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The two swords: Religion–state connections and interstate disputes

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Abstract

Since the end of the Cold War, a global religious resurgence has transformed many aspects of world politics, including transnational activism, human rights, and terrorism. Yet, scholars still debate whether a generalizable influence of religion on interstate disputes exists. Despite significant progress in the study of religion and world politics, then, the fundamental question remains: under what conditions does the post-Cold War era's religious resurgence influence interstate disputes? This article points to the significance of institutional religion–state connections and ideological distance between disputants to account for the varied significance of religion in interstate conflicts. Religion influences conflict behavior when there are close ties between religion and the state and when a religious state is in a dispute with a secular state, creating ideological distance between the combatants. In such instances, the dispute is more likely to involve the use of force. The article tests this theory through a quantitative analysis of interstate disputes, using a Heckman probit model for the effects of religion–state connections on dispute severity. The tests reveal that while religious–secular dyads do not experience greater risks of conflict compared to other dyads, conflicts involving religious–secular dyads are more severe than those including other dyads, even when numerous competing explanations are accounted for. The article contributes to the study of religion and politics by highlighting the political factors that increase religious effects on international relations; it also contributes to the broader study of interstate crises by demonstrating the means through which ideas can affect interstate disputes.

Keywords

domestic politics, interstate conflict, religion and politics

Religion has asserted itself dramatically as a political force since the end of the Cold War. Many claim that religion will have an indelible impact on the international system, and numerous studies have demonstrated the significance of religion in areas such as democratization, transnational social movements, and even the rise of the modern state (Banchoff, 2008; Fox & Sandler, 2004; Nexon, 2009; Philpott, 2000; Thomas, 2005; Toft, Philpott & Shah, 2011). Yet, even though the most famous claim of religion's importance – Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' (1996) – predicted religion would drive interstate disputes, religion's importance in this area is unclear. For every apparent example of religion affecting an interstate dispute, numerous counter-examples exist (Shaffer, 2006). Scholars analyzing religion and interstate conflict thus still face two questions. Does religion matter in interstate disputes since the end of the Cold War? And, if so, what explains the variation in its apparent impact?

The literatures on interstate disputes and on religion and international relations have made significant progress in their respective research programs, but struggle to answer these questions. Studies of interstate disputes often downplay ideational factors or focus on testing Huntington's arguments (Chiozza, 2002; Sweeney, 2003). This is effective in dispelling claims of a 'clash of civilizations' and demonstrating the dynamics of interstate disputes, but overlooks recent advances in the study

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of religion and politics that may contribute to debates over international disputes. Similarly, some studies of religion and international relations either posit religion as a broad transformative force or focus on highlighting examples of its relevance (Fox & Sandler, 2004; Thomas, 2005). And studies on religion and conflict have demonstrated the role religion plays in some conflicts (Fox, 2002; Hassner, 2003; Horowitz, 2009; Juergensmeyer, 2003). While this is useful, further research can demonstrate the generalizable conditions under which religion influences conflict, rather than whether it does or does not in certain cases (Bellin, 2008).

This article analyzes the conditions under which religion affects conflict behavior. Religious sentiment is a powerful force in society, but its political salience depends on the conditions in which religious groups operate. Religion influences state policies when religious groups have institutional ties to the state; this grants them leverage over leaders and increases the significance of religious beliefs in a country's politics. The most intense religious influence on disputes occurs when there is ideological distance between the disputants – specifically when one state is religious and the other secular – as this heightens leaders' threat perceptions and increases concerns about losing support as a result of the dispute.

The article tests the effects of religion–state connections and international ideological distance through a quantitative analysis of militarized interstate disputes from 1990 to 2000. It uses a Heckman probit model to assess the influence of religion–state connections on the level of dispute severity. The study finds disputes are more likely to involve the use of force when one state has extensive religion–state connections and the other does not. This effect is stronger in dyads of different religious makeups, although these results are less consistent than those for religion–state connections. The tests indicate the significance of the post-Cold War religious–secular divide in the severity of interstate disputes.

The study contributes to the literature on both religion and international relations and interstate disputes. The article points to the significance of religion–state connections and ideological distance in explaining variations in religion's role in state behavior, highlighting a mechanism through which religion can influence world politics. It also addresses the role of ideational factors in interstate disputes, expanding existing work on this topic.

This article defines religion as a 'system of beliefs and practices oriented towards the sacred or supernatural' (Smith, 1996: 5). The article refers to the religious tradition with which the majority of a society identifies – e.g. 'Muslim' or 'Christian' – as 'religious makeup'. 'Religious groups' refers to organized pressure groups that base their actions on religious sentiment. And the article refers to institutional ties between religious groups and the state, and ideological appeals to religion on behalf of state officials, as 'religion–state connections'.

The article proceeds in five parts. First, it surveys the literature on religion and interstate conflict. Second, it highlights the significance of religion–state connections and ideological distance to analyze this issue. It then presents the research design and the findings and implications. Finally, it provides conclusions and the study's broader relevance.

Religion and interstate conflict

Numerous studies have focused on the effects of religion on international relations since Samuel Huntington (1996) famously claimed the world may experience a clash of civilizations. Some scholars of religion and conflict posit that religious beliefs directly influence a population's behavior; for example, the severity of violence seen among Muslims in recent decades was purportedly due to the state of 'Muslim civilization' (Lewis, 1990). Others argue that religion is a transformative, but benign, force in world politics, and often claim religion challenges existing theories and methods (Beyer, 2006; Casanova, 1994; Hurd, 2004; Thomas, 2005). In contrast, some believe that religion may be a destabilizing force in world politics due to certain strains of religious traditions that reject nationalism and promote violence (Juergensmeyer, 1993). And many argue that it is not religion per se but political actors' mobilization of religion that leads to severe religious violence (Fox, 2002; Henne, 2012; Lynch, 2010; Moghadam, 2008/09).

Many other studies, however, reject religion's importance. Some argue that religious conflicts are actually due to material interests or ethnonationalism (Pape, 2003; Shaffer, 2006). And several quantitative tests have found little empirical support for a clash of civilizations (Bolks & Stoll, 2003; Chiozza, 2002; Fox & Sandler, 2004; Gartzke & Gleditsch, 2006; Pearce, 2005).

