overall level of political repression may also affect specifically religious repression. Therefore, we include the country's level of political openness, using data from the Democracy and Dictatorship Revisited (DD) data set (Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland 2009). This data set is specifically designed for use in studies involving political violence.[10] Finally, the overall level of the conflict may affect both whether or not it is religious in nature and the level of religious repression, so we include the intensity of the conflict in the country, drawn from the database.[11]

We also used a variety of alternate variables in robustness checks. We use measures of regime type and political repression from Polity and the Political Terror Scale as alternatives to the DD.[12] Additionally, we use a dummy variable to indicate the country is in the Middle East to deal with potential confounding from this factor.

Methods

We analyze the data using an instrumental variable regression since there is a potential for simultaneity bias in the data.[13] That is, the extent of religious repression undoubtedly has some effect on whether or not a conflict in a country is religious—in addition to religious conflict's effects on religious repression—so the findings could be biased by reverse causality. We use rough terrain as an instrument. Influential studies have pointed to the role rough terrain in a country plays in fostering the conditions under which intrastate conflict breaks out (Fearon and Laitin 2003;
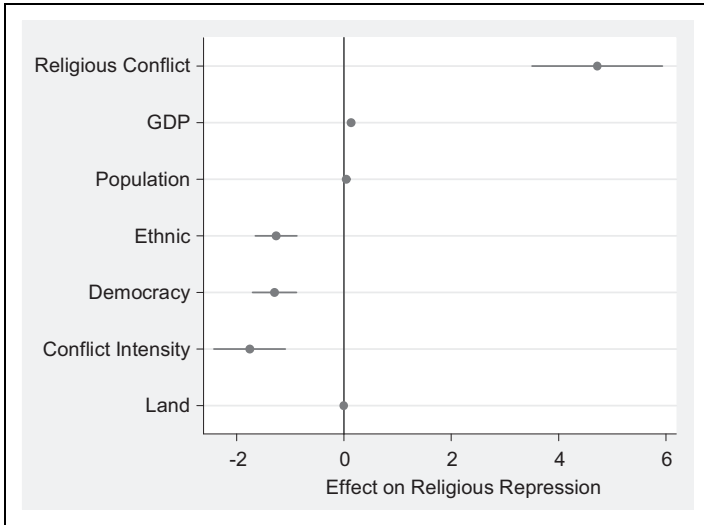
Figure 1. Effects of religious conflict and other variables on religious repression, 1990–2009.

Lujala, Gleditsch, and Gilmore 2005; Lacina 2006; Hegre and Sambanis 2006). It is difficult to imagine, however, how this could influence religious repression. In line with other studies, we use the log amount of mountainous land in a country to measure rough terrain. We also use the percentage of land that is forested, as this is a useful measure of rough terrain in some of the countries included in the study.[14]

Model 1 uses Religious Repression and Religious Conflict with the above model. Model 2 follows this specification but replaces Religious Conflict with Religious Demand. And model 3 replaces Religious Conflict with Religious Mobilization.

Findings

Our analysis indicates that there is a strong connection between whether or not a conflict is religious in nature and the extent of religious repression in a country. Conflicts that were more religious in nature were more likely to be associated with greater religious repression; this result held up under numerous model specifications.

Religious Conflict and its components—religious demands and religious mobilization—were significant at the .001 level, with a positive effect on religious repression. The coefficient for Religious Conflict was 4.7, the lowest of the models, indicating that an increase in the extent to which a conflict was religious corresponded to a statistically significant increase in a country's religious repression (see Figure 1 and Table 1). Both *Religious Demands* and *Religious Mobilization* were significant as well, indicating that each aspect of religious conflict, as well as their

Table 1. Effects of Religious Conflict on Religious Repression, 1990–2010.

