The impact of religious freedom research

International Journal for Religious Freedom
Volume 12, Issue 1/2, 2019

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Cover Art

The cover art was created by Hugo Ortiz De Pinedo (Tiger Cartoon). Its inspiration is Chagall's painting The Wolf and The Lamb, which illustrates one of Jean de la Fontaine's fables that retells the old Greek fable of Aesop. In Chagall's original painting, the Wolf devours the Lamb. In this illustration, the Wolf and the Lamb, which stand for the Persecutor and the Persecuted, lie down together, reminiscent of the image of Isaiah 11:6. In the background, the world is a barren wasteland, desperate for redemption. There is hope, as is represented by a butterfly, a universal symbol of transformation.

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Volume 12, Issue 1/2, 2019
ISSN 2070–5484

Editorial

The impact of religious freedom research

We are pleased that IJRF is continuing to catch up on its backlog. While this volume comes under the label of 2019, the articles were written in 2020 and 2021. The issue is being published at the end of 2021.

Our guest editors for this special issue are Dr Dennis P. Petri and Prof Dr Govert J. Buijs. Dr Petri has contributed articles to several previous issues of the IJRF. A political scientist, international consultant and researcher, Petri founded and serves as scholar-at-large of the Observatory of Religious Freedom in Latin America (OLIRE). Dr Buijs is professor of political philosophy at the Faculty of Humanities, Department of Philosophy of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and holds the Kuyper Chair for 'Political philosophy and religion' as well as the Goldschmeding Chair 'Economy in relation to civil society'.

Dr Petri and Dr Buijs held a two-part virtual expert seminar on 18 and 25 May 2020 on The Impact of Religious Freedom Research.[1] The seminar included 13 excellent papers on a wide variety of subjects related to religious freedom research, which form the foundation of this issue. We appreciate Dr Petri and Dr Buijs's work in editing this issue of IJRF.

Yours for religious freedom,
Prof Dr Janet Epp Buckingham, executive editor

Introducing this special issue

The IJRF exists to publish academic research on religious freedom. In this special issue, we take a critical look at ourselves as academics, reflecting on the real and potential impact of this research.

In our opinion article, as guest editors, we explore the question of the impact of religious freedom research further, using the articles contained in this issue as a starting point. In their opinion article, Thomas Müller, Matthew Rees and Frans Veerman introduce the World Watch List of Open Doors and show how it allows to make unreported dimensions of persecution against Christians visible.

In the first section of this journal, the authors discuss methodologies and tools to assess religious freedom. Jonathan Fox, who is the mastermind behind the very comprehensive Religion and State Project at Bar-Ilan University, questions the multiple conceptualizations of religious freedom and their measurements. Niels De Nutte and Anton Van Dyck take the Freedom of Thought Report issued by Humanists

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[1] The recordings of the expert seminar are available here: https://youtu.be/UfkgPUP-v8I (Part 1) and here: https://youtu.be/c_qNQai3wfQ (Part 2).

International as their starting point and investigate the relevance of this tool. Christof Sauer interrogates the conceptual and methodological complexities involved in quantifying the number of persecuted Christians. Dennis P. Petri presents a new tool to assess religious freedom, The Religious Minorities Vulnerability Assessment Tool, which seeks to overcome limitations of existing religious freedom datasets.

The second section delves into the relationship between religious freedom research and different areas of public policy. Jason Klocek takes a critical look at the role religious freedom research can play to inform US foreign policy. Janet Epp Buckingham zooms in on the use of religious freedom research to assist in adjudicating religion-based claims within the Canadian refugee determination system. Luke M. Perez stresses the importance of studying public support for international religious freedom policy, based on an original survey of the US electorate. John F. Osorio presents an interreligious dialogue mechanism used to inform urban planning in the city of Manizales, Colombia.

The final section of this journal sheds light on a variety of blind spots of religious freedom research. James C. Wallace elaborates on the ignored religious dimensions of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative. Kareem McDonald looks at the religious literacy of the managers of Danish asylum centers. Marcelo Bartolini explores the reasons behind the insufficient protection of religious freedom in Mexico. Ronald Boyd-MacMillan takes a historical-theological perspective to debunk the assumption that persecution necessarily leads to Church growth.

We are pleased to present this issue which covers a great variety of methodological, disciplinary and geographic perspectives on the impact of religious freedom research. We hope that this rich collection of papers will inspire more researchers to engage in this field.

Yours sincerely,
Dr Dennis P. Petri & Prof Dr Govert J. Buijs
Guest editors

Dr Dennis P. Petri   *Prof Dr Govert J. Buijs*

The societal relevance of religious freedom research

Notes for academia, public policy and vulnerable religious groups

Dennis P. Petri[1] and Govert J. Buijs[2]

Abstract

In recent years, the study of religious freedom has received increased attention in academia. In parallel, more and more national governments and supranational bodies have taken an interest in religious freedom, developing documentation tools and appointing specialized religious freedom officers. Notwithstanding these developments, there is little consensus about the conceptualization and measurement of religious freedom. Moreover, the effectiveness of religious freedom research to combat religious freedom violations remains unclear. Based on a review of the articles included in this special issue, we discuss the impact of religious freedom research on academia, on public policy and on vulnerable religious groups.

Keywords   religious freedom, research, societal relevance, academia, public policy, vulnerable religious groups.

We are strong believers in the importance of the societal relevance of academic research. In our view, researchers should not stay in their ivory towers, but engage in an open dialogue with "the real world", which, ultimately, we seek to understand better and, if we can, help move forward. This does not mean that we are academic activists, because that would imply that we allow our personal preferences and biases to take precedence over the methodological soundness of our research.[3] Rather we are of the conviction that one of the justifications for doing academic research is to make a meaningful contribution to address real-life problems, while at the same time being sufficiently detached from them to be objective.

[1]   Dennis P. Petri is international director of the International Institute for Religious Freedom; founder and scholar-at-large at the Observatory of Religious Freedom in Latin America; lecturer at The Hague University of Applied Sciences, the Universidad Latinoamericana de Ciencia y Tecnología and the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (UNESCO); and director of the Foundation Platform for Social Transformation. Email: dp.petri@gmail.com.

[2]   Govert J. Buijs is professor of political philosophy at the Faculty of Humanities, Department of Philosophy of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and holds the Kuyper Chair for 'Political philosophy and religion' as well as the Goldschmeding Chair 'Economy in relation to civil society'.

[3]   We are aware that the influence of personal preferences and biases cannot be avoided completely, although the practice of submitting our work to peer review is helpful!

One of the problems of "the real world" is religious freedom or, as it is referred to more inclusively, "freedom of religion or belief." Until recently, the social sciences were still largely dominated by the secularization theory, which regarded religion as not worth spending time on, in line with its claim that religion's societal significance was bound to decrease. This also led to a neglect of religious freedom as an area of study, which created a kind of self-reinforcing spiral: because religious freedom was not perceived as an important issue, it was not researched, and because it was not researched, no significant religious freedom violations were identified, which further discouraged scholars from researching it.

This impasse started to be dissolved, in part because of the realization that the empirical evidence contradicted the central claim of the secularization theory, which its main proponent, Peter Berger, later graciously recognized (2009).[4] There were also some pioneering academics who took an interest in the issue of religious discrimination. In 1997, Jonathan Fox took Ted Gurr's Minorities at Risk dataset and adapted it to include religious minorities, which later evolved into the Religion and State Project at Bar-Ilan University (Fox 1999). That same year, Paul Marshall's book *Their Blood Cries Out* attracted wide attention (Marshall and Gilbert 1997). In 2005, Brian Grim and Roger Finke (Grim 2005; Grim and Finke 2011) laid the foundations of what would later become the Pew Research Center's Global Restrictions on Religion reports. Around the same time, Thomas Schirrmacher and Christof Sauer founded the International Institute for Religious Freedom, which has grown to become a network of scholars working on reliable data on the violation of religious freedom worldwide.

The initial impetus for religious freedom research, however, did not come from academia. For decades, faith-based organizations, some with a missionary focus, had been involved in documenting and measuring religious freedom, mainly to inform their strategic planning. The first version of Open Doors' World Watch List was developed in 1992. In the 1990's, public and multilateral institutions all around the world followed and started developing religious freedom monitoring instruments.

This brief historical background illustrates that religious freedom research, mainly since the 1990s, has been a growing field. It is timely, therefore, to look back and reflect on the impact of this research. The contributing authors to this special issue explore this theme from a wide variety of angles. In this essay we highlight some key findings from these authors, which we complement with our own reflection. In the following, we will discuss the impact of religious freedom research at three levels: on academia itself, on the policy world and on vulnerable religious groups.

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[4]   While acknowledging that religion indeed continues to be present in society, Peter Berger did note that it has taken on new forms.

1. Observing the full scope of religious freedom

The growing interest in academia in the documentation and measurement of religious freedom has led to the development of an increasingly rich corpus of religious freedom monitoring instruments, ranging from qualitative monographs and narrative reports to surveys and quantitative tools.[5] The contributing authors to this issue discuss the following instruments in-depth: the Religion and State dataset (Fox; Petri), the Freedom of Thought Report of Humanists International (De Nutte and Van Dyck), the Pew Research Center's Global Restrictions on Religion (De Nutte and Van Dyck; Petri; Buckingham; Wallace) and the World Watch List of Open Doors (Müller, Rees and Veerman; Sauer; Petri; Buckingham; Bartolini). In their articles, Klocek, Buckingham, Perez and Wallace also take a look at US-based reports, including the Annual Report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom and the Department of State's International Religious Freedom Report.

An unavoidable observation is that there is little consensus about the conceptualization and operationalization of religious freedom, as well as about the proper methodology to measure it. In this respect, Matthias Kœnig speaks of a "polyphony of religious freedom", referring to the plurality of uses of this concept in different legal traditions throughout history, a point also made by Joustra (2018) and by Fox in this issue. This is not necessarily a problem because the different approaches and instruments to assess religious freedom can be used alongside each other, as they each highlight complementary aspects.

Yet, conceptual and methodological choices have very real consequences, for example if one seeks to determine which countries have religious freedom (Fox), to rank countries based on the degree of legal discrimination and restrictions on freedom of thought, belief and expression (De Nutte and Van Dyck), to quantify the number of persecuted Christians (Sauer) or to assess the intensity and severity of persecution of Christians (Müller, Rees and Veerman). It also makes a difference how broad or narrow the adopted definition of religious freedom is, how religion is defined and operationalized and whether non-religious factors that create vulnerability for religious groups are considered (Fox; Petri).

When making these conceptual and methodological choices, there will always be a tension between pragmatism and idealism. As pointed out by Owen (2003), data collection in social sciences is subject to what can be referred to as a "measurement paradox"; the more exhaustive one seeks to be in observing any social phenomenon, the more difficult data collection becomes. The only way to overcome

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[5]   As an illustration, Katherine Marshall's comprehensive working paper "Towards Enriching Understandings and Assessments of Freedom of Religion or Belief: Politics, Debates, Methodologies, and Practices" (2021) discusses 31 different instruments.

this measurement paradox seems to be for quantitative and qualitative approaches to remain in dialogue with one another, as we have attempted in this issue. This way, the advantages of both types of approaches can be harnessed. Indeed, qualitative studies focusing on specific countries or subnational areas have the advantage of being more granular. They can also inform quantitative studies. For example, a premise of Petri's Religious Minorities Vulnerability Assessment Tool, but also of other tools such as the World Watch List, is precisely that data from other sources can be integrated in its own data collection process. The strengths of quantitative studies are that they allow for cross-national comparisons, which provide helpful international benchmarks for qualitative case studies.

Important blind spots of religious freedom research are discussed in this issue. Müller, Rees and Veerman show how the World Watch List of Open Doors has shed light on some "dark corners of persecution." This includes the plight of Christian converts, the compound vulnerability of women belonging to persecuted groups and "eclipsed" expressions of persecution in multi-faceted conflict situations such as Nigeria or Myanmar. Petri stresses the importance of observing three aspects: (1) the role of religious behavior; (2) the actions of non-state actors; and (3) activities at the subnational level to get a more complete picture of religious freedom violations in a given context.

There are many more areas with very real religious freedom implications that have thus far been neglected by empirical observation or that existing frameworks fail to detect. Wallace makes a compelling case to acknowledge the religious implications of China's Belt and Road Initiative, which has not been the object of prior research. McDonald describes the concerning lack of basic knowledge of religion of the managers of Danish Red Cross-operated asylum centers, which poses challenges to the protection of religious rights in these centers. Bartolini signals, among other things, that research on religious freedom in Mexico has almost exclusively focused on church-state relations, thereby ignoring other important dimensions of religious freedom. Boyd-MacMillan looks at some of the factors that have historically threatened the mere existence of Christianity, but that are not widely known.

These examples of blind spots of religious freedom research underline the necessity of approaching religious freedom as a multidimensional concept. In line with UN Human Rights Committee (HRC) CCPR General Comment No. 22 (1993), and as we have argued elsewhere, religious freedom should be considered as a multidimensional concept (Petri and Veerman 2020). We develop this notion further in the next section of this essay.

2. Designing public policy from a "religious freedom perspective"

In a 2015 TEDx talk, Allen Hertzke, a leading scholar in religious studies, recognized how instrumental religious freedom data has been to make this issue visible

and to promote policy responses: "To create the kind of global future we want, we must put religious freedom back on the map. We must put religious freedom back on the map! Indeed, the protection of religious freedom may be the best means of navigating the crucible of the 21st century. Living with our differences and a shrinking world." (Hertzke 2015) Was Hertzke too optimistic?

It is undeniable that since the 1990s, national governments, as well as supranational bodies, have taken interest in the issue of religious freedom, developing their own documentation tools and, in some cases, appointing specialized officers to promote religious freedom in foreign or domestic policy.

A landmark was the adoption of the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) in the United States in 1998 which created an Office of International Religious Freedom within the Department of State, headed by an Ambassador of Religious Freedom with the mandate to produce an annual "International Religious Freedom Report" on all countries of the world. It also created the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), which is an independent, bipartisan, federal government entity mandated with monitoring the status of freedom of religion or belief outside the United States and providing policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State, and Congress. After the adoption of the IRFA, other national governments which in the 2010s have created specialized divisions focusing on religion or religious freedom within their ministries for foreign affairs include Norway, Canada, Italy, France and The Netherlands. In addition, several Western parliaments have deployed initiatives to promote freedom of religion (Petri 2020).

The impact of these initiatives varies greatly; some government divisions have since been abandoned or receive less attention, while other governments have increased their efforts (Toft and Green 2018; Petersen and Marshall 2019). By contrast, religious freedom is not a policy priority for any Latin American country except for Brazil (Freston 2018) nor for multilateral regional bodies such as the Organization of American States (Petri 2020).

The articles included in this issue offer a mixed account of the impact of religious freedom research on domestic and international policy, in particular its effectiveness to combat religious freedom violations. Let's start with the success stories first.