This ongoing debate has coalesced into a research program with three promising developments. The first is the rejection of arguments that posit a direct influence of religious beliefs on political behavior (Chiozza, 2002; Fox & Sandler, 2004; Grim & Finke, 2011). The second is the use of mainstream methods to identify religious influences on conflict (Fox, 2002; Fox & Sandal, 2010;

Grim & Finke, 2011; Hassner, 2003; Horowitz, 2009; Latham, 2011; Moghadam, 2008/09; Toft, 2007). The third is a new conception of religion's role in politics. Many studies emphasize the institutional and political context in which religious groups operate, which matters as much – if not more – than the actual content of religious beliefs (Fox, 2008; Grim & Finke, 2011; Nexon, 2009; Owen, 2010; Pew Forum, 2011). Studies have used these institutional ties and political conditions to explain democratization, domestic politics, political violence, and even international systems change (Driessen, 2010; Fox & Sandal, 2010; Gill, 2008; Grim & Finke, 2011; Kalyvas, 1996; Kuru, 2009; Nasr, 2001; Nexon, 2009; Owen, 2010; Philpott, 2000, 2007).

Despite this progress, further research can elaborate on exactly how religion affects interstate conflict. First, many of these works focus on domestic politics, and the most compelling examples of religion's effects on conflict lie in civil war and terrorism. Second, while works such as those by Fox & Sandler (2004), Hassner (2003), and Horowitz (2009) are useful in identifying religious influences on interstate disputes, it is unclear how widespread the phenomena they identify are in international relations.

Religion–state connections, ideological distance, and the severity of interstate disputes

This article explains religious influence on interstate disputes through the interaction between domestic religion–state connections and international ideological distance. Religious sentiment is important, but its effects on state behavior depend on the political context in which it arises. Religion has greater political salience when there are close ties between religion and the state; likewise, it affects interstate disputes in the context of ideological distance between the disputants, specifically when a religious state and a secular state enter into a dispute. In such cases, the dispute is more likely to involve the use of force.

Religion and interstate disputes in the post-Cold War era

Religious politics in the post-Cold War era are a combination of increasing religious sentiment, intensified clashes between religious and secular belief systems and a general decline in religion as the primary motivation of political behavior. Numerous scholars have discussed the contemporary religious resurgence, with one influential volume even dubbing the 21st century 'God's century' (Toft, Philpott & Shah, 2011). Moreover, many studies have highlighted the increase in state policies and actions that tie states to religion and restrict religious practice (Fox, 2008; Grim & Finke, 2011; Pew Forum, 2011). Yet, religious politics are not defined by the doctrinal clashes that marked the early modern era or the religious motivations that drove events like the Crusades (Horowitz, 2009; Philpott, 2000). Instead, most contemporary religious groups accept the differentiation between religious and political authority, interact with their communities in diverse ways, and often advance 'secular' agendas like political reform (Casanova, 1994; Mandaville, 2001; Roy, 1994). Religious politics thus resemble religiously grounded 'common sense', rather than the attempt to impose certain religious standards – such as Islamic law – on society (Salvatore & Levine, 2005). And in the high-stakes area of international security, with the exception of discrete issues like 'sacred spaces' – as Hassner (2003) discussed – states often do not base their foreign policies on religious beliefs (Shaffer, 2006).

This has three implications for understanding the effect of religion on contemporary interstate disputes. First, the nature of institutional connections between religion and the state affects the extent to which religion influences state behavior. These institutional ties include the provision of an official religion in the state's constitution, laws based on religious standards, and favoritism towards the official religion, which can take the form of support for the official religion's activities or restrictions on minority religions (Fox, 2008; Gill, 2008; Grim & Finke, 2011; Kuru, 2009).

These institutional connections fall into four categories: religious states, civil religious states, passive secular states, and assertive secular states.[1] Religious states possess numerous institutional ties to religion. Examples of religious states include Saudi Arabia's intertwining of political authority and conservative Islamic groups and the Sri Lankan state's support for Sinhalese Buddhism (US Department of State, 2010). Civil religious states, in contrast, do not have an official religion; religion does play an important part in the state's functioning, however, and these states have some laws based on religion or some official favoritism towards religious groups. Examples in this category include states such as Indonesia and Spain, which are officially secular but have adopted some government support for and control of religions. Secular states lack such institutional

[1] For a similar approach see Esposito (1998) and Kuru (2009). See the 'Research design' below and the online appendix for more on this point.

religion–state connections. Some are 'passive secular' states, which separate religion and state but still allow religion to play a role in politics; a prominent example is the United States (Kuru, 2009). Others are 'assertive secular' states, which limit religion's role in politics – like France – or even actively repress religious groups, like China (Kuru, 2009).

The level of religion–state connections corresponds to the political effects of religion. In religious states, the close ties between religion and state grant favored religious groups greater institutional access and funding, increasing their political power (Blum, 2006; Dawisha, 1983; Gill, 2008). For example, close ties between the Catholic Church and some Latin American states historically gave the Church influence over state policies towards minority religious groups (Gill, 2008). Also, religion–state connections intensify ties between regime elites and religious groups, making it more likely elites will come from or be aligned with religious groups (Nexon, 2009). This can be seen in Pakistan, in which connections between the military and Islamist groups led to the emergence of military leaders sympathetic to Islamist causes (Haqqani, 2005; Tahir-Kelli, 1983). And religion–state connections amplify the significance of religious symbols in political discourse (Nexon, 2009). For example, Islam both challenges and buttresses state power in Saudi Arabia due to the state's close ties to the religion (Fraser, 1997; Piscatori, 1983). In contrast, religious contention in secular states tends not to seriously affect state behavior.[2] Similarly, religion matters in civil religious states, but the relatively weak ties between religion and state result in less dramatic behavior than seen in religious states.