	Model		
Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)
Religious conflict	4.72***		
	(.62)		
Gross domestic product	0.13***	0.18***	0.03
	(.02)	(.01)	(0.07)
Population	0.04	0.26***	−0.20**
	(.04)	(.03)	(0.06)
Ethnic	−1.26***	−0.76***	−1.94***
	(.20)	(.17)	(0.31)
Democracy	−1.30***	−1.24***	−1.36***
	(.21)	(.20)	(0.25)
Conflict intensity	−1.76***	−0.66***	−3.32***
	(.34)	(.13)	(0.73)
Land	−0.00	−0.00**	0.00
	(.00)	(.00)	(0.00)
Religious demand		5.69***	
		(.86)	
Religious mobilization			21.40***
			(3.11)
Constant	0.40	−3.53***	5.32***
	(.63)	(.41)	(1.58)
Observations	3,672	3,672	3,672

Note: Robust standard errors are given in parentheses.
*$p < .05$.
**$p < .01$.
***$p < .001$.

combination, contributed to an increase in countries' religious repression (see Online Supplemental Material).

The model also suggests striking substantive effects of religious conflict on religious repression. The coefficient of 4.7 indicates an increase in over four points on the religious repression measure. This can be difficult to interpret as we normalized the scores. But this is about the difference between Pakistan (with an average score of 4.7) and Norway (with a score of 1.1). Additionally, an alternate test using the raw additive scores for the religious repression index has a coefficient of 50, indicating an increase in the extent of religious conflict in a country corresponds to an increase in fifty different types of government policies that repress religious groups[15] (see Figure 2 and Table 2).

While the instrumental variable analysis is designed to minimize simultaneity bias, two prominent historical examples further clarify that religious violence often precedes religious repression. The first is a representative, or typical, case from our
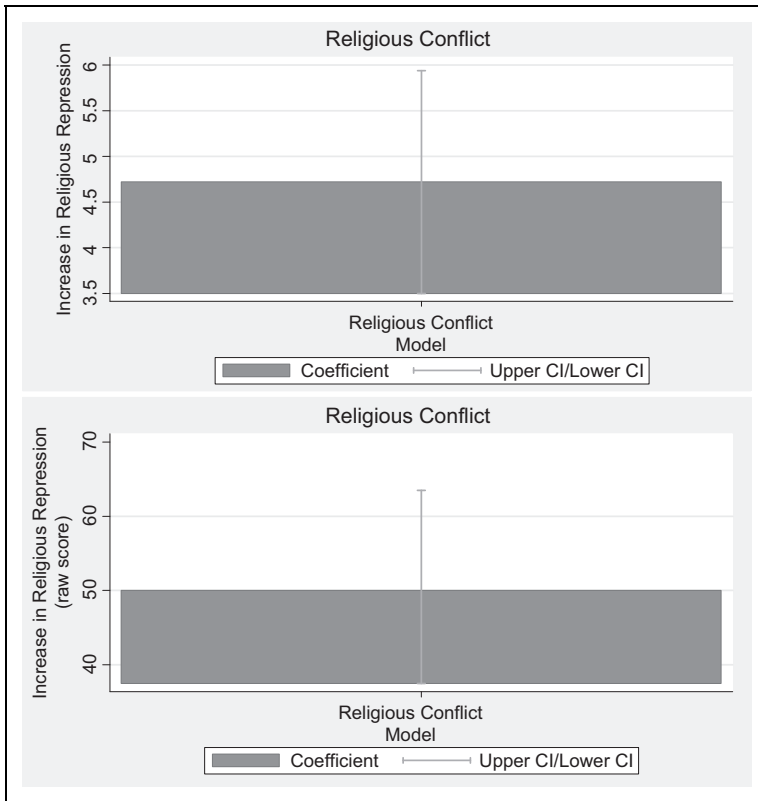
Figure 2. Substantive effects of religious conflict on religious repression, 1990–2009.

sample and concerns a major policy shift in Russia following the First Chechen War (1994–1996). Prior to that conflict, the Kremlin had progressively relaxed Soviet-era restrictions on religion (Arzt 2009). For example, a 1990 freedom of worship law passed by Mikhail Gorbachev granted the right to freely express and disseminate one's religious convictions in public. And, the 1993 Russian Constitution officially extended these rights to the citizens of the Russian Federation by guaranteeing freedom of religion. The insurgency in the North Caucuses, however, led to a sharp reversal of this pattern.