As a result of the IRFA, the United States made religious freedom an explicit foreign policy priority (Klocek; Perez). Although presidential administrations since 1998 have placed different emphases, it has become institutionalized and is expanding. One example is the increasing requirements of federal agencies to incorporate religious freedom into their programming, which has led some of them to hire religious freedom experts (Klocek). In Colombia, something similar occurred, affecting domestic policy, the adoption of the "Comprehensive Public Policy on Re-

ligious Freedom and Freedom of Worship" in 2018 by the Ministry of the Interior. This triggered local governments to adopt their own religious freedom policies, which in the case of the city of Manizales included a consultation mechanism aimed at involving religious groups in local development policies (Osorio).

The contributing authors to this issue highlight other ways in which religious freedom research has informed policy. The World Watch List of Open Doors (Müller, Rees and Veerman) and the Freedom of Thought Report by Humanists International (De Nutte and Van Dyck) have been used to brief parliamentarians and diplomats from various countries as well as UN staff. Open Doors was also instrumental in getting the vulnerability of women from minority faith communities recognized within the UK's Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI).

Religious freedom research has, nevertheless, not had the impact on policy it could have, as our contributing authors show. Whilst Open Doors reports have informed asylum cases involving Christian converts in the United Kingdom and in Germany, this is much less the case in other countries. As Buckingham claims, important documentation or reports specializing in religious freedom are not considered in the refugee determination process in Canada. On a related matter, McDonald shows that Danish refugee center managers are unfamiliar with religious freedom research that could benefit their work. On Mexico, Bartolini concludes that religious freedom research has had no bearing whatsoever on the religious freedom situation of the country. One could also ask how sensitive policymakers are to the methodological and measurement challenges related to religious freedom discussed by Fox, Petri and Sauer.

Even in the US, there are issues. Klocek warns that calls to include religious freedom in the programming of federal agencies do not always lead to structural responses or are insufficiently informed by data. He observes that policymakers do not always follow the most recent and accurate data available, nor are they always sensitive to the nuances of this data.[6] Perez signals the key importance of educating the general public about the existence of international religious policies to ensure ongoing support for them. Wallace cautions that although US foreign policy may have espoused religious freedom, its diplomats have also overlooked the religious implications of the Belt and Road Initiative.

The consequences of the neglect of religious freedom research in policy are evident. It is a direct obstacle to evidence-based policy when it disregards religious sensitivities. Indeed, religious freedom is not only affected by religious policy (Fox), but by many other policy fields. The contributors to this issue illustrate this: religious freedom has implications for public health (in relation to COVID-19: Mül-

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[6]   A related challenge is the (perceived and effective) politization of religious freedom (Klocek).

ler, Rees and Veerman),[7] refugee policy (Buckingham; McDonald), foreign policy (Klocek; Perez; Wallace), infrastructure (Wallace), urban planning (Osorio) or security policy (Petri; Wallace; Bartolini). In other words, appointing ambassadors for religious freedom, whilst important, is not enough; religious freedom needs to be a cross-cutting policy theme, very much like gender or the environment.[8]

Considering the above, what determines the impact of religious freedom research on policy? Primordially, the documentation of incidents is the main justification for requesting attention to a specific social problem or social fact, as almost all authors in this issue confirm. If religious freedom violations are not documented, it is as if they did not exist. Documentation is particularly important in situations in which victims of violence are too afraid to report crimes to the police – as observed in Petri's three case studies – or when states fail to comply with the requirement to register human rights violations as is the case in Mexico (Bartolini).

Another factor seems to be the level of institutionalization of religious freedom as the examples of the United States and Colombia show. Indeed, it is not without significance that the US government is mandated to do its own religious freedom research (Perez; Klocek) and that the Colombian city of Manizales has created an interreligious council to advise its development policies (Osorio). Of course, such institutional mechanisms cannot prevent blind spots from appearing, but they do help to keep public institutions focused on religious concerns.

Two more determining factors can be cited. The first is the role of political support (Klocek; Osorio; Bartolini) and public support (Perez). It is worth noting that the passage of the IRFA was the result of aggressive lobbying by David Horowitz, who led a broad interfaith coalition of opinion leaders and religious representatives including key Jewish leaders such as Rabbi David Saperstein, the Dalai Lama and other Tibetan Buddhists, Baha'is, the US Catholic Bishops Conference and various Evangelical activists (Hertzke 2004). The adoption of the Colombian religious freedom policies is, at least in part, the result of the personal commitment to religious freedom of national and local government officials (Osorio). The softening of Mexico's anticlericalism in 1992, as well as the current lack of a federal religious freedom policy, can be interpreted as a consequence of electoral considerations (Bartolini), confirming Anthony Gill's thesis about *The Political Origins of Religious Liberty* (2008).[9]

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7 The IJRF is preparing a special issue on the relationship between COVID-19 and religious freedom (scheduled for 2022).

8 Policy documents all over the world speak of "the gender perspective" and the "environmental perspective." Whilst this is naturally important, "the religious freedom perspective" is often missing and is also essential.

9 Noting the role of political and public support also compels us to acknowledge that policy is, unfor-

Finally, religious literacy, especially religious freedom literacy, is hugely determinant for religious freedom research to be taken into consideration in policy as Klocek, Perez, Wallace, McDonald and Bartolini stress in various ways.

3. Serving vulnerable religious communities

Most analyses of religious freedom focus on documenting religious freedom violations but give little attention to the responses of religious minorities to these violations. As Daniel Philpott and Timothy Shah, who directed the first systematic study on the resilience of Christians to persecution, *Under Caesar's Sword* (2018), comment, "Far less well understood is how Christians respond when their religious freedom has been severely violated." (2017:2) The resilience of religious groups was the subject of the 2017 issue of the *International Journal for Religious Freedom* which collected 7 articles around the topic "Responding to Persecution".[10] Save these examples, academic research projects that investigate the resilience of religious groups are rare.[11]

Even rarer are reflections on the impact of religious freedom research on vulnerable religious communities. This is quite surprising. After all, if all this research on religious discrimination is being done, shouldn't we want to know if it is making a difference for religious minorities and contributes to increasing the resilience of religious groups to persecution? The articles contained in this issue only laterally look at this question. It is, without a doubt, a subject that demands further research.

Clearly, religious freedom research exerts an indirect influence on vulnerable religious groups by informing policy initiatives, as described in the previous section. This is, however, quite a diffuse effect, because in the best case, religious freedom research contributes to more religiously literate policies that take the expectations, needs and sensitivities of religious groups into account. This does not automatically imply, however, that religious freedom research actually helps religious groups to be better prepared to face pressures.

More to the point, in this issue De Nutte and Van Dyck argue that the comparative and global nature of the Freedom of Thought Report (and any cross-national religious freedom datasets for that matter) increases the resilience of religious groups because it helps them identify countries' strengths and weaknesses in relation to FoRB, without targeting any particular country or religious group. These authors also describe how

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tunately, not always informed by research.

[10] Ronald Boyd-MacMillan's *Faith That Endures: The Essential Guide to the Persecuted Church* (2006) is a practical handbook based on years of fieldwork that offers advice for persecuted Christians. This book was later expanded in the form of the educational video series "Dangerous Faith" and "Thoughts from the Underground." This course was later developed into a course on "Persecution, Mission and Christian Spirituality" that is taught at Fuller Theological Seminary.

[11] The USAID-USIP "Closing the Gap" project (2020-2021) also laterally covered responses of discriminated religious groups in its case studies of the state of religious freedom in four countries.

religious freedom data has been used to campaign against religious freedom violations more effectively, citing the examples of blasphemy and apostasy. For example, they recount how the removal of the word "blasphemy" from the Irish constitution came to be referred to as a "best practice" by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. Similarly, the religious freedom policy of the city of Manizales in Colombia can also be analyzed as a "best practice" because consultation of religious groups on policy matters is a very effective model to prevent religious conflict (Osorio).

In his contribution, McDonald highlights the way in which religious beliefs constitute a coping method which provides asylum seekers with a framework to make sense of their suffering. Likewise, Boyd-MacMillan shows that persecuted Christians can obtain much encouragement and hope by understanding church history, first because it helps them realize that their plight is not unique but has been shared by many others throughout history, and second because it can provide them with tactics to endure their tribulations.

4. Final remarks

Notwithstanding their richness, the collection of articles included in this issue only cover a limited sample of the conceptual and methodological challenges and blind spots of religious freedom research. We encourage our colleagues to consider religious freedom from the broadest possible perspective, always acknowledging its multiple dimensions and being on the lookout for neglected areas where the rights of religious groups are being threatened. An incomplete understanding of the right to religious freedom results in many violations not being recognized, which leads to victims of these violations not being helped.

Promoting religious literacy and religious freedom literacy is key. We encourage our colleagues to include relevant aspects of religious freedom research in their teaching. The fact that religious freedom research has grown does not mean that is has become mainstream, nor that it has influenced academia more broadly. Moreover, we encourage religious freedom scholars to dedicate more attention to the identification and systematization of good practices that can contribute to the resilience of religious communities.

We hope that our joint research efforts will contribute to more informed and more religiously literate decision-making, that is more sensitive to the religious freedom implications of policy decisions.

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Highlighting the dark corners of persecution
Using the Open Doors World Watch List as a basis

Thomas Müller, Frans Veerman and Matthew D. Rees[1]

Abstract

World Watch Research has for many years been gathering data about different types of hostilities against Christians. Traditionally these data were used to guide Open Doors (OD) field work, as well as by Open Doors Offices, mainly to sensitize Christian constituencies, encourage them to pray and give for the 'persecuted Church'. More recently, the data have been used more broadly by different groups of users. This article describes how World Watch List (WWL) data have helped to highlight under-researched topics concerning persecuted Christians. It also gives an example how OD's office in the United Kingdom used the data to improve its advocacy work.

Keywords   World Watch List, persecution engines, drivers of persecution, advocacy, conversion, gender dimension of persecution, persecution eclipse.

World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International,[2] has been gathering data about different types of hostilities against Christians for many years. Traditionally, these data have guided Open Doors (OD) project work and have been used by OD offices around the world, mainly to sensitize their Christian constituencies and encourage them to pray and give financial support for the "persecuted Church." In more recent years, WWR's work has received broader attention, for several reasons. First, OD offices have been able to reach the secular public more extensively, as journalists have reported more often on the situation of Christians. Second, OD Advocacy has more actively used the data in the political sphere. Third, the data have been analysed by OD experts looking for patterns of gender-specific persecution. Fourth, WWR team members have presented the data to other religious freedom professionals.

In this article, we briefly describe how World Watch List (WWL) data have helped to highlight under-researched topics concerning persecuted Christians (in

this article referred to as "dark corners of persecution"). We also explain how OD's office in the United Kingdom used the data to improve its advocacy work. We attempt to identify lessons learned and discuss how to increase the positive impact of WWL research on behalf of the "persecuted Church."

1. The World Watch List

The WWL is one of the few comprehensive annual research projects authored by a non-state actor on the status of freedom of religion worldwide. It focuses on the situation of Christians and is published as a ranking of 73 countries with corresponding country dossiers,[3] detailing the situation of Christians in each country.

The underlying research follows a detailed methodology, which has at its heart a questionnaire with 84 questions grouped in six spheres (five spheres of life and violence).[4] Those spheres of life follow the guarantees of freedom of religion stipulated in Article 18 of the United Nations' Universal Declaration on Human Rights and Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The five spheres are private life (in freedom of religion terminology, usually *forum internum*), family life, community life, national life and church life (comprising the collective dimension of freedom of religion). Violence frequently occurs across all spheres.

But these are just the core questions respondents and the WWR team should answer. At least as important for a good understanding of any given country are the systemic questions about a country's persecution engines, its drivers of persecution, and the categories and geographic spread of its Christian communities. Adding in general questions, such as ones on a country's political, economic, social and technological situation, a total of 126 questions should be answered, painting a detailed picture of the situation on the ground.

WWR categorises nine persecution engines; although, in practice, the various sources of persecution are often blended, usually one engine is dominant. The nine engines are Islamic oppression, religious nationalism, ethno-religious hostility, clan oppression, Christian denominational protectionism, communist and post-communist oppression, secular intolerance, dictatorial paranoia, and organized corruption and crime.

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[3]   On the question of whether freedom of religion can be measured at all and different options for doing so, see Anja Hoffmann, "Measuring Freedom of Religion: An Analysis of Religious Freedom Indexes," MA thesis, University of Vienna, 2017. For the 2020 World Watch List, see the Compilation of main documents, last revision 15 January 2020. The 2020 list had 73 countries, but the number varies from year to year, as all countries scoring at least 41 points on the WWL rating system are included. The individual country dossiers for WWL 2020 were updated in February/March 2020, the 74 country dossiers for WWL 2021 were updated February/March 2021.

[4]   The complete WWL methodology has been updated in October 2020.

WWR has also developed a list of twelve drivers, including not just typical actors of persecution such as state authorities and religious radical groups, but also persecutors that may not initially be recognized as such: political parties, ordinary citizens or one's own immediate or extended family. As with the engines, usually more than one driver of persecution is active, leading to what could be called a persecution matrix.

Finally, it is important to determine who is actually being persecuted. Therefore, four categories of Christian communities have been distinguished: communities of expatriate Christians (including migrant workers), historical Christian communities and/or government-controlled churches, converts to Christianity and non-traditional Christian communities. In any given country, different engines and persecutors may be targeting different categories of Christian communities. Furthermore, the situation within a country can vary by region, adding additional complexity.[5]

Respondents to the questionnaire are experts who are independent of OD and the WWR analyst. All answers are fed into the scoring process[6] that results in the production of the WWL. In addition, the information is reflected in the picture of persecution explained and detailed in country dossiers. The complete WWL 2020 documentation encompasses approximately 2,500 pages of text when one also counts general articles on trends, violence and statistics along with an audit statement. This documentation should be taken into account when evaluating a country's score or position on the list.

Given this wealth of information, it is not surprising that the interest in the data provided has grown exponentially and reaches beyond traditional Christian constituencies, although these are still an important target group. The WWL remains a valid and important way of transmitting information to facilitate prayer and support, but its applications have expanded considerably beyond this task, especially when used in combination with the country dossiers. In the past, mainly Christian media were reporting on the persecution of Christians; in recent years, the situation of Christians worldwide has attracted increasing interest in secular media as well. The type of reporting varies from basic overviews to human interest stories that support advocacy for those at risk. Meanwhile, politicians have also been showing more interest in the topic,[7] although this interest has not necessarily translated into action on behalf of persecuted Christians.

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[5] For example, see the country dossiers on Ethiopia, update February 2020; Myanmar, update February 2020; or China, update February 2020.

[6] For a detailed explanation of the scoring process, see p. 36 of the complete WWL methodology, updated October 2020.

[7] The 2020 WWL was launched – amongst other places – in the European Parliament, with 70 people attending, including eight members of the parliament; 123 MPs attended the presentation in the Uni-

2. The dark corners of persecution

One of the most practical results of this increase in research and corresponding interest is the discovery of what could be called the dark corners of persecution against Christians – situations which are rarely highlighted or even mentioned in any media reporting. The wealth of data gathered in the process of compiling the annual list contributes not only to a better understanding of the situation and persecution patterns, but also to identifying groups that are especially vulnerable to persecution. Many of these groups were rarely the subject of reporting, due to lack of knowledge, lack of available data, or other reasons.