While many of these works that emphasize the significance of institutional religion–state connections in religious politics focus on domestic politics, their insights can be applied to international relations. Religious sentiment alone will not necessarily drive a state's foreign policies, but religious sentiment can affect its foreign policy through extensive ties between religion and the state, which increase the power of religious groups and the political salience of religion (Philpott, 2000).[3] Such pressure is absent in secular states, due to the lessened political salience of religion; moreover, because there are few ideologically secular groups in contemporary societies, secular states will not face pressure equivalent to religious states from secular elements of society.[4]

The second implication of the current context in which religious groups operate is that religion will only affect states' behavior under certain international conditions, specifically ideological distance between states. Most of the time, religion does not drive a state's foreign policies; states use foreign policy to advance state interests, and much religious contention in states is focused on local issues (Shaffer, 2006). It is only when domestic religious sentiment and international issues combine to threaten a regime's legitimacy that these domestic dynamics affect foreign policy (Nexon, 2009; Philpott, 2000). Ideological distance is likely to be the most common such international condition in the contemporary era. Several studies have argued that ideological distance heightens uncertainty and threat perception, exacerbating underlying conflicts (Haas, 2005; Owen, 2010). Ideological distance can also cause elites to be afraid of ideological contagion – which would undermine their political power – and regime change in allies as a result of ideological division, threatening the state's security situation (Haas, 2005; Owen, 2010). And, as Owen (2010) argues, contemporary ideological distance in Muslim countries is connected to widespread debates over the proper role of religion in politics.

This article elaborates on these works – particularly Owen's (2010) – to argue that the ideological distance arising from religious–secular divides extends beyond Muslim countries and has significant effects on the severity of interstate disputes.[5] Research on religious politics shows that state involvement in religion and hostilities over the role of religion in politics have been rising dramatically since the end of the Cold War; the religious–secular divide Owen (2010) identified in Muslim countries thus also influences political conflicts in non-Muslim societies (Fox, 2008; Pew Forum, 2011). This divide manifests itself internationally as religious–secular ideological distance. When a religious state faces a secular state, the religious regime will experience heightened threat perceptions and an unwillingness to back down for fear of losing legitimacy due to the dispute's outcome. In contrast, religious issues may be points of contention in disputes between religious states but a loss in the dispute is less likely to

[2] The possible counter-example of the United States is discussed below.

[3] For theoretical analogues, see Acharya, 2004; Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2004; Busby, 2007; Goemans, 2000; Nicholls, Huth & Appel, 2010; Snyder, 1991; Vreeland, 2008; Zürn & Checkel, 2005.

[4] There are historical examples of this, including revolutionary France and Turkey's Kemalism.

[5] For a discussion of domestic ideological polarization and international conflict, see Clare (2010). And for a discussion on the interaction between revolutionary politics and interstate conflict, see Colgan (2010).

undermine the regimes due to the ideological similarity so there will be less escalatory pressure. And disputes between civil religious or secular states will lack this pressure due to the lessened political salience of religion. Disputes between religious and secular states are thus more likely to involve the use of force than those lacking this ideological distance. For example, regime change in Yemen sparked the 1960s proxy war between Egypt and Saudi Arabia; yet, once Egypt and Saudi Arabia became involved in the conflict ideological distance between the two exacerbated tensions, particularly Saudi fears of Egyptian secular nationalism undermining their religiously-based rule (Hart 1998; Owen, 2010).

Finally, these dynamics affect the severity of disputes, not their onset. States do not start wars, sign alliances, or create regional groupings due to religious beliefs alone. The outbreak of hostility often arises from states' consideration of their security interests, even if they miscalculate (Fearon, 1995; Wolford, Reiter & Carruba, 2011). And domestic politics can contribute to dispute onset, but by causing miscalculations that lead to conflict, not starting the conflict itself (Snyder, 1991; Van Evera, 1984). Yet, domestic factors may influence a dispute once it begins; then, leaders are concerned about maintaining domestic support, which can affect their willingness to prolong and escalate the conflict (Fearon, 1994; Goemans, 2000). In the case of religious influences on disputes, disputes will occur due to security concerns, not the increased salience of religion among religious states. Once disputes begin, though, the regime's concerns about losing support will provide room for religious pressure to influence the state's behavior. For example, while the 1980's Iran–Iraq war began through Iraq's geopolitically motivated invasion of Iran, Iran used the secular nature of the Iraqi regime to rally support through appeal to religious symbols (Piscatori, 1991).

Religious makeup may also affect dispute severity. This article argues that it is the institutional and political context of religion, rather than the religious makeup of a population, that matters in interstate disputes. Yet, when a religious state confronts a secular state of a different religious makeup, this religious difference could heighten the regime's threat perception; at the same time, the regime might also fear ideological contagion due to the non-sectarian nature of secularism. Ideological distance, however, could also matter for states of the same religion; a religious state composed of Muslims may be more concerned about losing a conflict to a secular Muslim state because of the similarity of their populations. Therefore, religious makeup likely matters through interaction with the dyadic combination of religion–state connections; religious makeup alone, however, will have a smaller effect on interstate conflicts than religion–state connections. For example, during the First Gulf War, the heretofore secular Saddam Hussein was able to use the religious difference between Iraq and the United States to frame his invasion of Kuwait as a religious struggle (Piscatori, 1991).

Hypotheses on religion and interstate disputes

This approach to religion and interstate disputes provides two hypotheses on the effects of religion on conflict behavior. First, religion is likely to influence interstate disputes – by increasing the likelihood of a severe dispute – when a religious state is in a dispute with a secular state, either assertive or passive secular.[6] Second, religion will not affect dispute onset.

> *H1:* Disputes involving one religious state and one secular state (either assertive or passive secular) are more likely to involve the use of force than disputes involving religious, civil religious, or secular dyads.
>
> *H2:* Religion will affect dispute severity, not dispute onset.

There are numerous counter-arguments. One could accept the significance of religion–state connections but differ with the above hypotheses, arguing, for example, that religion–state connections affect dispute onset or that their effects will be strongest among religious dyads.[7] Alternately, 'civilizational' explanations would expect more frequent and intense conflict among states of different religions. Another set of explanations posits numerous non-religious factors to explain dispute severity, such as intergovernmental organization (IGO) membership, democracy, trade, geographic distance, the issues at stake in the dispute, rivalries, and relative power.