While the Chechen conflict began largely as a separatist, nationalist struggle, it took on a number of religious overtones by the mid-1990s (Hughes 2008; Byman 2013; Garner 2013). This included the framing of the conflict as a holy war by frontline rebel commanders and an influx of foreign fighters, a number of which had trained and maintained ties with Islamist groups, especially al-Qaeda (Vidino 2005; Rich and Conduit 2015). These religious dynamics, and their mobilizing power, were not lost on Russian authorities.

Table 2. Unscaled Version of Religious Repression, 1990–2009.

Variables	Unscaled Religious Repression
Religious conflict	50.54***
	(6.63)
Gross domestic product	1.43***
	(0.25)
Population	0.48
	(0.40)
Ethnic	−13.52***
	(2.11)
Democracy	−13.86***
	(2.24)
Conflict intensity	−18.82***
	(3.64)
Land	−0.00
	(0.00)
Constant	4.26
	(6.74)
Observations	3,672

Note: Robust standard errors are given in parentheses
*$p < .1$.
**$p < .05$.
***$p < .01$.

One year after the end of the conflict, the State Duma passed and Boris Yeltsin signed the *Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations* (the 1997 Law). This law strongly curtailed protections afforded by the Russian Constitution. In particular, the 1997 Law assigned a "special role" to the Russian Orthodox Church and prohibited religious groups from operating in the country unless they are officially registered with the state (Gunn 2009). This requirement has led to the legal dissolution of hundreds of religious communities, meaning they lost their right to assemble or to own property.

A similar pattern can be observed in an out-of-sample case: China following uprisings in Tibet and Xinjiang during the late 1980s. Prior to this unrest, the Communist Chinese Party (CCP) demonstrated a relatively relaxed stance toward religion, especially compared to previous periods (Potter 2003, 319-20). However, a surge in violence by Tibetan and Uighur dissidents, respectively, led Chinese officials to reevaluate this position. And, by 1991, the CCP Central Committee/State Council passed "Document No. 6," which increased regulatory control over all religious communities. In addition to curbing religious activities in Tibet and Xinjiang, this new policy was used to restrict Christian activities, especially those conducted by missionaries from Taiwan, by limiting proselytization, recruitment, fund-raising, and other activities in support of organized religion (Chan and Hunter

1995; Spiegel 1992). This case was not included in our data set because the religious conflict occurred prior to 1990, yet the same causal logic is present.

Robustness Checks

While our initial analysis supports the claim that political elites increase religious repression in response to the threat of religious conflict, we also ran numerous robustness checks to account for potential issues with our models.[16] Some, for example, may prefer alternate measures of political repression, such as the widely used Polity score or Political Terror Scores instead of the DD variable.

Another concern may be that religious conflicts have a stronger effect when they have occurred recently. To address this issue, we include a measure of the years since a religious conflict occurred and a measure of whether the conflict is ongoing. And we include a one-year lagged version of *Religious Repression* in one test and lag all explanatory and control variables in another robustness check to address other potential temporal effects.

Other robustness checks use alternate models. We use a random effects regression, a random effects instrumental variable regression, a fixed effects regression, and a Heckman selection model to address issues with the cross-sectional nature of the data and potential selection effects with states that did not experience a conflict. And, we use coarsened exact matching to preprocess the data and deal with potential bias. We use the results of the matching as weights in one check and in another model only include matched observations (Iacus, King, and Porro 2011).

We also use an alternate approach to address the potential of reverse causality. We first run a logit with the presence of conflict as the dependent variable and then use the results of this to predict the propensity for conflict.[17] We use this variable in a random effects model that includes only matched observations. Additionally, we run a robustness check using the alternate version of Religious Conflict discussed above. Finally, we run several robustness checks with the alternate dependent variables discussed above. This includes dichotomous measures of religious mobilization and religious demands, and an alternate calculation of Religious Conflict that does not rank religious demands above religious mobilization.