2.1 The situation of Christian converts

No matter who drives persecution or the motives behind it, converts to Christianity are bearing the brunt of persecution all over the world, across all categories of drivers and engines. People are converting to Christianity in countries where religion plays a major role in daily life (such as many Muslim countries, Hindu India or Buddhist Myanmar and Sri Lanka) and also in Communist countries such as Vietnam and China. Often in these countries, established churches (both Catholic or Protestant) do not dare to support converts or even have contact with them, since they are perceived as apostates and enemies of society.[8] Even the decision to convert from one Christian denomination to another can invoke persecution.[9]

Converts frequently prefer to keep their decision as private and secret as possible, fearing the harsh consequences[10] should their conversion become known to family, friends or the wider community. The WWL data show that converts not only face social pressure to return to their old faith but may be excluded from their families, forced to leave the village, deprived of their livelihood or even killed with impunity. This is one reason why converts do not show up in most statistics published by religious organizations or state authorities. A politically motivated under-reporting of Christians in many government censuses adds to this bias.[11] Acknowledging a

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ted Kingdom, 40 in France, and 16 in Sweden. A launch was also held in the Italian parliament for the first time, and the results were presented to the Danish parliament as well.

[8] See the in-depth study of conversion and apostasy in Christine Schirrmacher, *Let there be no Compulsion in Religion (Sura 2:256): Apostasy from Islam as Judged by Contemporary Islamic Theologians* (Bonn VKW, 2016).

[9] This is the case in Ethiopia, for example; see the country dossier on Ethiopia, update February 2020 (especially the section on the private sphere), although such an inter-denominational change could perhaps be better distinguished from conversion by using another term.

[10] For details, see the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom's overview on (anti-)conversion laws from December 2018.

[11] This is believed to have been the case with the 2014 government census in Myanmar; see country dossier Myanmar, update February 2020, pp. 11-12, or the 2017 government census in Pakistan; see country dossier Pakistan, update February 2020, pp. 10 and 13.

higher number of Christians would embolden radical groups or support narratives by majoritarian groups that their religion, culture and very being are threatened by the Christian minority. Furthermore, Christian converts are unlikely to self-identify as such when enumerators deployed by the state come to visit. Therefore, converts prefer to stay in their "dark corner", not out of shame over their faith but out of self-protection. WWR receives hundreds of testimonies of this sort from converts all over the world every year, although for security reasons it is often not possible to publish details.

Converts are far outnumbered by other categories of Christians in most countries on the WWL (though there are exceptions, such as Iran). However, even though small in number, their situation is so different from that of other Christians – and their experience of lack of freedom of religion is so pronounced and multifaceted – that they should be treated as a separate category. Through its published research, WWR directs light into this dark corner of persecution and provides at least some of the data needed to enable an increased level of reporting.

WWR's in-depth research into the situation of converts has benefitted OD's advocacy work. For instance, OD UK and Ireland has responded for many years to requests for support from Christians living in the UK who are facing forced return to a WWL country. For these individuals, the advocacy team provides a letter outlining the dangers for a Christian living in that country, which can be used in the individual's appeal for the right to remain in the UK. Having detailed and accurate research on the location and situation of converts in countries where Christians are persecuted has made these letters crucial in protecting extremely vulnerable Christians from being sent back to high-risk situations in their home countries. OD's research has enabled these letters to provide a nuanced account of Christian's experience in these countries, highlighting the added danger for converts (as well as other vulnerable groups such as women, Christians of a lower caste and children).

In October 2019, OD Germany published a report on the situation of 6,516 converts who had fled to that country, many of whom were at risk of being sent back to countries such as Iran or Afghanistan.[12] The report was based on WWR research and triggered discussions with the relevant authorities.

2.2 The situation of women

Another dark corner of persecution which quickly emerged through OD's research was the situation of women. What may appear to be a societal problem at first glance (since, in many societies, women are relegated to an inferior status by fam-

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[12] Report "Schutz für Konvertiten vor Abschiebung in Länder mit Christenverfolgung – Erhebung zur Situation von 6.516 Konvertiten in Deutschland", October 2019, only available in German.

ily, community and religious authorities and are more prone to discrimination) is in fact a problem that affects freedom of religion and belief as well. That is because along with women's inferior status in society comes an additional layer of vulnerability if they are members of a Christian minority.[13] Affiliation with a minority faith adds to their already existing challenges and frequently leads to discrimination from communities that react in a hostile and derogatory manner to a religion perceived as alien or Western. This double vulnerability can even become a triple vulnerability if the woman is a convert to Christianity, especially when she is the first or only one in her family or community. In such cases, the woman's only way to escape persecution would be to leave her residence, an option rarely available for economic reasons. In many cultures, women have no opportunity to travel or live on their own, separated from their family.

Double vulnerability appears across all categories of persecution engines and countries, but is most pronounced in countries where Islamic oppression is the dominant engine. When the 2018 WWL was launched, pilot studies on this topic were published for six countries: the Central African Republic, Colombia (where the double vulnerability is not related to Islamic oppression), Egypt, Ethiopia, Iraq and Nigeria.[14] For the 2019 WWL, a more systematic analytical approach was applied, and with the 2020 WWL a full report on gender-specific religious persecution (GSRP) was published,[15] based on the data WWR is gathering annually. For the first time, this report also identified typical gender-specific situations of persecution, called "pressure points."

It is much harder to determine the levels of pressure and discrimination faced by women than to gather data on violence, because women face discrimination not only from civil authorities but also from family and society. Gender-based discrimination is a much more everyday phenomenon and often taken for granted, to the extent that its victims do not even think about it. Therefore, considerably fewer reports are available. Finally, discrimination is often perceived as a source of shame, especially when it comes from within one's own family. For these reasons, the main publicly reported pressure point of persecution for women is not discrimination, but sexual violence;[16] for men, it is physical violence. The report does not stop with

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[13] In two-thirds of the top 50 countries on the 2020 WWL, Christians are a minority of not more than 5 percent of the population, and in many cases the percentage is much less than that.

[14] Country reports "Compound structural vulnerabilities facing Christian women under pressure for their faith", November 2018; available for Central African Republic; Colombia; Egypt; Ethiopia; Iraq and Nigeria (revised version from April 2019)

[15] See Report "2020 Gender-specific religious persecution", February 2020 (abbreviated: GSRP report 2020).

[16] GSRP report 2020, p. 9.

reporting violence, as an example about the experience of female Christians in Myanmar makes clear:

> Women, especially when belonging to ethnic or religious minorities, are at the mercy of military personnel, and are vulnerable to assault. Unconfirmed reports indicate that military men are encouraged to marry Christian women and convert them to Buddhism, incentivized by the promise of money or a promotion in rank. Some women report feeling resigned to this fate and see entering such marriages as a way to escape dire poverty and insecurity.
>
> Reports also indicate that Christian women in Kachin State are being trafficked to China to become "brides," where they are raped with the aim of impregnating them.[17]

Another example with very different persecution dynamics is Nigeria:

> In north-east Nigeria and in the Nigerian Middle Belt, the gender component of the attacks and suffering of Christian women and girls is almost in a class of its own. Raids by Boko Haram, and its splinter group ISWAP in north-east Nigeria, along with Fulani herdsmen in the Middle Belt (and even some southern states), have terrorized Christian communities, captured their women and sexually abused them, forced some to be sex slaves, killed some and still collected ransom money for them. The desire to depopulate Christian-dominated territory has brought about an increase in abduction and forced marriage of Christian girls. Married Christian women are victims of this, too. In extreme circumstances, teenage girls are being recruited by force to be used as suicide bombers.[18]

Underscoring the fact that pressure is harder to track than violence, it is much more difficult to give comprehensive reports about forced divorces or incarceration by families – which rank third and fifth, respectively, among the most common findings related to women in the top 50 WWL countries – as these actions usually occur in private. Nevertheless, those findings have highlighted the double vulnerability of Christian women to persecution and have enabled advocacy strategies (for example in the UK) to be better targeted.

The decision to include gender-based questions as part of the WWR questionnaire has been a great asset for OD's strategic advocacy with the UK government. This research has provided opportunities to discuss the specific vulnerability of Christian women and has allowed OD to collaborate with other NGOs working in

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[17] GSRP report 2020, p. 13.
[18] GSRP report 2020, p. 15.

this area. One such NGO is BRAC UK, which seeks to address the specific vulnerability of Rohingya women who are, like Christian women in northern Nigeria or Myanmar, targeted on the basis of their gender and persecuted for their faith. Together, both NGOs have campaigned to have the specific vulnerability of women from minority faith communities recognized within the UK's Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict initiative (PSVI). This campaigning has taken various forms, from a joint submission to the International Development Select Committee to exhibiting together at conferences. Identifying the intersection of faith and gender has provided OD with the ability to build new coalitions with organizations OD would not traditionally have worked with.

Furthermore, the gender-based research has provided OD with new advocacy methods. In 2018, OD took the artist Hannah Rose Thomas to northern Nigeria to visit a trauma centre run by partners of OD. Here, women who have experienced violence at the hands of Boko Haram and Fulani herdsmen receive creative "trauma care." As part of a week-long workshop, Thomas helped each of the women to paint a self-portrait. For many, this was the first time they had held a paint brush or written their own name. On returning, Hannah then painted her own portrait of each of the women. These portraits, alongside the self-portraits, have been used for advocacy purposes and have been displayed at the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in Westminster Abbey, as part of an exhibition designed to influence the PSVI, and at the One Young World conference in London.

Engaging with art as advocacy has provided OD UK and Ireland with a method by which to reach new audiences. For instance, presenting the art at the FCO provided space for continued discussion on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) and PSVI (a strategic goal for OD), and exhibiting at the One Young World conference offered exposure to an international development audience, something OD sees as a strategic priority going forward. Furthermore, the art itself produces an emotional response from decision makers which words and statistics cannot produce. Hence, it opens a new way of discussing persecution of Christians with them.

2.3 Persecution eclipse

"Persecution eclipse" is another "dark corner" found by WWR which is not connected to a certain group of persons, but to the overall situation in a country. This term describes a situation where persecution and a general crisis overlap to the extent that the former appears to be overshadowed or rendered almost invisible by the latter. The danger here is that all attention and efforts to mitigate the situation are focused on the general crisis and the non-religious reasons for it, leaving the religious persecution unaddressed. Persecution eclipse typically occurs in four contexts.

2.3.1 One-sided interpretation of civil conflict

Persecution eclipse arises when specific events are wrongly or one-sidedly interpreted. Nigeria provides a clear example, as a country with an alarming record of religiously related violence. Is the violence taking place in the country actually persecution or just civil unrest? Is there an agenda of Islamization or is it just about economic issues, environmental degradation and migration? A paper published by World Watch Monitor in June 2013, argues that this is a classic example of persecution eclipse.[19] Additional detailed reports on fact-finding missions in the Nigerian Middle Belt further illustrate this pattern.[20]

Another example of one-sided interpretation is the situation of the Christian population in Kachin State and Northern Shan State in Myanmar.[21] The Kachin have been striving for independence and/or autonomy since the 1950s. The fact that Kachin fighters regularly clash with the Burmese army has overshadowed the fact that Christian churches and schools have frequently been shelled, Christian teachers have been killed, pastors have been arrested and thousands of Kachin Christians are still displaced in the region and have been deliberately cut off from receiving aid.

The fact that Border Guard Forces (BGF) are also drivers of persecution blurs the picture. These are armed groups operating alongside the Burmese army, recruited from other ethnic minorities. Furthermore, the Myanmar army, politicians, insurgents and BGF all participate to varied degrees in the trade of precious stones, timber and drugs. As the leader of the Kachin Baptist Convention, Dr. Hkalam Samson, stated in September 2019, all sides of the conflict are simply benefitting too much from the current status quo and do not really seem interested in peace.[22] Amidst the concerns over an insurgency, economic problems and corruption, the underlying religious reasons for mistreatment of innocent persons to be overlooked.

2.3.2 Oversee initial phases of a conflict

Persecution eclipse also arises when conflicts receive international attention after their initial phases. One example is Boko Haram in Nigeria. In its early phases (after its resurrection in 2010), Boko Haram killed government personnel (including security forces) and Christians. Whereas government personnel (whether Muslims or Christians) were killed because they were linked to the government, Christians were killed because of

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[19] Report "Nigeria: persecution or civil unrest?", 2013.
[20] See all 12 reports focusing on Nigeria under the headline "WWR Analysis – FOCUS NIGERIA: 2013-2018" at the tab "Reports".
[21] The paragraphs on Myanmar have been finalized before the military coup on 1 February 2021 took place.
[22] "No peace in Myanmar without sacrifices: Kachin Christian chief"; Interview in *The Irawaddy,* 18 September 2019.

their faith. When the international community began to notice the situation, the conflict had already spread to include Muslims not associated with Boko Haram.

Another example comes from the Central African Republic. In 2012 and 2013, Christians were violently persecuted by Islamic Séléka militants on their way to gaining power in Bangui, the nation's capital. International attention arose when the so-called anti-Balaka forces (seen by some as a Christian militia) started to commit revenge attacks on Muslims in Bangui. The origin of the conflict was then quickly forgotten, and nearly the entire blame was placed on the allegedly Christian militia.

2.3.3 Culture of violence

Another form of persecution eclipse occurs when organized crime leads to a culture of violence in society that extends beyond the most radical criminal groups. Gangs consisting of youth who saw their fathers and sometimes mothers leave home to go abroad for paid work sometimes step into the criminal opportunities left open by organized crime groups, partly for easy gain and partly in their search for belonging. This situation is common in several Latin American countries. Since these criminal groups and gangs often operate at the level of the local community, local churches, pastors and members are seriously threatened when they try to put their faith into practice by offering youths alternatives to a gang career through education or training. Church leaders and professionals, in particular, are targeted where they stand up for Christian values in violent societies. It is often assumed that they are being targeted for socio-political reasons, not due to their faith, but it is very difficult to separate the two in such circumstances.

2.3.4 National disaster: COVID-19

Finally, persecution eclipse can happen when, during national or international crises such as COVID-19, attention shifts away from hostilities against minority religious groups and completely focuses on the new crisis at hand. In the shadow of such a crisis, persecution can take place in houses, in local communities and even at the state level without being noticed. The crisis could even be purposefully exploited as an opportunity for additional persecution. Anecdotal evidence is available on these consequences of COVID-19, but more research is necessary before conclusions can be drawn.[23]

3. Conclusion

This article has sought to highlight the so-called "dark corners" of persecution that WWR has identified while gathering and processing data about the situation of

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[23] For instance, state aid is sometimes provided only to members of the majority religion, or Christian nurses and medical personnel have been placed at the forefront in treating infected patients. For example, see country dossier Pakistan WWL 2021, updated February 2021, pp. 7 and 42.

Christians around the world. In addition to determining that the plight of certain groups, such as converts and women, has been under-reported and not sufficiently understood, WWR also found that religious persecution can be partly or totally eclipsed by other factors in crisis situations. More broadly, the research provides a glimpse into the complexity and volatility of persecution in countries around the world today.

More research is needed to achieve a better understanding. Since persecution for religious reasons is as old as the Bible (and even predates it), one might assume that there are no further discoveries to be made. However, new phenomena such as the persecution eclipse are being discovered. Understanding these phenomena will help to better support the persecuted, inform prayer supporters and donors, assist media reporting, and advocate effectively to politicians. WWR is committed – together with all the other contributors to this volume and others – to supplying this crucial research.