Research design

Data and dependent variables

The study uses a compiled dataset with data on interstate crises from the Militarized Interstate Dispute (MID) project (Ghosn, Palmer & Bremer, 2004; Jones, Bremer & Singer, 1996).[8] The dataset includes MIDs between

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[6] This article does not point to significant differences between passive and assertive secular states in interstate disputes, but includes both variables to deal with potential counter-examples involving this difference.

[7] Other theorized influences of religion on conflict may hold in certain circumstances.

[8] Data available at COW Home Page, http://www.correlatesofwar.org/

1990 and 2000, as the data for the explanatory variable are available from 1990 to 2001, MID data are available until 2001, and some control variables do not extend past 2000. The dataset includes all politically relevant dyads, in addition to those that experienced a MID, to deal with concerns over selection bias.[9]

There are two dependent variables. The first, *severe dispute*, is a dichotomous measure of dispute severity, with 1 indicating the use of force in the dispute and 0 indicating the dispute involved only threats or displays of force.[10] The second, *dispute* – a dichotomous variable indicating whether a politically relevant dyad entered into a MID – tests the effects of selection bias on dispute severity in conjunction with *severe dispute*.

Explanatory variables

The primary explanatory variable is the combination of state–religion connections in the disputant dyad. Several studies have conceptualized and measured these connections and their effect. Some conceptualize religion–state connections as a semi-continuous index: countries receive a numerical score based on the extent of these ties (Fox, 2008; Grim & Finke, 2011). Others use categorical distinctions between types of religion–state connections (Driessen, 2010; Esposito, 1998; Kuru, 2009; Philpott, 2007). Both of these approaches are useful. The former provides greater variation in state–religion connections, allowing for nuanced analysis of differences among states. The latter, in contrast, yields qualitatively meaningful measures of religion–state connections.

This study takes the latter approach, breaking states into the four categories discussed above. This approach fits the theory's focus on combinations of religion–state connections, with meaningful variation lying in the difference between specific institutional configurations. It also facilitates analysis of the type of religion–state combinations this article posits as significant: the combination of a religious state and a secular state.

The article uses three indicators of religion–state connections from Fox's Religion and State (RAS) dataset: an official religion, laws based on religious standards, and official favoritism towards the official religion.[11] If all three indicators are present, the state is a religious state.[12] Civil religious states have one or two of the indicators but do not score as highly on them as do religious states. And both passive secular and assertive secular states lack official religions, although they differ in the extent to which laws separate religion and politics.

The article uses the dyadic combinations of this variable as its explanatory variables. There are six dichotomous variables: *religious*, *religious-passive secular*, *religious-assertive secular*, *religious-civil religious*, *civil religious*, and *civil-secular*.[13] *Religious-passive secular* and *religious-assertive secular* are the explanatory variables; the others are included to allow for accurate comparison between categories and to account for the possible significance of other religion–state combinations. The article also uses interaction variables between the above dichotomous variable and *same religion* (discussed below) as explanatory variables.

The article uses a few alternative specifications of the explanatory variable as robustness checks. One set involves broader categories of the dyadic combinations. A second uses the *s* variable from the RAS dataset – which measures a state's official religion – alone to code for religion–state connections. Finally, another alternative uses Grim and Finke's (2011) indexes – Government Restrictions Index (GRI), Government Favoritism Index (GFI), and Social Restrictions Index (SRI) – as control variables, using the highest score in the dyad.[14]

Control variables

One control variable, *same religion*, tests the effect of religious makeup; this variable measures whether the religious makeup of the two states is the same, characterized along Christian, Muslim, and Other religious groupings.[15] The dyad is coded as 1 if at least 50% of the population in

[9] Data generated using the Eugene program. See Bennett & Stam (2000) and http://eugenesoftware.org. Version 3.204 used.

[10] Based on MID's *cwhostd* variable; *severe dispute* takes the value 1 for disputes coded as involving the use of force.

[11] See Driessen (2010) and Fox & Sandal (2010). RAS includes data from 1990 to 2001. Data available at http://www.religionandstate.org/

[12] The temporal dependence controls – see footnote 17 – address concerns over possible endogeneity between interstate disputes and religion–state connections; if states with numerous past conflicts were more likely to become religious–secular dyads, then controlling for a dyad's conflict history would undermine the significance of religion–state connections.

[13] This includes the theoretically relevant combinations – passive secular-religious, assertive secular-religious, and religious dyads – and collapses less relevant categories. This avoids issues involved in including too many dummy variables in a regression (Achen, 2005). A robustness check includes all combinations.

[14] Data available at http://www.thearda.com/

[15] *Other* includes countries with majority Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, and Animist populations, which comprise one category due to the relatively small number of dyads with each individual religion.

each country belongs to the same religion. Alternate versions of this variable deal with schismatic elements in the same religion, such as the Orthodox/Catholic split in Christianity and the Sunni/Shia split in Islam. One codes whether a dyad is schismatic, while the other is a version of *same religion* that codes schismatic dyads as of a different religion. Additional dichotomous variables indicate if the dyad is Christian–Christian, Muslim–Muslim, Christian–Muslim, Christian–Other, Muslim–Other, or Other–Other. Also, a control variable measures whether dyads contain one or two countries in which no religious group is in the majority of the population.

Other control variables include distance between the states, relative power, and the context of the dispute. *Distance* measures geographical distance as the log of the distance between the capital cities of the two states (Kinsella & Russet, 2002; Lemke & Reed, 2001).[16] *Relative power* measures the relative power ratio between two states – specifically, the more powerful state to the less powerful state – using the Correlates of War's 'Composite Index of National Capability' (Lemke & Reed, 2001; Reed, 2000; Singer, 1987).