Our findings held up under over twenty robustness checks that test for these alternate model specifications, alternate calculations of religious repression, alternate instruments, and other possible issues with our main models. In twenty-eight robustness checks, the religious conflict variables remained significant at, a minimum, the .05 level with a positive effect on religious repression.[18]

Conclusion

This article highlights the important role religious conflict plays in influencing a country's level of religious repression. Countries in which rebel groups mobilized followers along religious lines or made religious demands tended to have higher levels

of religious repression than those in which combatants were leftist or solely ethnonationalist in nature. This was the case even when general political repression, demographic factors, and the overall level of conflict in the country were taken into account.

Moreover, while religious conflict and repression are most likely characterized by an endogenous process, religious repression still had a significant, independent effect on future acts of repression. We see this finding as complementing, rather than undermining, past studies that make the opposite causal claim (Akbaba and Taydas 2011; Saiya and Scime 2015; Basedau, Pfeiffer, and Vüllers 2016). Since dissident and government behavior is interdependent, it is important to examine the motivations and consequences of both sets of actors.

Our findings also suggest several important implications for how we think about political repression more broadly. As scholars such as Davenport (1996) have argued, both socioeconomic conditions and the history of social unrest in a country contribute to the level of repression a government undertakes. Our findings extend these insights, demonstrating that the specific nature of that history affects the form of political repression. When unrest is religious in nature, regimes are likely to focus their repressive activities on religious groups and religious activities. These government policies are viewed as effective at minimizing the risk of future dissidents emerging from these social groups.

Additionally, our study suggests that while religious repression follows a similar logic to broader forms of state persecution, it is also connected to a specific type of social unrest, religious conflict. This suggests a path for future research into how distinct types of conflict and social unrest—such as differing motivations or makeups of social groups contending with the regime—produce distinct types of political repression (Fox 2000, 2013).

Finally, our findings provide some insights into the role of religion in contemporary politics. Religion is a powerful mobilizing and motivating force, so much so that the use of religion by a combatant group—even if combatant groups only appealed to religion instrumentally to gain followers—can produce a distinct response from a regime. Additionally, our article suggests the full import of religious conflict cannot be understood without analyzing its impact on political institutions. Studies that focus on the strategic manner in which groups use religious arguments to frame their contentious politics and the interaction between religious contention and the state may, therefore, be particularly well positioned to advance the study of religious politics (see Philpott 2007; Hassner 2011).

Our study is, of course, not without its limitations. While we specified the causal mechanisms that would connect religious conflict and religious repression, we did not directly test them in the quantitative models. Qualitative studies or more detailed quantitative analyses could examine whether these mechanisms best account for the link between religious conflict and repression. In terms of the empirics, we are, unfortunately, limited by the availability of data. Because the systematic collection of information on government repression remains a relatively recent endeavor, we are unable to test our claims beyond the time period

under investigation. That being said, understanding the dynamics of religious repression since 1990 is very important for scholars and policy makers grappling with contemporary world politics.

Finally, some limitations of our analysis have to do with the scope of the study. In terms of time horizons, it is plausible that the effects of religious conflict on religious repression may spread out over multiple years. Unfortunately, religious repression as measured by the Religion and State data set does not vary significantly within countries across the time period of the study, so we are limited in our abilities to expand this currently. In addition, due to limited data, we were not able to control for politicized religious groups that made demands but did not engage in violence. We think this points to an exciting avenue of future research that investigates whether repression results from perceived or actual threats or both. Likewise, our restricted scope conditions mean that Islamist groups are disproportionately represented in our study. As such, there are insufficient data to ascertain whether our findings involve elites' views of all religions or particular faith traditions, such as Islam. Our results did hold up even when accounting for conflicts in the Middle East, but future studies could provide further insight into the decision-making process of elites facing specific types of religious groups. Until more data become available, therefore, our claims should be interpreted cautiously.