How common is religious freedom worldwide?

Jonathan Fox[1]

Abstract

This study discusses and measures six alternative definitions and conceptions of religious freedom: free exercise, religious persecution/repression, religious tolerance, absolute separation, neutrality and laicism. Each conception is operationalized using both strict and lenient interpretations based on data from the Religion and State round 3 (RAS3) dataset on discrimination against religious minorities, regulation of the majority religion, and support for religion. According to some of the stricter operationalizations, no countries have religious freedom; even using the most lenient approach, most countries in the world do not have religious freedom. These findings also apply to Western democracies, thus contradicting claims that liberal democracy is strongly associated with religious freedom.

Keywords   religious freedom, religious minorities, persecution, repression.

The topic of religious freedom is widely discussed but often not examined with sufficient care. As a result of this lack of rigor, two problems arise. First, it is very much a Tower of Babel where many people using the same term do not agree on what that term means. Second, many assume that religious freedom is present in cases where it is not.

This study addresses these issues by discussing six competing conceptions of religious freedom and operationalizing them using the Religion and State round 3 (RAS3) dataset, to determine how many states in practice subscribe to any of these conceptions of religious freedom. I find that even when using relatively lenient operationalizations of these conceptions, which allow states that engage in significant violations to still be viewed as adhering to an overall regime of religious freedom, a majority of countries do not have religious freedom. This finding also applies to Western democracies, thus calling into question whether religious freedom is truly an essential element of liberal democracy or whether Western democracies are truly liberal democracies.

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1. Six conceptions of religious freedom

Religious freedom is a contested term. The concept is understood in multiple ways, with different implications for what specific rights are subsumed within the right to religious freedom. In this section, I discuss six popular definitions. My list is not intended to be inclusive, but to represent a range of different conceptions and to demonstrate that variations in how to define the term have practical implications for what specific rights are promised.

Table 1 summarizes the six conceptions and their consequences for religious freedom. The table focuses on four types of government policy that violate each conception of religious freedom: (1) restricting the religious practices or institutions of religious minorities, (2) regulating all religions including the majority religion, (3) laws or institutions which enforce religion, and (4) other laws or policies which support religion. I discuss the empirical definition of each of these types of policies in the methodology section below.

The term *free exercise* of religion originates from the First Amendment to the US Constitution. It means that the government may not restrict the free practice of religion, including the right to create and manage independent religious institutions. This right focuses on what is specifically religious and does not cover other types of discrimination against religious minorities that do not interfere directly with the free exercise of religion, such as economic discrimination (Fox 2016:14-15). Thus, it does not prevent the enforcement of religious laws that do not directly contradict the practices of a minority religion. For example, since no religion of which I am aware mandates abortions, except perhaps to save the mother's life, a religiously motivated law banning abortions would not violate this conception of religious freedom.

Bans on *religious persecution and repression* are a second common conception of religious freedom. This conception is broader and involves all the freedoms included in the free exercise conception, as well as precluding any form of restriction placed specifically on religious minorities. For example, Farr (2008) states, "Religious persecution is generally associated with egregious abuse – torture, rape, unjust imprisonment – on the basis of religion." Jenkins (2007:3) similarly defines religious persecution as "an effort by a government to repress major activities by a given religious group, commonly with the goal of eliminating that group in the long or short term." Sarkissian (2015) uses a broad definition of religious repression which includes both limits on the free exercise of religion and political and economic restrictions on religious groups. This broader view would most likely include a ban on laws or institutions which enforce the majority religion.

The third conception, *religious tolerance,* focuses on giving equal rights to religious minorities. Tolerance is generally defined as the ability or willingness to accept something with which one does not necessarily agree or like (Eisenstein

Conceptions and their consequences for religous freedom ▼	Types of Government policies			
	Restricts the religious practices or institutions of religious minorities	Regulates all religions, including the majority religion	Entails laws or institutions which enforce religion	Other types of support
	Does this activity violate religious freedom?			
Free exercise	Yes	Yes	Only if observing the religious laws violates one's own religion	No
Religious persecution/ repression	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Religious tolerance	Yes	Maybe, depending on interpretation	Yes	No
Absolute separationism	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Neutrality	Yes	No	Yes	No if all religions are supported equally
Laicism	Yes	No and some such laws are required	Yes	Yes

Table 1: Concepts of Religious Freedom and Religion and State 3 (RAS3) Measures

2008). In the context of religious freedom, this means guaranteeing the same rights and freedoms to religious minorities as are granted to the majority. For example, Little (1996:81) argues that "to be tolerant is, at a minimum, to respond to a set of beliefs and practices regarded as deviant or objectionable without forcible interference." Karpov (2002:267) similarly defines political tolerance as "the willingness to extend civil liberties to political outgroups."

There is considerable room for interpretation of this concept. A narrow definition would give religious minorities only whatever rights are also granted to the majority. Thus, any restriction placed on everyone, including members of the majority religion, would be permissible within the bounds of tolerance. A broader definition could mirror the previous conception (religious persecution

and repression) by banning any restriction on religious practices. From this perspective, the two bodies of literature discuss the same conception in practice, with the persecution/repression literature focusing on what governments may not do and the tolerance literature focusing on the justifying the importance of religious freedom and providing a philosophy for protecting that freedom.[2]

In practice, however, these three conceptions of religious freedom focus on what the government may not do, on the presumed basis that as long as a government avoids restricting certain freedoms, religious freedom exists. The following three conceptions, in contrast, are conceptions of secularism rather than religious freedom. As such, they look at a broader range of government policies concerning religion, including other forms of support for religion. More specifically, they consider whether a government can support certain expressions of religion in various says, such as financing, and still maintain a religiously free environment. However, these conceptions also include inherent definitions of religious freedom.

The fourth conception, *absolute separationism*, bans any government entanglement with religion. That is, the government may neither support nor restrict religion in any way. This conception clearly includes protections of the free exercise of religion, as well as a ban on any support for religion, such as laws or institutions which enforce the majority religion. However, restricting religious minorities in matters other than religion is not explicitly excluded under this conception.

Some, such as Casanova (2012:81-82) view this concept more broadly to include restrictions on discrimination on the basis of religion. Casanova argues that in addition to a ban on establishing a religion (a form of support for religion) and respecting the free exercise of religion, the state must also guarantee equal participation for all citizens in matters outside of religion. However, in some respects his definition is narrower because he only bans state support for religion because established religions often limit the free exercise of religion. It is important to emphasize that this model, of which the United States is considered the archetype, requires only separation of religion and state but not separation of religion and politics. "In a liberal democracy, one can pursue absolute separation of church and state, but one cannot ask for or pursue an absolute separation of religion and politics. These are two radically different pursuits; the first one is institutional, the latter is behavioral" (Eisenstein 2008:6).

The fifth conception, *neutrality*, focuses on ensuring equal treatment for all religions. Finke (2013; Stark and Finke 2000), among others, argues that true equality requires a "level playing field," meaning that the government must support all religions equally. If any one religion receives a form of support, then so must all

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2   For a discussion of how religion is related to tolerance and intolerance, see Djupe and Calfino (2013) and Eisenstein (2008).

the others, because selectively supporting some religions can have the same result as discrimination putting adherents of other religions at a disadvantage, even if this support in no way restricts the practice of the non-supported religions. For example, when a government provides selective financial support for religion, the supported religions are less expensive for their congregants. Religion is not free. Its financial costs include the construction and upkeep of physical buildings and salaries for clergy. Congregants of non-supported religions have to bear the full cost of these expenses while congregants of supported religions pay less or perhaps even nothing. This lower cost gives the supported religions an unfair advantage in attracting congregants.

Interestingly, this conception does not necessarily ban the placing of limitations on religion and its free exercise, since as long as all limitations are placed on all religions equally, the playing field remains level.

The final conception is *laicism*, taking this name from France's religion policy. Laicism is perhaps the most extreme type of secularism found in democracies. It forbids state support for any religion and restricts expressions of religion in public. Under this conception, religion is considered a private matter that should not intrude into the secular public sphere. Thus, restrictions on religion in the public sphere are not only allowed by this conception, but even mandated. However, as the purpose of these restrictions is to maintain a secular public sphere, all restrictions on public manifestations of religion must be applied equally to all religions, including the majority religion. Applying any restrictions only to minority religions is ruled out, because this practice would constitute support for the non-restricted religion (Kuru 2009; Haynes 1997; Keane 2000; Durham 1996:21-22; Esbeck 1988).

Joustra (2018) argues that this conception of religious freedom contains some inherent tensions between freedom and repression. It posits the necessity of restrictions on religion in the name of pluralism. That is, repressing religion is considered necessary to enhance equality and freedom. In addition, "a political system that replaces the religious with a comprehensive secular philosophy at its foundation risks making religious members into second-class citizens." (Joustra 2018:57). Moreover, this conception essentially prefers a secular ideology over religion (Bader 1999).

As shown in Table 1, each of these conceptions of religious freedom has important consequences for government policy concerning religion. With the exceptions of the second and third conceptions, which lead in practice to essentially the same policy, each one places a different set of requirements on governments. It is also not possible to create a policy which adheres to all six conceptions at the same time. For example, whereas laicism requires restrictions on religious expression and institutions in public, guarantees of the free exercise of religion ban all such restrictions.

As already noted, these six frameworks are not the only possible conceptions of religious freedom. For example, Joustra (2018:33) points out that "for the ardent religious believer … religious freedom often means the right to restrict the freedoms of others, or to impose one's religion on the larger world." However, these six conceptions are the most common ones in Western democracies.

2. The assumption of religious freedom in Western liberal democracies

The literature on religious freedom in liberal democracies makes two assumptions: first, that religious freedom is a core value in Western liberal democracies; second, that in practice Western liberal democracies maintain religious freedom for all citizens, including religious minorities. However, as I demonstrate in the empirical section of this study, the second assumption is incorrect, because in actuality most liberal democracies do not satisfy any of the six conceptions of religious freedom discussed above – a finding that also calls the first assumption into serious question.

The foundations for these assumptions in existing literature can be divided into three categories. First, some argue that processes inherent in modern Christianity increase religious toleration. Martin (1978:25-49) argues that this is true for Protestant Christianity, in that the Protestant Reformation increased religious pluralism in the West, which in turn increased toleration. The fact that the newer Protestant denominations were less closely linked to the state facilitated this process. Ideologically, Protestantism focuses on individualism, so Protestants are less likely to consider religion superior to the state. Martin also links the Protestant doctrines of election and free grace to support for universal rights. Woodberry and Shaw (2012) argue that pluralism, reduced corruption, economic development, mass education, an independent civil society and religion's independence from the state are all ideas linked to Protestantism.

Others focus on progress within Catholic ideology, especially related to Vatican II, which made the Catholic Church more tolerant toward religious minorities and separated it from local politics, leaving more room for democracy and toleration (Philpott 2007; Anderson 2007). However, arguments based on this theological evolution do not explain why this evolution would have occurred only in the West and not also in Christian-majority countries outside the West.

Second, many argue that the West is more secular than the rest of the world and that this factor results in more religious freedom. For example, Appleby (2000:2) contends that "the core values of secularized Western societies, including freedom of speech and freedom of religion, were elaborated in outraged response to inquisitions, crusades, pogroms, and wars conducted in the name of God." Calhoun (2012:86) similarly states that "the tacit understanding of citizenship in the modern West has

been secular. This is so despite the existence of state churches, presidents who pray, and a profound role for religious motivations in major public movements.''

These arguments imply that this combination of religious freedom and secularism is unique to the West. Others make this argument more explicitly:

> The modernization of Muslim societies, unlike Western ones, did not lead to the privatization of religion but to the opposite, that is, the politicization of Islam in a way unprecedented in premodern Muslim societies. This is not because Islam does not separate religion and politics (which is by the way historically false) but because the Islamic tradition was integrated into the nation state-building that took place at the end of the Ottoman Empire. (Cesari 2014:xiii)[3]

Others focus on the process of secularization, arguing that this process is uniquely strong in the West and has led to more religious freedom (e.g., Berger 2009; Marquand and Nettler 2000; Bruce 2009; Halman and Draulans 2006; Kaspersen and Lindvall 2008; Voicu 2009).

Third, some focus on specific political and social processes purportedly unique to the West which have led to secularization and religious freedom. Haynes (1997, 1998, 2009), for example, cites Western governments' institution of equality policies and their tendency to co-opt and subordinate religious institutions. Norris and Inglehart (2004) argue that increased prosperity has led to increased secularism. Crouch (2000) suggests that past religious wars, increased tolerance, individualism, and liberalism among Europeans have contributed to a Western rejection of religion in politics. Kuhle (2011) demonstrates that many Western governments have imposed secular liberal values on their national churches. For example, several Nordic countries forced their national churches to change their theology on a wide variety of issues, including the ordination of women and same-sex marriage.

3. The religion and state dataset as a practical measure of religious freedom

Since there is no general consensus on how to define religious freedom, any measure of the concept would take a normative position on the meaning of religious freedom. Methodologically, I take a broad view of religious freedom by operationalizing all six conceptions of religious freedom discussed above.

The Religion and State round 3 (RAS3) dataset provides the variables necessary to measure the degree of religious freedom based on each conception. RAS3

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[3] For similar arguments, see Demerath and Straight (1997:47); Facchini (2010); Haynes (1997:709); Huntington (1996:75); Imboden (2013:164).

includes data on government policy concerning religion policy in 183 countries from 1990 to 2014. This study uses the data for 2014, the most recent year available.[4] As in previous rounds, the RAS3 data are based on a country-by-country survey of information from multiple sources, such as laws and constitutions; reports by media outlets, governments, and NGOs; and academic works. The variables measure different aspects of government policy on religion: laws, court decisions, bureaucratic regulations, or consistency of government officials' behavior.[5]

RAS3 includes three sets of variables that measure the four types of activity described in Table 1. The first set of variables measures *religious discrimination*, or "limitations placed on the religious practices or institutions of minority religions that are not placed on the majority religion" (Fox 2015:136-137). RAS3 includes 36 specific types of religious discrimination including 12 types of restrictions on religious practices such as restrictions on observing religious dietary laws or on the ability to observe one's religion in public, eight types of restrictions on religious institutions and clergy such as restrictions on access to or ordination of clergy or on the ability to build places of worship, seven types of restrictions on conversion and proselytizing including restrictions on proselytizing by residents of a country as well as foreign missionaries, and nine types of restrictions which do not fit into these previous categories such as the arrest or harassment of religious figures and anti-cult policies. All of these are measured on a scale of 0 to 3 based on their severity and combined in a cumulative measure on which scores can range from 0 to 108.[6]

Religious restrictions refer to the restriction or regulation of all religions in the country, including the majority religion. Although in theory this category overlaps with religious discrimination, in practice the types of restrictions placed on all religions are different from those imposed only on minorities. In addition, the motivations for restricting the majority religion are different from those for restricting minority religions (Fox 2015, 2019). The RAS3 contains 29 types of religious restrictions. These include seven limitations on religious-affiliated political activities, such as bans on political

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[4] For countries in which no data is available for 2014, I used the most recent year available.