Territorial conflict uses the MID dataset's *revtype* variables to measure whether there was a revisionist aspect to the dispute, which can affect severity (Senese & Vasquez, 2003). Zero indicates no territorial claims, 1 indicates one state is territorially revisionist, and 2 indicates both states had territorial claims. And *peace years* – which measures the length of time between dispute occurrences – addresses the conflict history between the states; this variable measures temporal dependence in conjunction with natural cubic spline variables.[17]

There are also several factors that inhibit conflict. *Democracy* codes joint democratic dyads – using Polity IV data – as 1 (Kinsella & Russett, 2002; Ray, 2003).[18] Another is *trade*, the level of trade between two states measured as the sum of the imports into each country in US dollars (Barbieri, Keshk & Pollins, 2009; Li & Reuveny, 2011).[19] And extent of membership in international governmental organizations (IGO) is measured as the total shared membership in IGOs for each dyad, *IGO* (Kinsella & Russett, 2002).[20] Finally, alliance membership, *alliance*, might affect dispute severity (Gibler & Sarkees, 2004; Tierney, 2011).

The study includes other factors that might affect dispute severity as robustness checks. Dichotomous control variables address the presence of the United States or the United Kingdom to deal with the unique nature of these states and their prevalence in disputes; based on the coding, the United States is a secular state despite the significance of religion in its politics, and the United Kingdom is religious even though religion is not very politically salient. The study also uses dichotomous variables to account for the parts played by the disputant dyads in Operation Desert Storm and conflicts occurring in the Middle East, Latin America, and sub-Saharan Africa.

Other robustness checks include the alternate measures of religious makeup and religion–state connections. And the article uses Diehl and Goertz's (2000) continuous measure of dispute severity as an alternative to the dichotomous dependent variable. Finally, an alternate dependent variable tests whether the religious state in a religious–secular dyad initiated the dispute, using MID data on dispute initiation; this deals with the counter-argument that it is actually the secular state's actions that drive the severity of disputes.

Methods

The primary model is a Heckman probit selection model, as the *severe dispute* variable is dichotomous. Selection bias can affect the results of the model since the conditions under which a dyad enters into a dispute could determine the severity of disputes that occur; the Heckman probit accounts for this possible selection bias. Yet, several scholars have raised concerns about this approach to selection bias (Simmons & Hopkins, 2005; Sartori, 2003). Accordingly, the article also uses alternate selection models as robustness checks. This includes a probit test of *severe dispute* that uses the propensity score for dispute onset as a control variable – following Simmons & Hopkins (2005) – and Sartori's (2003) estimator for selection models with the same

[16] Data for *distance*, *relative power*, and *alliance* is from the Eugene program.

[17] *Peaceyears* and cubic splines are calculated using the dataset's population, dyad-years from 1990 and 2000. An alternate version uses dyad-years from 1985 to 2000 to account for disputes before 1990. Variables generated using the btscs command developed by Beck, Katz & Tucker (1998) and http://www.prio.no/CSCW/Datasets/Stata-Tools/. An alternate measure of temporal dependence using Carter & Signorino's (2010) method is included in a robustness check.

[18] Data are available at http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm

[19] Data from Barbieri, Keshk & Pollins, 2009.

[20] Data from Pevehouse, Nordstrom & Warnke, 2004.

variables in both stages of the model. Since several dyads are in numerous MIDs and each dyad has ten observations, the models use standard errors clustered by dyad. Y_1 is *dispute*, and Y_2 is *severe dispute.*

Models 1 through 3 include all control variables and the religion–state combination categories; Models 1 and 2 are separate probits for *dispute* and *severe dispute*, and Model 3 is the Heckman probit. The study also performs post-estimation tests to interpret the probability of the level of hostility for types of religion–state combinations. *Territorial conflict* is only in the second stage and *alliance* and the spline variables are only in the first stage; the model includes all other control variables in both stages.[21] Models 4 through 6 follow this specification and include the interaction variables between religion–state connections and religious makeup.

The study runs numerous robustness checks. Separate models include: the dichotomous variables for Christian–Christian, Muslim–Muslim, Christian–Muslim, Christian–Other, Muslim–Other, Other–Other, sub-Saharan Africa, Middle East, Latin America, and mixed dyads; the schismatic measures; Carter and Signorino's (2010) measure of temporal dependence; and the control variables for Operation Desert Storm, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Another set of models includes: the *s* variable alone as a measure of religion–state connections; *GRI*, *SRI*, and *GFI* in separate models; and the additional religion–state combination categories. Other robustness checks use alternate models. Several address possible issues with the Heckman probit model through the aforementioned tests. The article also uses a probit to test whether religious states originate religious–secular disputes and a Heckman selection model with the Diehl and Goertz (2000) measure of dispute severity.

Findings and implications

The presence of a religious–secular dyad – either passive or assertive secular – increases the likelihood that a dispute is severe, although it does not make a conflict more likely to occur. And religious makeup appears to affect dispute severity through its interaction with religion–state connections, but these results are less consistent than those for the significance of religious–secular dyads.

Religious-passive secular was significant and positive in Models 2 and 3. In contrast, neither the other religion–state connections variables nor *same religion* were significant at the 0.05 level. Some of the control variables were significant, although this did not undermine the significance of the explanatory variables. And none of the religious variables were significant in the first stage of the model dealing with dispute onset or Model 1.[22] (See Table I and Figure 1.)

Post-estimation tests on Model 3 further revealed the substantive significance of the explanatory variable. The presence of religious–passive secular dyads in a dispute increased the likelihood of a dispute falling into the severe dispute category – i.e. involving the use of force – by 0.24. In contrast, *territorial conflict* – one of the control variables that was significant and positive – increased the likelihood of a dispute using force by 0.1. This is, of course, based on the model and is not a forecast of dispute severity likelihood, since the model – as discussed above – does not attempt to explain all aspects of interstate disputes, only the effect of religion–state connections on dispute severity. Yet, it indicates the relative effect of religious–secular ideological distance through comparison with *territorial conflict*. (See Figure 2.)