Still, our findings point to important implications for policy makers attempting to formulate responses to religious conflicts or alleviate religious persecution around the world. Since religious repression appears related to earlier episodes of religious violence, peacekeeping and postconflict reconstruction programs may need to do more than address security challenges or distribute aid to affected populations if they hope to secure a lasting peace. They could also encourage religious outreach and interfaith dialogue programs to reduce societal tensions. Moreover, they could develop mechanisms to monitor current and future restrictions on religious freedom. This would have the double benefit of reducing the likelihood of conflict recurrence and religious discrimination.

Our argument and findings also suggest that those concerned with a global increase in negative sanctions against religion, more broadly, need to consider both political elites' incentives to repress and the institutional constraints within which those decisions are made. Policies that merely attempt to raise the short-term costs of repression are likely to fall short in countries with a history of religious unrest. Rather, individual states or the international community need to also support endogenous development within those states' institutions (Greif and Laitin 2004; Mahoney and Thelen 2010). This might involve support for reformers within a regime or grassroots movements that can help to reshape the political context. However, since institutional change is often subtle and gradual, our study provides a somber outlook regarding the persistence of religious repression in the near future.

Acknowledgments

to an outstanding team of undergraduate research assistants supported through the University of California, Berkeley's Undergraduate Research Apprentice Program.

Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. By religion, we mean a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things (Durkheim 2008). Following convention in the field, we restrict our analysis to the major world religions and their major subgroups (e.g., Sunni or Shia Islam and Protestantism or Roman Catholicism).
2. This definition is in line with recent studies on religious repression (see Grim and Finke 2010; Sarkissian 2015; Fox 2015).
3. Much of the research on the behavioral threat model has focused on police response to protestors, but a number of studies have shown that its core findings also apply to state efforts to control dissidents more broadly (Gupta, Singh, and Sprague 1993; Davenport 1995, 2007; Moore 1998).
4. All calculations performed in Stata 13 and Stata 12. Instrumental variable models were run using the "ivreg2" package (Baum, Schaffer, and Stillman 2015). Graphs were produced using the "coefplot" package (see Jann 2015).
5. We chose variables from the Religion and State data set that matched the Pew Research Center, removing the Pew Research Center's focus on government favoritism. We are unable to use the Pew Research Center index itself as it only covers 2007–2013, so there are insufficient observations overlapping with our measure of religious conflict. More information on all alternate measures of religious repression is available in Online Supplemental Material.
6. We do not include other types of religious violence, such as faith-based terrorist incidents, for the reasons we have previously discussed.
7. The UCDP conflict Encyclopedia is accessible at http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/database/. The START database can be found at http://www.start.umd.edu/tops/.
8. World Bank data are available at http://data.worldbank.org/.
9. Fractionalization data are available at http://www.anderson.ucla.edu/faculty_pages/romain.wacziarg/papersum.html.
10. Democracy and Dictatorship data are available at https://sites.google.com/site/joseantoniocheibub/datasets/democracy-and-dictatorship-revisited.

11. Data are available at http://ucdp.uu.se/downloads. More information can also be found in Gleditsch et al. (2002) and Pettersson and Wallensteen (2015).
12. Polity data are available at http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscrdata.html. Political Terror Scale data are available at http://www.politicalterrorscale.org/Data/. Further information is also available from Gibney et al. (2015).
13. Further information on the results of the instrumental variable models and diagnostic checks is available in Online Supplemental Material.
14. Mountainous land data are from http://web.stanford.edu/group/ethnic/publicdata/public data.html. Forested land data are from the World Bank (see Online Supplemental Material for more details on diagnostic checks and the first stage results from the instrumental variable analysis).
15. The full results for this model are available in Online Supplemental Material.
16. See Online Supplemental Material for the results of these robustness checks.
17. For a similar approach, see Simmons and Hopkins (2005).
18. The full model specifications and results are available in Online Supplemental Material.

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