[5] Sources of the RAS data included government documents such as the US State Department's reports on international religious freedom, reports from international organizations such as the EU and UN, reports from advocacy groups such as Forum 18 and Human Rights without Frontiers, and media coverage. For a discussion and analysis of the dataset, the variables described below, and reliability tests, see Fox (2015, 2020); Fox et al. (2018).

[6] The scale is as follows: 0 = none, 1 = The activity is slightly restricted or the government engages in a mild form of this practice for some minorities, 2 = The activity is slightly restricted for most or all minorities, the government engages in a mild form of this practice, the activity sharply restricted for some of them or the government engages in a severe form of this activity toward some of them, 3 = The activity is prohibited or sharply restricted or the government engages in a severe form of this activity or most or all minorities.

speech by clergy and religious political parties; seven types of restriction on religious organizations, institutions, and clergy, such as government influence on the appointment of religious leaders and limitations on access to places of worship; seven restrictions on religious practices such as people being arrested for conducting religious activities and barring religious activities outside recognized places; and eight other types of restrictions that do not fit into the previous categories, such as restrictions on public religious speech or government influence over the content of religious education. Again, each item is scored from 0 to 3, so the cumulative scores range from 0 to 87.[7]

The final two sets of measures are based on *government support for religion*. The RAS3 variable has 52 components, which I divide into two categories. The first includes 26 topics that measure governments' legislation of *religious precepts* and their *enforcement* of religious laws:

- Marriage or divorce can only occur under religious auspices.
- Automatic civil recognition for marriages performed by clergy.
- Restrictions on interfaith marriages.
- Restrictions on premarital sex.
- Banning homosexuals or homosexual sex.
- Prohibitive restrictions on abortion.
- Restricting access to birth control.
- Women may not go out in public unescorted.
- Required public dress or modesty laws for women.
- Female court testimony given less weight than male testimony.
- Restrictions on women other than those listed above.
- Religious dietary laws.
- Restrictions on alcohol.
- Laws of inheritance defined by religion.
- Religious precepts define or set punishment for crimes.
- Charging interest is illegal or restricted.
- Required public dress or modesty laws for men.
- Restrictions on conversions away from the dominant religion.
- Significant restrictions on public music and dancing.
- Mandatory closing of some or all businesses on religious holidays and/or the sabbath.
- Other restrictions on religious holidays or on the sabbath.
- Blasphemy laws or restrictions on speech about the majority religion.

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[7] The scale is as follows: 0 = none, 1 = Slight restrictions including practical restrictions or the government engages in this activity rarely and on a small scale, 2 = Significant restrictions including practical restrictions or the government engages in this activity occasionally and on a moderate scale, 3 = The activity is illegal or the government engages in this activity often and on a large scale.

- Censorship of the press or publications for being anti-religious.
- A police force or government agency exists solely to enforce religious laws.
- Religious courts have jurisdiction over family law and inheritance.
- Religious courts have jurisdiction over matters other than family law and inheritance.

Each variable is coded as 1 if identified in a country and 0 otherwise, creating a scale from 0 to 26.

The last category includes *all other types of government support* for religion. These 26 items are as follows:

- Government funding of religious primary and secondary schools, or religious education programs in non-public schools.
- Government funding of seminaries.
- Government funding of religious education in colleges or universities.
- Government funding of religious charitable organizations, including hospitals.
- Government collects taxes on behalf of religious organizations (religious taxes).
- Official government positions, salaries, or other funding for clergy, excluding salaries of teachers.
- Direct general grants to religious organizations.
- Funding for building, maintaining, or repairing religious sites.
- Free airtime on television or radio provided to religious organizations on government channels or by government decree.
- Funding or other government support for religious pilgrimages such as the hajj.
- Funding for religious organizations or activities other than those listed above.
- Some religious leaders are granted diplomatic status, diplomatic passports, or immunity from prosecution by virtue of their religious office.
- Presence of an official government ministry or department dealing with religious affairs.
- Certain government officials are also given an official position in the state church by virtue of their political office.
- Certain religious officials become government officials by virtue of their religious position.
- Some or all government officials must meet certain religious requirements to hold office.
- Seats in the legislative branch or cabinet are awarded by law or custom, at least in part, along religious lines.
- Religious education is present in public schools.
- Official prayer sessions occur in public schools.
- Public schools are segregated by religion, or separate public schools exist for members of some religions.

- The presence of religious symbols on the state's flag.
- Religion listed on state identity cards or other government documents that most citizens must possess or fill out.
- A registration process for religious organizations exists that is in some manner different from the registration process for other non-profit organizations.
- Burial is controlled by religious organizations or clergy or is otherwise subject to religious laws or oversight.
- Blasphemy laws protecting minority religions or religious figures.
- Other mandatory religious prohibitions or practices.

The scoring is the same as for the previous category.

As noted in Table 1, the free exercise conception bans religious discrimination and restrictions. Religious persecution/repression and religious tolerance, though theoretically distinct, are operationalized identically, as both ban religious discrimination and restrictions as well as religious precepts or enforcement. Absolute separationism bans all four types. Neutrality bans religious discrimination and precepts or enforcement. Finally, the laicism conception bans religious discrimination, precepts or enforcement, and other support.

These five operational conceptions allow testing whether countries meet a variety of religious freedom standards. In addition, I operationalized three versions of each conception. The first is a "zero tolerance" version that requires government to engage in no activity whatsoever that violates the conception – i.e., it must score 0 on all relevant variables to be counted as permitting religious freedom. Thus, for example, the free exercise conception would require a score of 0 on the religious discrimination and religious restrictions indexes. On the other hand, since this conception does not ban support for religion, high scores on the last two variables would not be considered a violation.

I also conducted two more lenient operationalizations, to acknowledge the possibility that a government may violate religious freedom in some minor way within the context of an overall policy that respects religious freedom. This analytical leniency recognizes that perfection is often not possible and that a lack of perfection may not necessarily undermine adherence to a larger principle. Where governments still violate a more lenient operationalization, this may demonstrate a general lack of adherence in practice to religious freedom. In the first lenient operationalization a country must score 3 or lower on all relevant variables to qualify as permitting religious freedom; on the second, it must score 5 or lower. These more lenient assessments would permit a government to engage in a substantial amount of activity that undermines religious freedom yet still be classified as respecting the rights of religious believers. Below, I refer to them as lenient-3 and lenient-5, respectively.

While any such 'lenient' operationalization is, of necessity, arbitrary, these operationalizations are intended to allow the maximum level of violations of religious freedom possible while plausibly maintaining an overall policy of religious freedom.

4. How many countries have religious freedom?

Table 2 shows how many states have religious freedom based on each of the three operationalizations and each of the five different standards for religious freedom described above. (Recall that two of the six conceptions were merged as a single standard.) Based on the "zero tolerance" standards, very few countries qualify. No country meets the zero-tolerance standard under the conceptions of religious persecution/repression/tolerance, absolute separatism, or laicism, because no country fails to support or enforce religion in at least some small way (Fox 2019). Only Taiwan and Uruguay meet the neutrality zero-tolerance standard (which allows some forms of government support for religion), and only Cameroon, Namibia, and the Solomon Islands meet the free exercise standard (which allows all types of government support for religion). Thus, when we define the term strictly, few or no countries have religious freedom and, interestingly, none of those meeting the standard are Western democracies.

When we examine the results for all 183 countries, based on even the lenient-5 version for each category, we find no instance in which most of the world's countries are religiously free. This statement is also true of Western democracies and democratic countries as defined by the Polity dataset (Jaggers and Gurr 1995). Within several religious or geographic groupings, a majority of states qualify as religiously free:

- Christian-majority countries that are neither Catholic nor Orthodox, based on the lenient-5 standard for free exercise and religious persecution/repression/tolerance, and the lenient-3 standard for neutrality;
- Catholic-majority countries, based on the lenient-5 standard for neutrality;
- Countries in sub-Saharan Africa, based on the lenient-3 standard for neutrality; and
- Latin American countries, based on the lenient-5 standard for neutrality.

Thus, using even relatively lenient standards for religious freedom, only a few groupings of states – mostly in the developing world – can be said to have a majority of states that are religiously free.

5. Conclusions

It is not my purpose to express an opinion as to which conception of religious freedom is best. That is a normative question that lies beyond the scope of this study. Rather, my intention is to demonstrate that on any generally recognized conception, religious freedom is far rarer in Western democracies than many assume.

% of countries which Meet this Standard of Religious Freedom														
	Free Exercise			Religious Persecution/ Repression/ Tolerance			Absolute Separationism			Neutrality			Laicism		
Score	0	3	5	0	3	5	0	3	5	0	3	5	0	3	5
All Countries	1.6	17.5	28.4	0.0	16.9	28.4	0.0	8.2	21.3	1.1	29.0	40.4	0.0	12.6	27.3
By Majority Religion															
All Christian	1.9	23.3	37.9	0.0	22.3	37.9	0.0	9.7	28.2	1.0	27.9	53.4	0.0	14.6	35.0
Catholic	2.2	20.0	33.3	0.0	17.8	33.3	0.0	6.7	22.2	2.2	33.3	53.3	0.0	8.9	28.9
Orthodox	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Other	4.3	34.8	54.3	0.0	34.8	54.3	0.0	17.4	43.5	0.0	54.3	69.6	0.0	26.1	52.2
Muslim	0.0	3.8	11.3	0.0	3.8	11.3	0.0	0.0	5.7	0.0	9.4	17.0	0.0	1.9	11.3
Other	3.6	21.4	25.0	0.0	21.4	25.0	0.0	17.9	25.0	3.6	32.1	35.7	0.0	25.0	28.6
By World Region															
Western Democracies	0.0	22.2	40.7	0.0	18.5	40.7	0.0	0.0	22.2	0.0	25.9	48.1	0.0	0.0	22.2
Former Soviet	0.0	3.4	6.9	0.0	3.4	6.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.9	13.8	0.0	0.0	0.0
Asia	3.4	17.2	27.6	0.0	17.2	27.6	0.0	10.3	24.1	3.4	27.6	31.0	0.0	10.3	24.1
Middle East	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Sub-Saharan Africa	4.2	27.1	41.7	0.0	27.1	41.7	0.0	18.8	35.4	0.0	54.2	66.7	0.0	33.3	54.2
Latin America	0.0	25.9	40.7	0.0	25.9	40.7	0.0	11.1	33.3	3.7	37.0	59.3	0.0	14.8	40.7
Democracy															
Polity = 10	0.0	25.7	42.9	0.0	25.7	42.9	0.0	11.4	22.9	5.7	34.3	48.6	0.0	11.4	22.9
Polity 8 or higher	1.4	20.5	32.9	0.0	20.5	32.9	0.0	12.3	20.5	2.7	30.1	45.2	0.0	12.3	23.3

Table 2: Percentage of Countries with Religious Freedom as of 2014, Based on 15 Operationalizations

Overall, the findings in this study falsify arguments that Western liberal democracy is strongly associated with religious freedom. Although in theory this value is supported by liberal democracies, in practice – even using standards that allow considerable deviation from perfection – fewer than half of Western democracies and democracies offer religious freedom. This finding has considerable implications for our understanding of the link between liberal democracy and religious freedom.

Interestingly, there is some support for the argument that Christianity is a source of religious tolerance, as countries with Christian majorities are among the most likely to have religious freedom. However, this Christian tolerance seems more

common in the developing world than in Western democracies. Fox (2020) explains this somewhat surprising result by suggesting three features present in Christian-majority countries in the developing world that make religious discrimination less common. First, they are less economically developed, giving the government fewer resources to spend on restricting religion. Second, they are less likely to support a single religion either officially or unofficially. Third, secular ideologies, which can be a source of intolerance of certain practices of religious minorities (such as ritual slaughter or female head coverings), are less common in developing countries.

The conception on which the greatest number of countries fulfill the religious freedom standard is neutrality, which permits restrictions on religion and government support for religion as long as all religions are treated equally. This finding suggests that this conception of religious freedom is most popular among governments, perhaps because it is the least restrictive option.

The results show that much work is needed to promote religious freedom worldwide, and that Western countries that include religious freedom on their foreign-policy agenda need to get their own house in order if they desire to more effectively pursue this agenda globally.

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Using data to combat religious persecution

The *Freedom of Thought Report*

Niels De Nutte and Anton Van Dyck[1]

Abstract

Since 2012, the non-governmental organization Humanists International (HI) has published annually the *Freedom of Thought Report*, which looks at how non-religious individuals – not to be confused with the non-affiliated – are treated within any given state. It focuses on legal discrimination and restrictions on freedom of thought, belief and expression. This report, which has been presented at the United Nations General Assembly and at the European Parliament, ranks almost 200 countries by assessing them in four categories, which encompass the realms of government, education, society and freedom of expression. In the present paper, we evaluate the report's usefulness in impacting policy initiatives promoting the freedom of religion or belief (FoRB). Examples of its use in policy-making initiatives are provided. As this dataset examines the criminalization of apostasy and blasphemy, subsequent human rights activism by HI and other organizations benefits not just the non-religious but also minority religious groups. The report's impact on other human rights organizations and their campaigns suggests that research on FoRB can increase the resilience of religious or non-religious groups facing persecution.

Keywords   humanism, freedom of religion or belief, religious persecution, prosecution, freedom of thought.

1. The Freedom of Thought Report as a tool

The Freedom of Thought Report (FOTR) is published annually as an annotated qualitative dataset. The data contained in the FOTR can provide valuable support to research on policy making and the position of vulnerable religious groups. For the purposes of this article, our conception of religious freedom refers to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB). This is done for typological reasons (see, for instance, Galen 2020), as the term "freedom of religion" does not necessarily include the freedom not to

belong to any religion. Furthermore, FoRB is more universally used as part of human rights terminology and as such might be more suited for this discussion.

The impact of the FOTR has not yet been thoroughly researched. However, by contacting some of the policy makers who use this report, we have been able to identify some of the ways in which it is employed. The fact that some policy makers use data from the FOTR does not, of course, prove a linkage between the FOTR and any newly implemented policies. The dynamic interactions of policy processes are not so straightforward. James Anderson's (1975) model, which has been refined over time since then (Weible et al 2012), illustrated the cyclical interaction between agenda setting, implementation and evaluation of policy measures. Finding causal links, let alone causation, is not the purpose of our paper and would require a more nuanced approach and more in-depth research.

The custodial entity responsible for the FOTR, Humanists International (HI), is an umbrella organization that collaborates closely with its national and local partners. It does not operate as an external agency or organization, and it belongs to what it claims to be a global community of organized humanism. The scope of the FOTR itself is wider, involving the examination of mechanisms at the state or society level that may potentially promote one life stance or religion whilst disadvantaging or actively discriminating against others. The authors of the report have a clear stake in ensuring that their dataset reaches the appropriate policy-making bodies. The FOTR relies heavily on contributions from national organizations, many of which do more than just examining their own state structures. These national entities also try to push local policy bodies towards accepting legislation that ensures free and equal treatment of all life stances.

The contributing organizations are not all of the same scale, either in the size of their operation or in the extent of the networks they have built. Some are fledgling associations, whilst others date back as far as the mid-nineteenth century. They interact with each other through multinational foreign policy activities and international institutions such as the United Nations and the European Union.