The results from Models 4 through 6 indicate that the effect of religion–state connections on dispute severity may depend on religious makeup, although the results are less consistent than those for religion–state connections alone. The interactions for *religious-passive secular* and *religious-assertive secular* were not significant, although the two component variables were significant. This indicates their effect on *severe dispute* is stronger when *same religion* is 0, that is, among dyads of different religious makeup. The interaction between *religious dyad* and *same religion* was significant and negative, however, meaning religious dyads composed of the same religious makeup were less likely to involve the use of force; interestingly, *religious dyad* alone was significant and positive when the interactions were included, so religious dyads of different makeup were more likely to involve the use of force. This suggests a heterogeneous effect of religious–secular ideological distance between states of the same religious makeup and those of a different makeup, with ideological distance mattering more among the

[21] The spline variables are in the first stage because they measure the role of temporal dependence in the occurrence of a MID, while *territorial conflict* is in the second stage because the variable measures disputes that occur. *Alliance* is in the first stage as an instrument for selection (Sweeney, 2003). Issues with this specification are discussed below.

[22] Figure 1 presents the results from Model 3 without the relative power variable to allow for easier visual interpretation.

Table I. Religion–state connections and militarized disputes, 1990–2000 (Models 1–3)

	Model 1	*Model 2*	*Model 3*	
	Dispute	*Severe dispute*	*Stage 1: Dispute*	*Stage 2: Severe dispute*
Religious	0.18	0.54	0.18	0.41
	(0.19)	(0.37)	(0.19)	(0.36)
Civil religious	0.24*	−0.25	0.24*	−0.29
	(0.15)	(0.28)	(0.15)	(0.29)
Civil-secular	0.06	0.09	0.06	0.04
	(0.11)	(0.22)	(0.11)	(0.22)
Religious-civil	0.20	0.35	0.20	0.31
	(0.15)	(0.29)	(0.15)	(0.30)
Religious-passive secular	0.07	0.64*	0.07	0.69*
	(0.16)	(0.29)	(0.16)	(0.31)
Religious-assertive secular	−0.11	0.28	−0.11	0.37
	(0.20)	(0.28)	(0.20)	(0.25)
Trade	0.00*	−0.00	0.00*	−0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Democracy	−0.53***	−0.39	−0.53***	−0.23
	(0.12)	(0.25)	(0.12)	(0.33)
Same religion	−0.08	−0.16	−0.08	−0.17
	(0.11)	(0.18)	(0.11)	(0.19)
Relative power	−0.05	1.57	−0.05	3.65
	(1.37)	(2.49)	(1.37)	(2.62)
Distance	−0.12***	−0.02	−0.12***	−0.03
	(0.01)	(0.03)	(0.01)	(0.04)
IGO	0.01*	0.02*	0.01	0.02**
	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)
Alliance	0.10**		0.10**	
	(0.04)		(0.04)	
Time since last MID	−0.65***	−0.11**	−0.65***	−0.11
	(0.07)	(0.02)	(0.07)	(0.06)
Spline 1	−0.09***		−0.09***	
	(0.02)		(0.02)	
Spline 2	0.04***		0.04***	
	(0.01)		(0.01)	
Spline 3	−0.02*		−0.02*	
	(0.01)		(0.01)	
Territorial conflict		0.30**		0.26*
		(0.10)		(0.11)
Constant	−0.98	−1.67	−0.98	−3.63
	(1.41)	(2.55)	(1.41)	(2.73)
ρ	n/a	n/a		−0.16
χ^2	n/a	n/a		0.23
Pseudo-R squared	0.26	0.13	n/a	n/a
Observations	15,284	533	15,284	15,284

Robust standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.5$.

latter category of dyads. And religious–religious pairings have an effect among dyads of different religious makeup, even though this effect is not apparent in the entire population. This adds some nuance to the above findings on ideological distance, although the conclusiveness of the finding concerning religious makeup is less clear as it does not hold up to all robustness checks, as discussed below. (See Table II.)

The significance of religious–secular ideological distance was consistent through the various robustness

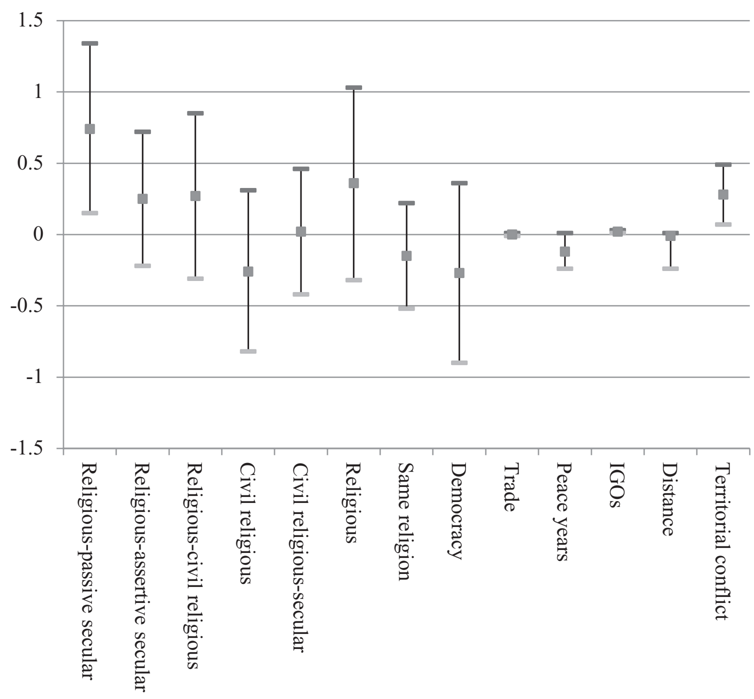

Figure 1. Coefficients and confidence intervals, religion-state connections and interstate disputes, 1990–2000 (Model 3).