One key aspect of the FOTR is that the collaboration of a variety of national humanist organizations serves as a powerful agenda-setting tool, in the sense of the definition provided by McCombs and Shaw (1972). By leaning on these various organizations' expertise and connections, and by providing others with a tool that places their own situation within an international context, the FOTR can be helpful on both the national and the international level. The cooperation between national member organizations and HI means that the report relies not only on its own public affairs apparatus, but also on that of all its members.[2] In addition, the press releases

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[2]   As such, it provides its members with press kits that contain all the building blocks for press releases.

of national organizations are more likely to draw media and public attention, as the international scaling up of the endeavour increases the newsworthiness of national developments. Thus, the report provides policy makers with a versatile tool that provides high-quality content, whilst also creating opportunities for issue attention via alternative channels such as social media (Gupta and Jenkins-Smith 2015; Neuman, et al 2014).

2. The history and context of the FOTR

The FOTR is published by HI, the global umbrella organization for humanists, which brings together participants from roughly 170 organizations in over 80 countries. Established in 1952 as the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), HI arose from the post-war initiatives of a small network of internationally connected humanists. The seven original charter members were American, Austrian, Belgian, British, Dutch and Indian (Gasenbeek and Gogineni 2002:20-21, 26). Although humanism was their common denominator, they initially hardly agreed on terminology. The participants spanned not only newly formed post-war humanist initiatives but also older organizations of rationalist, ethical and universalist persuasions. Nevertheless, the Amsterdam Declaration of 1952, which was updated with a few adjustments in 2002, did contain a minimal statement of the nature of their common humanism (McGowan 2012:261-263):

1. It [Humanism] is democratic. It aims at the fullest possible development of every human being. It holds that this is a matter of right. …

2. It seeks to use science creatively, not destructively. …

3. Humanism is ethical. It affirms the dignity of man and the right of the individual to the greatest possible freedom of development compatible with the rights of others. There is a danger that in seeking to utilize scientific knowledge in a complex society individual freedom may be threatened by the very impersonal machine that has been created to save it. Ethical Humanism, therefore, rejects totalitarian attempts to perfect the machine in order to obtain immediate gains at the cost of human values.

4. It insists that personal liberty is an end that must be combined with social responsibility in order that it shall not be sacrificed to the improvement of material conditions. ...

5. It is a way of life, aiming at the maximum possible fulfilment, through the cultivation of ethical and creative living. It can be a way of life for everyone everywhere, if the individual is capable of the responses required by the changing

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Through this practice it provides professional support to its smaller member organizations, whilst encouraging a certain degree of unity in tone and content among its partners.

social order. The primary task of humanism today is to make men aware in the simplest terms of what it [humanism] can mean to them and what it commits them to. By utilizing in this context and for purposes of peace the new power which science has given us, humanists have confidence that the present crisis can be surmounted. Liberated from fear the energies of man will be available for self-realization to which it is impossible to foresee the limit.

Although the peculiarities of national humanist groups can differ widely (Schröder 2020; Tyssens and De Nutte 2019), for our purposes it is sufficient to describe humanism as a non-religious life stance and HI as a group that safeguards the interests of the non-religious and non-affiliated in pluralist supranational institutions.

The FOTR arguably represents one of the more durable projects led by HI. As a large portion of the organization's power is based in the Anglophone world, it is not surprising that the report was initially a project led by the IHEU, together with the American Humanist Association, the Center for Inquiry (CFI), the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science, and the Secular Coalition for America (International Humanist and Ethical Union 2012:2). The overrepresentation of US organizations can likely be traced to the original project lead within HI, Matt Cherry, a former executive director of the American Institute for Humanist Studies. The educational and research-oriented nature of most of these bodies further helps to explain the format of the FOTR as both a set of data and a policy instrument. Due to the specific nature of US church-state relationships, the so-called 'Wall of Separation', legal procedures are frequently applied as an instrument for change. The Secular Coalition for America, founded in 2002, is a prime example of this, being both the cause and effect of a policy advocacy group (Blankholm 2014).

3. The FOTR and policy

With respect to the FOTR's potential influence on religious freedom policy initiatives it is clear that the constellation of its initial backing organizations was quite favorable in this regard, since its American partners, although not necessarily massive in size, were the most prominent humanist and freethinking organizations in the US at that time. Moreover, the endorsement on the cover and the introduction, respectively, came from two men of great prominence: Heiner Bielefeldt,[3] then the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion or Belief, and Matt Cherry,[4] the international representative for the IHEU and president of the NGO Committee on Freedom of Religion or Belief at the United Nations.

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[3] Prof. Dr. Heiner Bielefeldt was the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, a specialist in human rights and a Catholic theologian. He had no direct ties to the creation of this report.

[4] Matt Cherry was executive director for the Institute for Humanist Studies in Albany, New York (USA) and

Although no actual research on the FOTR's influence as a policy-making tool has been conducted, we know that the report is circulated to a variety of interested parties. It also became available online in 2018. Through contacting a few key figures, we can offer some tentative conclusions related to the FOTR's efficacy as a policy-making tool. At the 2018 launch of the report, Ahmed Shaheed,[5] the current UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, stated that it "has become an invaluable source of well-researched and important information for policymakers." He later added, "The FOT report and its findings have also offered a strong basis for international advocacy on the subject and have increased the attention paid to this dimension of Freedom of Religion or Belief" (personal communication, 20 March 2020). A fortiori, the inclusive approach of the report – we will return to this point later – has increased the attention given to the dimensions of FoRB in other issues. As such, the international advocacy director for HI, Dr. Elizabeth O'Casey,[6] has been included in recent years on the advisory committee to the UN Office for Genocide Prevention and in the Steering Group on Faith for Rights initiative run by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

O'Casey (personal communication, 27 February 2020) added to Shaheed's findings by describing some of the FOTR's users. These have regularly included the staff of the European Union External Service, which decides what issues related to FoRB it will raise with non-member countries. The report is further consulted by the office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN Human Rights) staff and by UN Special Rapporteurs, including not only Shaheed but also Karima Bennoune and Agnes Callamard.[7] Another group of users is the European special envoys of member states concerning FoRB, who are at least familiar with its contents. Lastly, the report has been presented at a European level in the FoRB intergroup, the "Dialogue with Religious and Non-confessional Organizations" (Article 17 Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union) and the European Parliament Platform for Secularism in Politics (EPPSP).

Our research, which in all fairness should be considered a first inventory, leads to two distinct conclusions. First, the report clearly helps to establish the validity of HI personnel as experts in regard to FoRB, as is evident in the case of its advocacy director. Secondly, the report does find its way to a variety of policy makers. The

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is currently development director for John Burton Advocates for Youth.

[5]   Dr Ahmed Shaheed is a Maldivian human rights campaigner who served as a diplomat on behalf of the Maldivian Ministry of Foreign Affairs before taking on his current position at the UN.

[6]   Among other aspects of HI's recent changes, the FOTR's success has led to an influx of dedicated resources towards campaigning for freedom of thought. In addition to its existing staff, HI has recruited an advocacy officer to support its Director of Advocacy, along with a risk coordinator who focuses on the plight of humanists in life-threatening circumstances.

[7]   Karima Bennoune is the UN Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights, whilst Agnes Callamard is the Director of Columbia University Project on Freedom of Expression-Globally.

degree of engagement with its contents, however, varies significantly. Further research would be needed to determine the FOTR's actual impact on different stakeholders and on the reasoning behind its usage. Researchers might look at mentions in minutes, policy papers and reports, or they could conduct additional interviews.

Since 2012, the FOTR has been published annually. It analyses almost all countries worldwide on a range of different parameters related to FoRB. Primarily, this includes the tools a state may employ to either facilitate or block FoRB in favour of one specific ideology, life stance or religion. In the eight years since its conception, methods of data collection have evolved, which allow the report to provide an increasingly nuanced image of any given country. Data collection is qualitative in nature, although the report's format allows for the incorporation of quantitative analysis at a national level. Each country is rated from the most favourable status ("free and equal") to the least favourable ("grave violations") in four categories: (1) constitution and government; (2) education and children's rights; (3) family, community, society, religious courts and tribunals; and (4) freedom of expression, advocacy of humanist values.

In each of the four categories, a variety of so-called "boundary conditions" are identified and linked to a certain severity rating. Under education and children's rights, for example, the statement "Religious or ideological indoctrination is utterly pervasive in schools" counts as a grave violation, whereas state funding of at least some religious schools is classified as systematic discrimination, a less severe category. When more than a single statement within a category applies, the one with the highest level of severity is chosen to designate that category for the given country.

The report's methodology could be prone to some possible biases. For instance, the research underlying the FOTR cannot claim to be exhaustive. Lack of access to legal texts, the vagueness of said texts, state control over media and reporting, and the secrecy of courts in some countries are obvious obstacles to information gathering. Furthermore, though vetted by HI, the report is prepared mostly in collaboration with volunteer researchers, who are likely to be sympathetic to humanist sentiments and advocacy initiatives. Not all countries have a dedicated contributor, which might complicate matters further. Finally, the report is only as powerful as its boundary conditions. The statements included can never be fully comprehensive. As such, bias might arise if a statement that could prove vital in assessing a certain category is omitted.

4. The FOTR and the resilience of religious and non-religious groups

One of the questions proposed for consideration in this special issue of *IJRF* is how religious freedom research can increase the resilience of religious groups facing persecution. The FOTR can contribute to the resilience of both religious and non-religious groups in two ways.

First, the comparative nature of this report helps researchers in the field of FoRB to carry out a comparative assessment of how religious and non-religious minorities are treated in any given country. The added value of this dataset lies in its global scale. No particular country or religious group is targeted. Even some countries generally considered 'Western' score rather poorly, as evidenced by the color-coded world map on HI's website.

Second, the report is highly useful for campaigns on issues encountered by non-religious and minority religious groups alike. Two prime examples here are charges of blasphemy and apostasy. The importance of tackling these subjects is self-evident, considering, for instance, that the Pew Research Center found in 2016 that about one-quarter of all countries still had anti-blasphemy laws and one in ten had laws or policies condemning apostasy (Pew Research Center 2016). It is precisely in advocating the abolition of existing blasphemy laws that the global scale of the report has its merits. Highlighting the fact that some Western countries still have blasphemy laws on their books is of vital importance. Whether these laws are still in use themselves is beside the point, because such laws could become a means of justifying the existence or establishment of similar laws in other countries. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation, for example, has been known to cite Ireland's law as a "best practice" (McChrystal 2016). In Ireland, the word "blasphemy" was removed from the constitution only in 2018 (Pearl Goldman 2018). The removal happened only after famous comedian and humanist Stephen Fry was investigated by Irish police for allegedly breaking the blasphemy law.[8]

Laws against apostasy, meanwhile, could affect all people who do not belong to the dominant religious group in any given country. An example of this in the Muslim world can be found in a contribution to this journal by Christine Schirrmacher, a professor of Islamic studies, in 2013. She shows that charges of apostasy are not only used as a tool in power politics, but are also supported by what she calls a "moderate majority of theologians." Amongst traditionally trained theologians, a broad majority subscribed to the opinion that whoever publicly confesses or propagates deviating notions deserves the death penalty (Schirrmacher 2013:190). Further, she explains, "for that reason the charges of unbelief, apostasy from Islam, and blasphemy in countries characterized by Islam count are the most serious charges there are." One such example is the Saudi writer Raif bin Muhammad Badawi, who faced criminal apostasy charges in 2012 (Smith 2016:82). According to the prosecuting authorities in Saudi Arabia, Badawi had insulted Islam. In 2014,

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[8] Individual cases, such as this one and the additional cases cited in the next paragraph, are essential to the FOTR's success as they help to humanize larger systemic problems. Humanization of issues has a marked, positive effect on the sense of urgency required to address these issues on a political level (Power 2019).

he was convicted and faced 10 years in prison and 1,000 lashes. In another case, from 2013 onwards, Islamic extremists in Bangladesh threatened, attacked and killed various secularist and atheist bloggers. Attacks on people within the LGBTQ+ communities as well as other religious minorities happened during the same time period. Another blogger, Ruslan Sokolovsky, was charged with blasphemy and convicted by Russian courts for playing the popular phone app Pokémon Go in a church. He faced more than three years in prison (Skladanowski 2020).

The FOTR is a valuable research tool for those who seek to increase the resilience of non-religious and religious groups alike. Its comparative dimension exposes countries' strengths and weaknesses in relation to FoRB issues. Moreover, its global scope benefits national humanist and freethinking organizations by helping them contextualize their own situation. Organizations on each continent might experience different issues and clearly operate in legal situations that treat humanist groups differently. Some themes are, of course, shared by all countries, such as equal treatment, LGBTQ rights, and the depenalization of bio-ethical issues such as abortion and euthanasia, but advocacy on these issues is served by leaning on foreign expertise and at least the semblance of a humanist community. Being an annually published dataset, the report provides hints and clues as to changes in FoRB policy in any given country, which might in turn have an impact on other countries.

The FOTR has continually emphasized this by reiterating that FoRB protects the right of any individual to follow a religion and equally protects the right to reject any religion or belief. In this regard, the 2012 and 2019 forewords differ rather significantly in style. The original report was introduced by a text that more explicitly resembles an atheist manifesto, whereas the 2019 edition starts with a distinctly pluralist introduction. This difference is most likely the result of the character of the organizations that originated the report, as they may have been part of a political constellation that calls for a more militant tone. However, any particular reactions to the tone should not distract the attentive reader from the report's content, which is committed to a fully inclusive approach to the concept of FoRB.

5. Concluding remarks

Throughout this article, we have provided the background underlying the publication of the Freedom of Thought Report. We have shown that this report, although essentially a dataset with a corresponding ranking system and an analysis of each country's treatment of humanists, atheists and non-believers, has the potential to do much more than to simply provide a status report.

First, being a product of contributions made by many of HI's member organizations, the report amplifies the involvement of those members with their country's situation regarding FoRB.

Second, by collaborating on this report, such organizations are placed in contact with like-minded individuals around the globe. This provides an insight into each other's situation, structure and campaigns and strengthens the sense of community amongst humanist organizations.

Third, the nature of the report, aimed at increasing the level of FoRB in any given country, presents the humanist organizations as positive contributors to issues that concern other life stances and religions, as opposed to presenting itself as aiming only to protect the rights of the non-religious.

Fourth, as stated by Shaheed, the FOTR shows that FoRB is related to other societal issues as well.

Although HI is not a research institution, we feel that the potential of this collaborative dataset – constantly being improved and available as an open-source online tool – for policy making cannot be overerstimated amongst those researchers and policy makers who wish to guarantee FoRB worldwide. For example, the FOTR is considered by the European Union External Service when it determines what FoRB-related issues it will protect or champion in its work with non-member countries. As further evidence, the report is considered required reading for the EU's Special Envoys.

Although the FOTR is useful as a policy-making tool, its readers must be sufficiently cautious when handling the quantitative data presented. When dealing with matters of religion, and especially when the data concern whether an individual is affiliated with a particular religion or life stance, the data tend to suffer from questionnaire bias. Gauging the religious landscape in any given situation remains very difficult. This is also the case for the non-religious landscape (Cotter 2011).

Moreover, the effective prohibition against assessing the life-stance affiliation of a given country's citizens must also be taken into account. In Belgium, where both authors of this article live, any and all censuses of that kind are prohibited by privacy laws.[9]

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9   The Belgian application of the GDPR specifies that only data vital to the operations of the data collector may be gathered, and its non-discrimination legislation prohibits any differentiation on the basis of life stance identification. See the Law of 10 May 2007 to Combat Certain Forms of Discrimination, *Moniteur Belge*, 30 May 2007.

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How many Christians are under threat of persecution?

An initial assessment of approaches

Christof Sauer[1]

Abstract

This article examines published data from three organizations, each of which contributes in some way to a global quantification of the number of persecuted Christians. Their results depend on the delimitation of the phenomena measured and the thresholds applied. In addition, varying estimates on the number of Christians in individual countries strongly influence the outcome. The different approaches and results are compared and interpreted, and their usefulness is queried. In closing, some recommendations are made regarding the use of the data.

Keywords   religious persecution, Christians, demography, statistics, Pew Research Center, Center for the Study of Global Christianity, Open Doors International.

"As in all human rights reporting, the accuracy, precision, and meaning of the numbers of those persecuted can be equally uncertain [as the definition of terms such as persecution]." (Marshall, Gilbert and Shea 2013:6)

1. Introduction

Why would we want to have an up-to-date global estimate of the number of Christians under threat of persecution? For us to understand and tackle the issue of religious persecution, does it not suffice to have detailed descriptions of the situation in each country?

Country-based research has great value in enabling in-depth understanding of national situations. However, for anyone operating on a global level – politicians, advocacy agencies or researchers – global statistics are important. If we know how many people are affected, we can say something about the magnitude of the global

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phenomenon. We can also observe changes from one year to the next and de-termine trends over time. Comparing numbers in different locations can help us prioritize advocacy efforts. In addition, precise numbers help us counter the claims of those who deny Christians are actually being persecuted due to their faith on any significant scale (Schirrmacher and Müller 2016:26).

Obviously, journalists, politicians, and some advocacy agencies and researchers do think such numbers are important. As Birdsall and Beaman (2020) highlight, numbers put a handle on things; they are often regarded as "objective"; and un-expected numbers have the potential to raise awareness. Various such numbers have circulated in recent decades. Any number someone puts out is likely to be frequently quoted. Unfortunately, few users are checking the factual basis or plau-sibility of these figures.

Others are highly critical of such numbers. Some openly discredit those who produce the estimates or, at least, those who uncritically use them. Some even deny the possibility of arriving at a reliable global total due to the numerous challenges inherent in such an endeavour.

In this article, I examine how close current approaches come to providing a meaningful answer to the question of how many Christians are persecuted. What follows represents the initial results of a more extensive research project that I hope to publish later.

1.1 Key terms

The answer to this question obviously depends on the definition of key terms. First, who is counted as a *Christian*? For the purpose of this study, I follow the broad terminology of the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, counting as Christians any "fol-lowers of Jesus Christ as Lord, of all kinds, all traditions and confessions, and all degrees of commitment" (Johnson and Zurlo 2020:968).

What is considered *persecution of Christians*? I generally follow a broad use of the term along with Tieszen (2018:47): "Any unjust action of varying levels of hos-tility perpetrated primarily on the basis of religion and directed against Christians, resulting in varying levels of harm as it is considered from the victim's perspective." However, I am aware that such a comprehensive philosophical definition makes enumeration difficult, and that more pragmatic and narrow approaches would make the process easier.

Moreover, I do not wish to include only those who are acutely suffering persecu-tion, but also who are *under threat of* persecution.[2]

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[2]   Alternatively, one could conduct surveys asking how many Christians claim a fear of persecution, but to the best of my knowledge, no such study has been conducted yet.

In such studies, one further has to decide whether to focus on restrictions or violations of freedom of religion or belief, or on the actual phenomenon of persecution. Although these two concepts overlap, they are not identical and each one encompasses unique aspects not covered by the other.

1.2 Research question of this study

The research question of this article asks, "How many Christians are currently under actual threat of persecution globally?" This leads to a number of sub-questions: (1) What published, independent and interpreted research is available that could help us get closer to an answer? (2) How do the approaches and outcomes compare? (3) How meaningful and useful are the outcomes of the research currently available?

Of course, the research question posed here might not always match the primary intention of the sources used, which might not focus on exactly the same concerns.

1.3 Sources

The three main published, independent and interpreted sources discussed here come from the Pew Research Center (2019), the Center for the Study of Global Christianity (CSGC; Johnson 2013/2016) and Open Doors World Watch Research (2020). For each source, I identify the research question guiding the study, present the numerical outcomes, analyse the basis and methodology, and provide an assessment of usefulness and limitations. Laying such a descriptive foundation is essential because each of these sources asks different questions, prohibiting a straightforward and simple comparison.[3] Thereafter, I compare the approaches and outcomes, embed their interpretation into a wider framework, and finally make some recommendations on the use of the resulting data.

2. Pew Research Center: Number of countries where Christians are intimidated

The annual reports on religious restrictions around the globe published since 2009 by the Pew Research Center (Washington, D.C., USA) include a section on the number of countries in which "harassment of religious groups" was recorded. A country is included if at least one incident was reported for at least one religious group, regardless of the size of the group and the number of people affected. At the time of writing, the latest version was *A Closer Look at How Religious Restrictions Have Risen around the World* (Pew 2019), published on 15 July 2019.[4]

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[3] The space restraints given for this article did not permit to include a more extensive systematic comparison which is reserved for a follow-up article.

[4] The latest data appeared on 10 November 2020 (Pew 2020).

2.1 Research question

The overall research question of the Pew research project is as follows: How do countries and independent territories score and compare on the "Government Restrictions Index" and the "Social Hostilities Index," and how do these scores change annually?

Regarding our specific issue, the sub-question explicitly answered and analysed is in how many countries harassment or intimidation against Christians was reported in 2017. The actors include both "any level of government" and individuals or groups in society who are motivated by religious hatred or bias (Pew 2019:79).

2.2 Numerical outcomes

At least one case of intimidation or harassment against Christians was reported during 2017 in 143 countries (Pew 2019:51). Among these, government was considered an offender in 123 countries and private individuals or groups in 101 countries. Harassment of at least one religious group (not limited to Christians) was reported in 187 of the 198 countries and territories assessed. There was no attempt to quantify the number of Christians affected, either by individual country or as a global total.

2.3 Basis and methodology

For each of the sources perused, I will identify definition(s), data source, timeframe, and other relevant parameters.

Among the crucial terms used, "intimidation" remains undefined. "Harassment" "entails an offense against a religious group or person due to their religious identity, and can include being physically coerced or singled out with the intent of making life or religious practice more difficult" (Pew 2019:51). A definition of *Christian* could not be found.

The data for this report come primarily from a coding of "factual information on specific policies and actions" contained in the U.S. State Department's *International Religious Freedom Report,* supplemented by cross-checking information from 19 other reports (Pew 2019:67-70). The time frame under examination is the 2017 calendar year.

The Pew Research Center's project on religious restrictions is characterized by the numerical interpretation of global religious freedom data by Americans from a US perspective.

2.4 Usefulness and limitations

This approach has the limited value of indicating a maximum number of countries that need to be taken into consideration when the lowest threshold of intimidation and harassment is applied. However, the number of countries in itself carries little

meaning for answering our research question, due to the vastly divergent population sizes of countries. To add more meaning, the names of countries must be disclosed, and the total number of Christians residing in each one must be estimated.

One strength of the Pew study is its global coverage. On the other hand, it has several limitations: it "does not assess either the severity or the frequency of the harassment in each country" (Pew 2019:79), the data used are rather thin (Schirrmacher 2016:7), and the main data source may have some degree of bias (Johnson & Zurlo 2020:911).

3. CSGC: Number of Christians facing persecution around the world, 1970-2020

The lengthy essay "Persecution in the Context of Religious and Christian Demography, 1970-2020" (Johnson 2016) represents commissioned research by "the world's most eminent scholar on religious demography" (Hertzke 2016:3), Todd Johnson of the Center for the Study of Global Christianity, for a cooperative research project and book, *Christianity and Freedom: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Hertzke and Shah 2016). The research was originally presented in 2013.

3.1 Research question

The declared purpose of Johnson's analysis is "to provide a religious demographic context for discussions about Christianity and religious freedom in the twenty-first century" (Johnson 2016:13). The implied research question is "In 1970, 2000, 2010, and 2020, how many Christians were living in the 46 countries with the most significant threat of religious persecution or with the more egregious cases as identified by Paul Marshall in 2012?"

3.2 Numerical outcomes

Johnson estimates that in 2020 "about 600 million Christians … are living in" the 46 countries identified by Paul Marshall "where they are subject to persecution" (Johnson 2016:46).

3.3 Basis and methodology

For a definition of *Christians*, Johnson can point to the *World Christian Encyclopedia* (WCE), which he edits. The enumeration of Christians in the WCE aims at quantifying their order of magnitude in an approximate way (WCE 1982:45), looking at their geographical spread and location (WCE 2001:II,3).

As for defining *persecution*, Johnson was asked to base his findings on the taxonomy of Paul Marshall, which was published in the book *Persecuted: The Global Assault on Christians* (Marshall, Gilbert and Shea 2013). This book applies select-

ed descriptors from the U.S. International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. The 46 persecuting countries selected include five "Self-professed Communist States," 13 "National Security States" (including post-Communist countries), four "South Asian Religious Nationalist States," and 24 "Muslim Majority States" (Johnson 2016:44).

The data source used by Johnson is the *World Christian Database*, of which he is an editor.

The starting point of Johnson's approach is to apply his unique expertise, gathered over decades of research on general global Christian demographics, to a predetermined taxonomy with a largely fixed list of countries so as to establish the number of Christians living there.

3.4 Usefulness and limitations

Johnson's demographic approach offers a much better quantitative approximation than the mere counting of countries. It provides data on a country level and transparency regarding the countries included, both of which factors allow for better analysis and verification.

Limitations include the sole focus on the number of Christians residing in a country instead of those actually persecuted, and the restriction to a static set of countries with the most egregious cases.

If a way could be found to better determine (1) a transparent threshold of persecution for the inclusion of countries and (2) the respective number of Christians affected in each country or territory examined, an even better approximation to an answer to our research question could be provided.

4. Open Doors: Christians affected by persecution in 2018-2019

The annual World Watch List (WWL), prepared by Open Doors International/World Watch Research, the Netherlands, reports on the countries where it is most difficult to live as Christians. This is the most detailed, systematic and regular of such measurements currently available. Its published documentation includes a section on "the total number of persecuted Christians," the most recent version at the time of writing appeared on 15 January 2020 (WWL 2020a).

4.1 Research question

The WWL is guided by several questions: What are the 50 countries in the world where it is most difficult to live as Christians? Which countries fulfil the threshold of high levels of persecution beyond this top 50? How does this change annually?

Regarding our specific issue, the implied research question could be stated as follows: "How many Christians are affected by 'extreme,' 'very high' or 'high' levels of persecution in the 50 countries on the World Watch List 2020, when we calculate

the Christian populations living in provinces within these countries that meet the persecution threshold?"

4.2 Numerical outcomes

The WWL concludes that at least 260 million Christians are affected by persecution in the top 50 persecuting countries. This number increases to an estimated 312 million Christians when all 73 countries meeting the threshold of at least "high" levels of persecution are taken into account.

4.3 Basis and methodology

Persecution is broadly and comprehensively understood as "any hostility experienced as a result of one's identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians." In practice, it also includes hostilities between different Christian groups (WWL 2020a:2).

The definition of *Christians* is of limited relevance, as an external data source, the Brill *World Christian Database* (accessed in April 2019), has been used for the Christian demographics of most countries. Open Doors made independent estimates of the Christian population for only 11 countries.

The timeframe examined ranges from 1 November 2018 to 31 October 2019. The total number of countries thoroughly analysed is 110, with the remaining countries and territories monitored by less time-intensive methods. The threshold for including a country is a score of 41 points on a scale of 100, representing the bottom value of the "high" level of persecution among four possible categories: "extreme," "very high," "high," and "variable." This is an overall country score. Thus, countries are not included if the minimum threshold of 41 points is reached in certain regions but the country as a whole does not reach that score.

The number of Christians affected is determined by individual country: "If the estimate of the level of persecution in a specific region within the country came within the range of 'high' and above, the Christian population for that region was counted as persecuted Christians. The total of such regions made up the number of persecuted Christians in that country" (WWL 2020a:7). However, only the numbers of national Christian populations are published. Regarding Christians considered as persecuted, only a global total is published. Open Doors claims a risk of security concerns if such figures were released on a country level (WWL 2020a:8).

4.4 Usefulness and limitations

Of the three approaches examined, that of Open Doors is the most nuanced and differentiated, as it seeks to assess not only the number of countries engaging in persecution or the number of Christians residing there, but the number of Chris-

tians actually living in provinces of countries where persecution meets a defined threshold.

Open Doors' work benefits from well-developed professional expertise and vast data on the persecution of Christians, based on field research and primarily first-hand information. The inclusion of countries is based on a carefully calculated score, which attempts to incorporate many relevant variables (WWL 2020b).

The limitations include the fact that some information is treated as confidential, lack of finer documentation with respect to our research question, potential over-scoring of more populous countries, a margin of uncertainty due to the methodol-ogy, and lack of substantiation of diverging estimates of Christian demographics, such as for Egypt and China. Nevertheless, the WWL gives a rather good indication of the order of magnitude of Christians affected by persecution globally, provided that one accepts the definition of persecution and the threshold applied.

5. Comparisons

5.1 Overlaps and differences in approaches

Although each of the approaches examined has a different research design, there is also significant overlap between them. All three share an overarching approach in which the base units are countries/territories and Christians. As a result, the key questions are as follows: Which countries need to be considered in a calculation? What is the threshold to determine their inclusion? How many Christians are there, and how many of these are adversely affected? What is the threshold for including adversely affected Christians in a global count?

Each of the approaches, however, stops at a different point in the course of these inquiries. The Pew Research Center basically stops at the point of identifying the number of countries to be considered. The CSGC stops at the point of identifying the global total of Christians living in affected countries. Open Doors proceeds to a closer approximation of how many Christians are actually affected in each country under consideration, by examining information at the provincial level.

None of the methods provide an exact number in response to our research question. The total amount of Christians facing persecution globally remains, and likely will always remain, an approximation. Nevertheless, that approximation could still be improved.

5.2 Countries included

Each approach included a different number of countries in its formula. For Pew, a single incident reported in any of the sources used suffices; therefore, the re-sulting number of countries (143) is the largest amongst the three analyses.[5] The

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[5]   As Pew does not assess North Korea for methodological reasons, the total of countries engaging in some level of persecution of Christians is actually 144.

Comparison of numerically top countries for the persecution of Christians			
JOHNSON		**OPEN DOORS**	
Country	**Christian population**	**Country**	**Persecuted Christians**
Russian Fed.	118.027.000	China	65.000.000
China	109.594.000	India	46.336.000
Nigeria	93.791.000	Nigeria	32.827.000
India	66.194.000	Ethiopia	23.022.000
Ethiopia	65.776.000	Indonesia	19.674.000
Indonesia	32.790.000	Egypt	16.250.000
Egypt	9.322.000	Mexico	15.220.000
Totals	**495.494.000**		**218.329.000**

Table 1

CSGC works with the smallest set, 46 countries predetermined by an expert assessment. The application of Open Doors' threshold results in a total of 73 countries. Comparing the countries identified by the CSGC and Open Doors finds agreement consensus on a core of 42 countries.