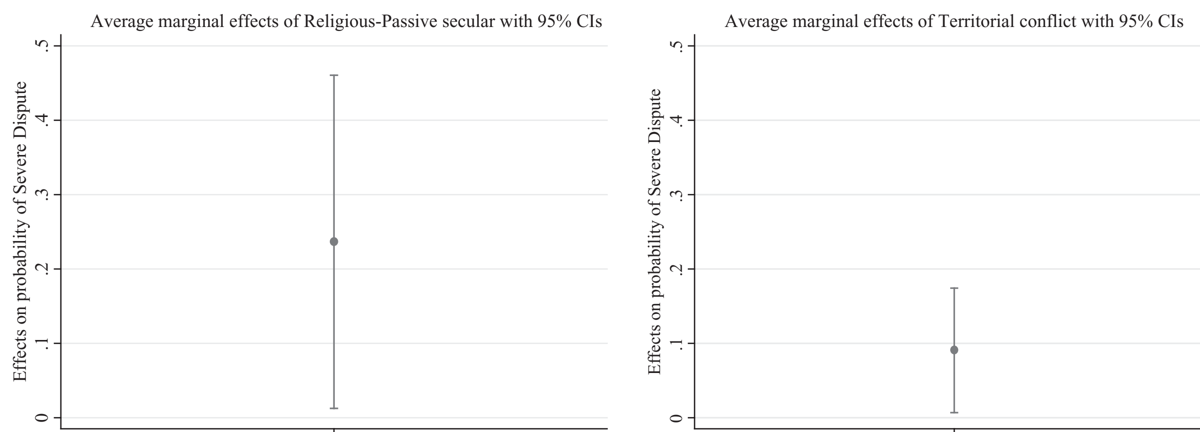

Figure 2. Substantive significance of *religious-passive secular* and *territorial conflict* in model of religion–state connections and interstate disputes, 1990–2000 (Model 3)

checks, but the interactions between the religion–state combination variables and *same religion* were not.[23] *Religious-passive secular* was significant in all robustness checks and significant at the 0.05 level in all but one of the robustness checks.[24] The interaction variables remained significant in all models but the one including

[23] See the online appendix for the results of the robustness checks.

[24] *Religious-passive secular* was weakly significant in the model including the United Kingdom. When the tests included the broader religious–secular mixed variables, however, they remained significant.

Table II. Religion–state connections, intradyad religious similarity, and interstate disputes, 1990–2000 (Models 4–6)

	Model 4	*Model 5*	*Model 6*	
	Dispute	*Severe dispute*	*Stage 1: Dispute*	*Stage 2: Severe dispute*
Religious	0.34	1.71***	0.34	1.41***
	(0.39)	(0.47)	(0.39)	(0.39)
Civil religious	0.41	0.31	0.41	0.17
	(0.34)	(0.50)	(0.34)	(0.48)
Civil-secular	0.21	0.82**	0.21	0.70
	(0.20)	(0.30)	(0.20)	(0.37)
Religious-civil	0.38	0.54	0.38	0.41
	(0.26)	(0.42)	(0.26)	(0.44)
Religious-passive secular	0.33	0.87**	0.33	0.82*
	(0.21)	(0.29)	(0.21)	(0.34)
Religious-assertive secular	−0.00	1.06**	−0.00	0.83*
	(0.28)	(0.39)	(0.28)	(0.34)
Religious-passive secular*Same religion	−0.64	0.24	−0.64	0.35
	(0.39)	(0.78)	(0.39)	(0.79)
Religious-assertive secular*Same religion	−0.08	−1.37**	−0.08	−0.76
	(0.39)	(0.48)	(0.39)	(0.43)
Religious*Same religion	−0.25	−1.51*	−0.25	−1.29*
	(0.44)	(0.64)	(0.44)	(0.58)
Civil-secular*Same religion	−0.23	−1.00*	−0.23	−0.91*
	(0.24)	(0.41)	(0.24)	(0.46)
Civil religious*Same religion	−0.24	−0.73	−0.24	−0.60
	(0.38)	(0.61)	(0.38)	(0.59)
Religious-civil*Same religion	−0.29	−0.12	−0.29	0.04
	(0.32)	(0.56)	(0.32)	(0.58)
Trade	0.00*	−0.00	0.00*	−0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Democracy	−0.54***	−0.52*	−0.53***	−0.35
	(0.12)	(0.26)	(0.12)	(0.35)
Same religion	0.12	0.30	0.12	0.19
	(0.19)	(0.27)	(0.19)	(0.30)
Relative power	−0.17	2.63	−0.17	4.52
	(1.35)	(2.44)	(1.35)	(2.66)
Distance	−0.11***	−0.04	−0.11***	−0.05
	(0.01)	(0.03)	(0.01)	(0.04)
IGO	0.01	0.02**	0.01*	0.02**
	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)
Alliance	0.10*		0.10*	
	(0.04)		(0.04)	
Time since last MID	−0.66***	−0.11***	−0.66***	−0.12
	(0.07)	(0.02)	(0.07)	(0.06)
Spline 1	−0.09***		−0.09***	
	(0.02)		(0.02)	
Spline 2	0.04***		0.04***	
	(0.01)		(0.01)	
Spline 3	−0.02*	−0.02*		
	(0.01)		(0.01)	
Territorial conflict		0.31**		0.27*
		(0.10)		(0.11)
Constant	−0.97	−3.13	−0.97	−4.87
	(1.39)	(2.51)	(1.39)	(2.78)
ρ	n/a	n/a		−0.13
χ^2	n/a	n/a		0.17
Pseudo-R squared	0.26	0.15	n/a	n/a
Observations	15,284	533	15,284	15,284

Robust standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.5$.

the United Kingdom as a robustness check; in this model, neither the interaction variables nor the *religious dyad* component variable were significant. These inconsistent results for *religious dyad* and the interaction variables indicate the findings concerning these variables are less certain than those for *religious-passive secular*.

Implications

These findings highlight the significance of religion–state connections in interstate disputes, specifically in the context of ideological distance. Religious factors play little role in dispute onset but do affect the severity of a dispute; disputes involving religious–secular dyads are more likely to involve force than disputes without such dyads. The distinction between passive and assertive secular states does not appear significant; the relatively small number of disputes involving religious–assertive secular dyads in the study's time period may account for this, however, and results could change if more historical cases were included. Non-religious factors were not irrelevant but they did not account for the effects of religion–state connections. And the substantive significance of religion–state connections is not overwhelming, but it is comparable to – if not stronger than – the effect of territorial claims on dispute severity.

Religious makeup alone played little role in dispute severity, but there are some effects from the interaction between religious makeup and religion–state connections. The influence of religious–secular ideological distance appears stronger in dyads of different religious makeup, suggesting that ideological distance can exacerbate the effects of religious difference; similarly, tests using the schismatic measures indicated schismatic dyads behaved similarly to dyads of different religions, suggesting intrareligious differences may be as significant as interreligious ones. Yet these findings are less certain than those for religion–state connections alone; further research in this area can elaborate on this finding.[25]

While there is insufficient space to provide detailed case studies of disputes, a brief discussion can highlight the validity of the findings. A few of the severe disputes between states in religious–passive secular dyads involved India and Pakistan. India–Pakistan hostilities are not due to religion; while religious differences contributed to the enduring rivalry between the two states, geopolitical factors often sparked their recurring conflicts. Yet, Islam assumed a prominent role in Pakistani politics, and the military often appealed to Islam in the context of tensions with India. The close ties between religion and state in Pakistan led its leaders and public to frame the conflict with India through religious symbols, exacerbating the rivalry. While Pakistani actions were not the sole cause of India–Pakistan tensions, and religious nationalism in India has played a prominent role in the country since the 1990s, the nature of religion–state connections in Pakistan and their interaction with India's political system did affect the disputes between the states (see Cohen, 2004; Haqqani, 2005).

Although these findings deal with the specific test of whether religion–state connections affect dispute severity in a relatively limited span of time, they can provide some insight into the nature of religious influences on international politics. The aforementioned critiques of civilizational arguments seem accurate, although that does not mean religion itself is irrelevant. The institutional conditions surrounding religion appear to be an important factor in religion's effects on interstate disputes. The significance of religious makeup suggests this also affects interstate disputes, but only when religious differences become politically salient through the combination of domestic religion–state connections and international ideological distance.

There are a few limitations of the study. The first is the fact that the study only covers the period 1990–2000. The article does emphasize the religious–secular divisions that have characterized much of international politics since the end of the Cold War, so this is theoretically justified. Yet, the findings should be considered conditional on the time period. Examining the effect of religion–state connections beyond these years could be useful, although current data limitations preclude an extended study. In addition to this, there is significant room to elaborate on the role of institutional religion–state connections in interstate disputes through both qualitative and quantitative studies. And there is no reason to assume that religion–state connections and ideological distance affect only interstate disputes; the findings of this study may extend to other areas of international politics.

Conclusions

According to this study, religion itself does not appear to cause conflict, but it can influence the severity of interstate disputes when state institutions are closely tied to religion and international ideological distance draws the domestic political salience of religion into the international arena. Religion is a type of domestic

[25] For additional information see the online appendix.

sentiment whose influence on a state's foreign policy depends on the institutional conditions surrounding religious groups. Just as it is difficult to understand the conflict behavior of some states without incorporating the effects of religion, it is equally problematic to study religion and international relations without taking into account the nature of a religion's connections to the state.

This finding contributes to debates in the study of religion and politics. Those studies that emphasize the interaction between political factors and religious beliefs seem most accurate; this includes the 'religious economies' theory of Gill (2008) and Grim & Finke (2011), the institutional focus of scholars like Fox (2008) and Philpott (2000, 2007) and the relational-institutional approach of Nexon (2009). Moreover, it demonstrates that existing approaches to domestic politics and foreign policy can explain religious influences on international disputes, and quantitative methods can detect these influences; religion and international relations can thus be studied in a manner similar to other topics in the subfield, as numerous scholars – including Bellin (2008), Fox & Sandler (2004), Nexon (2011), and Snyder (2011) – have argued. Post-positivist and qualitative studies of religion and international relations are valuable, but they exist as complements to, rather than competitors with, quantitative analyses. Finally, those theories that argue religion is epiphenomenal to material interests are insufficient, as they cannot explain the significance of religion–state connections.

This study also contributes to broader debates about interstate disputes and ideas in international relations. Instead of exogenously assuming domestic preferences, analyses of domestic influences on conflict may require understanding public beliefs and how the state responds to domestic sentiment. Similarly, research into the effects of normative concerns or ideational motivations like nationalism on international relations should continue to focus on the domestic conditions that translate diffuse global norms into specific state policies (Acharya, 2004; Busby, 2007; Cederman, Warren & Sornette, 2011). And states' positions on international normative issues may be driven by domestic politics and regimes' survival strategies, rather than principled stands on behalf of a cause (Vreeland, 2008).

The article also presents implications for policymakers grappling with the proper response to the resurgence of religion around the world. Although the study ended in 2000, conflicts since then suggest a continuing role for religious–secular ideological distance in interstate disputes. The 2001 terrorist attacks of Al-Qaeda prompted the US-led 'global war on terror', but US actions became part of the broader religious–secular conflict in Muslim societies (Owen, 2010). And the increasing importance of religion in Turkey's politics has led to decreased ideological distance between Turkey and Middle Eastern states; this contributed to greater ties between Turkey and its neighbors and, for a time, lessened tensions with states such as Iran (Yavuz, 2009).

The study provides a guardedly optimistic assessment of the future role of religion and interstate disputes. While many religious states are concentrated in the greater Middle East, religious states are more diffuse in other areas such as sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia. A good number of possible disputant dyads, then, fall into the religious–secular category, suggesting there is potential for religion to influence conflict in a negative manner. But the findings are generally optimistic in terms of the mechanisms through which religion affects conflict. Religion itself does not cause conflict, so increasing religiosity is not a cause for concern. And the connection between a state and religion is not in itself problematic for interstate disputes; while states with extensive religion–state connections may be more repressive, this does not always translate into conflictual international relations. Instead, it is the means through which leaders draw on ideologies – like religion – in response to domestic sentiment that exacerbates international conflict. Policymakers should therefore allow for the expression of religious values in international relations and focus their attention on the pathological institutional and political conditions that often repress and radicalize religious sentiment.

Replication data

The dataset, codebook and do-files for the empirical analysis in this article can be found at http://www.prio.no/jpr/datasets.

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