5.3 Most impacted countries

There is a consensus between the CSGC and Open Doors on six countries with the greatest numerical impact on Christians when considering persecution: China, Nigeria, India, Ethiopia, Indonesia and Egypt. Together they make up 70 percent of the global total of persecuted Christians as estimated by Open Doors. However, due to their different methods, CSGC and Open Doors do not agree whether Russia or Mexico is the seventh country to include in this category of numerically most impacted countries.

5.4 Impressions created by the results

What impressions are created by the respective results? The absolute numbers published need to be considered in relation to global totals and to the balance that is not named.

Focusing on the results for the years around 2020, the approach used by the CSGC arrives at nearly twice the absolute number of Christians facing persecution (600 million Christians out of 2.5 billion living in said countries) as compared to Open Doors' method (312 million Christians out of 2.5 billion facing persecution). Both approaches agree, however, that only a minority (OD 12.5%; CSGC 23,5%) of the global Christian population actually lives in areas with strong persecution. By contrast, Pew's numbers create a different impression because a minimal threshold for inclusion is used and countries (72% affected) are counted instead of Christians.

5.5 Definitions and determination of thresholds

The variations in the definitions of "Christians" used here apparently do not make much difference in the determination of the order of magnitude of the number of Christians facing persecution.

There is some variation in the definition and delimitation of the adverse phenomena affecting Christians. Pew focuses on two questions as a very broad and inclusive measure with a very low material threshold. In addition, the numerical threshold for coding is at the bare minimum, as a single recorded case suffices to place a country on Pew's list.

Regarding the CSGC's predetermined set of countries with the most significant threat to Christians, no clearly defined threshold is applied. For Open Doors, on the other hand, the threshold is systematically and empirically determined by the answers to a battery of 84 questions.

5.6 Data-related aspects

A closer examination of data-related aspects reveals the degree or originality of the source data, the different timeframes examined, the varying currency of the data, and the respective degree of coverage of the studies.

Regarding the originality of the source data, Open Doors is the only entity that conducts independent field research on persecution data. Pew and the CSGC both rely on external data in that regard. Conversely, only the CSGC can claim full originality with regard to demographic data on Christians. The most current data come from Open Doors, but with reliance primarily on external demographic data. Although the CSGC's projection in 2013 for 2020 might appear to address the present time most accurately, it might also be significantly off due to differences between projected and actual population/Christian growth rates.

Comparison of data related aspects				
		Pew	**CSGC/ Johnson**	**Open Doors**
Originality of source data	**persecution**	dependent	dependent	original
	demography	n/a	original	mainly dependent
Time examined (time frame or point in time)		2017 calendar year	1970, 2000, 2010, 2020; extrapolations in 2013	Nov 2018 – Oct 2019 (demo- graphics, April 2019)
Time lag of results		1.5 years	3.5 years	2.5 months
Degree of coverage		99.5% of global population	approx. 25% of countries	50-100% of countries

Table 2

With regard to the time lapse between the research and the date of publication of the results, Open Doors clearly leads the field, with a time lag of only 2.5 months.

Regarding the degree of coverage or comprehensiveness, Pew appears to be the leader, covering 99.5% of the global population in equal measure by considering all countries and territories except North Korea. However, these degrees of coverage cannot be compared fairly, because each one measures something different, due to the methodological differences between the approaches. Open Doors focuses only on the Christian population, and the CSGC's limitation to 46 countries is externally predetermined and not the result of systematic, empirical research.

All approaches examined have room to dig deeper and improve the meaningfulness of their results. Amongst the three, Open Doors provides the most current and detailed data on the number of Christians under threat of persecution, and thus it probably comes closest to a reliable approximation of a global total.

6. Interpretation within a broader framework

From this review, we can see which variables methodologically influence the outcomes of any attempt to determine the global magnitude of persecution of Chris-

tians. The meaningfulness of outcomes depends heavily on the choices made concerning how to assess the relevant variables, the respective depth of competence of the researchers, and the reliability of the source data. Beyond that, it is crucial to interpret the outcomes within the broader framework of global Christian and religious demographics and not regard them in isolation.

First, the 2.5 billion Christians of all traditions taken together represent the largest number of adherents of any religion, constituting 32.3 percent of the global population in 2020 (Johnson and Zurlo 2020:6). The number of persecuted Christians must be considered in relation to those global totals.

Second, since 1981 more Christians have been living in the Global South than in the Global North (Johnson 2016:15-17). Thus, we would also expect to find more persecuted Christians in the Global South.

Third, any study of persecution of Christians, as Johnson (2016:27) rightly reminds us, must recognize that the phenomenon is dynamic and not static.

Fourth, due to the greatly unequal overall population sizes of countries and the wide variation in the number of Christians in each country, global estimates of the number of persecuted Christians are largely influenced by estimates of Christian demographics in 7 countries with large Christian populations, each of which have millions of believers under likely threat of persecution. These countries include China, India, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Indonesia, and Egypt.[6] Any substantial uncertainty about the size of the Christian population in these countries will significantly affect the level of certainty regarding the number of Christians under threat of persecution globally.

Fifth, it is helpful to keep in perspective how persecution or violations of freedom of religion or belief affecting Christians are statistically related to those experienced by adherents of other religious faiths globally, if at all possible.

7. Recommendations for users

Users of statistics, including those on global numbers of harassed or persecuted Christians, need to observe multiple cautions. First, they should quote and apply the statistics carefully within the framework of their intended interpretation. Any attempt at simplification usually leads to the pitfall of oversimplification. Lack of attention to the nuance and detail included in the statements made by the various information sources leads readily to misquoting and misrepresenting the results.

Second, readers need to ensure that they understand the limitations inherent in the methodological approach chosen.

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[6]   In addition to those named above, according to the estimates by Open Doors, the other countries with large numbers of affected are: Mexico, Vietnam, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Colombia, Kenya and Tanzania.

Third, (professional) users of statistics should examine the derivation of those statistics critically. One needs to look beyond the conclusions communicated by the report authors and examine the data first-hand. Might there possibly be any flaws in the data, methodology or conclusions?

Fourth, critical minds should compare the outcomes of such reports with other comparable sources and use each one only where it is strongest and most meaningful. The results should also be embedded into the bigger picture.

Finally, users should be very careful when attempting to draw their own conclusions from the data, due to the considerations discussed above.

One possible conclusion could be that one or two of every ten Christians live in provinces with at least high levels of persecution. Or, stating the other side of the coin, at least three-quarters of all Christians globally do *not* live in provinces where they might be affected by at least high levels of persecution. What can the remaining 80 to 90 percent of Christians learn from those more under pressure for their faith and what is their responsibility towards their persecuted brethren?

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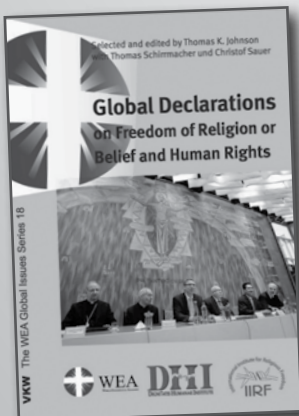
A human security approach to religious freedom

The religious minorities vulnerability assessment tool

Dennis P. Petri[1]

Abstract

A number of characteristic aspects of religious persecution in Latin America are insufficiently recognized by existing theoretical frameworks and data collection tools, leaving many forms of what I call "vulnerability of religious minorities" unobserved. Adopting a human security perspective, I develop a methodology that allows us to observe how different forms of religious behavior can lead actors such as states, indigenous leaders and organized crime to restrict the religious freedom of a religious minority. I call this methodology the Religious Minorities Vulnerability Assessment Tool (RM-VAT). This tool covers human security threats faced by religious minorities in different spheres of society and in relation to their type of religious behavior, as opposed to simply administering a pre-defined questionnaire. The RM-VAT represents a valuable instrument to assess the vulnerability of religious minorities in ways and on levels not observed before. These new insights form a useful basis to support building resilience within these groups and raising awareness of their situation worldwide.

Keywords   religious freedom, human security, vulnerability, active religious behavior, Latin America.

1. Introduction

In 2006, Grim and Finke lamented that "religion receives little attention in internatioin short supply." nal quantitative studies. Including religion in cross-national studies requires data, and high-quality data are in short supply." (p. 3) Today, this problem is not as acute, as increasing amounts of cross-country data on religion have become available (Fox 2011). Yet essential aspects of the vulnerability of religious minorities continue to be overlooked.

In April 2018, I visited the museum devoted to Monsignor Oscar Arnulfo Romero, the Salvadoran prelate murdered on 24 March 1980 while offering mass. It

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is generally believed that he was killed by a right-wing death squad for his public denunciation of social injustices and human rights violations. Romero was declared a martyr by the Vatican in 2015 (and canonized in 2018), but my guide at the museum told me that the canonization process was stalled for ideological reasons due to his presumed adherence to liberation theology. Moreover, because he was killed for political reasons, Vatican theologians disputed at length whether he qualified as a martyr. Eventually, they agreed that he did qualify because he was killed *in odium fidei* ("in hatred of the faith").

The debate about martyrdom and canonization is an internal matter of the Vatican, but it reflects a broader misunderstanding of the vulnerability of religious engagement both within and outside academia. No one would disagree that social and political activism by religious people can be risky and even life-threatening in authoritarian contexts. However, risks related to religious engagement are rarely understood as violations of religious freedom, nor are they recognized as a consequence of behavior inspired by religious convictions. Often, the religious dimension of conflicts is readily discarded in favor of alternative explanations.

In this article, I argue that observation of the vulnerability of religious minorities can benefit from the human security paradigm. I first present a methodological review of the most common tools used to measure religious persecution. I argue that these tools are useful instruments but that they nevertheless overlook many significant threats to religious minorities. As a complement to existing tools, I justify the relevance of the human security perspective. I offer some suggestions on how to operationalize this framework to assess the vulnerability of religious minorities, and I describe the development of the Religious Minorities Vulnerability Assessment Tool (RM-VAT). I then discuss how the RM-VAT can contribute to improving existing religious freedom assessment methods.

2. Methodological review of religious freedom assessment tools

The growing interest in documenting and measuring religious freedom has led to the development of a variety of "Religious Freedom Assessment Tools" (RFATs). RFATs were first created by faith-based organizations that had an interest in documenting religious freedom violations to inform their strategic planning. Some civil society organizations later integrated religious freedom into their monitoring instruments. In the 1990s, public and multilateral institutions gained interest in religious freedom issues and started developing monitoring instruments. Encouraged by the increasing interest in religious freedom by public institutions, various academic research projects started to develop RFATs in the 2000s.

Two broad types of RFATs can be identified: general datasets that include some variables about religious freedom and "pure" RFATs. In general datasets such as

the Cingranelli-Richards Human Rights Data Project (1981), the Minorities at Risk Project (1986), and the World Values Survey (1981), the treatment of religious freedom was generally very basic and did not contain the level of sophistication and complexity of the scholarly RFATs that emerged later.

Most of the pure RFATs use a sociometric methodology. The best-known one is Global Restrictions on Religion, adapted by the Pew Research Center from the methodology developed by Grim and Finke (2006) at Penn State University. This instrument includes indices for two dimensions of restrictions of religion for adherents of any religion or belief: "government restrictions" and "social hostilities." The methodology of the indices is based on the coding of 19 publicly available primary sources, among which the principal source is the International Religious Freedom Reports produced by the U.S. State Department (Grim and Finke 2011).

Following a similar sociometric methodology, the Religion and State (RAS) Project directed by Jonathan Fox (2011) at Bar-Ilan University "measures the extent of government involvement in religion." His dataset uses a broader range of primary sources and focuses specifically on "the relationship between religion and the state apparatus." The dataset developed in the framework of this project includes variables for Official Religion, Religious Support, Religious Restrictions, Religious Discrimination, and other topics. Additional variables measure policies including religious education, the registration of religious organizations, restrictions on abortion, restrictions on proselytizing, and religious requirements for holding public office or citizenship. A societal module was added to the RAS dataset in 2017. The variables measuring actions taken by societal actors describe societal discrimination and minority societal actions (Fox, Finke and Mataic 2018).

Although it was developed by a faith-based organization, the World Watch List of Open Doors International can also be considered a scholarly instrument since its methodological revision in 2012 and its academic validation by the International Institute for Religious Freedom, a network of scholars and universities specializing in religious freedom (Sauer 2012). Input for the World Watch List comes from questionnaires completed by both staff in the field and a network of external experts. The questionnaire design seeks to give expression to the degree of pressure experienced by Christians in five spheres of life: private, family, community, national, and church life. The questionnaire also includes a sixth block on physical violence, which cuts across the other five spheres of life.

Although each RFAT provides different results depending on its methodology and on what is observed specifically, their main contribution lies in their attempt to document, quantify, and compare situations of religious freedom worldwide. The relevance of RFATs is not in dispute, but there are at least four areas in which the data provided

by RFATs should be further complemented: they are insufficiently holistic, neglect the local scale, have a state bias, and use a restrictive definition of religion.

First, previous RFATs are insufficiently holistic, especially in the case of quantitative (sociometric) tools. Because of coding requirements, most RFATs simplify reality by focusing on a reduced number of variables. Measuring a fixed set of variables can be useful to enable cross-national comparisons and to observe evolutions of these variables over time; however, such approaches do not account for the complex interaction between socio-political factors that, under specific circumstances, can lead to situations of vulnerability for religious minorities.

In selecting the variables to observe, most RFATs adopt what could be called a "laundry list" approach. The problem with this type of approach, as Fox (1999: 443) notes, is that laundry lists are either so specific – "limited to various aspects or instances of the relationship between religion and violence and revolution" – as to be insufficiently comprehensive, or on the contrary so comprehensive that they have "extensive lists of factors contributing to religious violence and revolution." In essence, laundry lists are subject to what Owen (2003b) refers to as a "measurement paradox": they are never representative (exhaustive) enough, but the longer they are, the more difficult data collection becomes, particularly if the methodology requires cross-national comparisons. Another problem with the laundry list approach is that it lacks explanatory power, as Fox (1999:442) points out: "[Laundry lists] identify many pieces to the puzzle but do an incomplete job of putting that puzzle together." Moreover, important explanatory factors in particular cases may not have been included in the datasets and risk being ignored in the subsequent analysis.

I realize that this shortcoming applies to quantitative methods in general. Indeed, any sociometric model inevitably simplifies reality. However, by focusing on a reduced number of variables to describe religious freedom, RFATs run the risk of overlooking specific human security threats to which religious minorities are vulnerable.

Connected with the former critique, the predominant quantitative approach of the RFATs raises an issue related to scale. As they focus on cross-national comparisons, their unit of analysis is the national state. Although the methodologies of most RFATs indicate that they take local variations into account when relevant, their primary focus is at the national level.[2]

RFATs are macro-level indicators, meaning that, as Owen (2004) asserts, they are aggregates that conceal realities that can only be observed locally. Ignoring factors at the local level – which Stein Rokkan (2009 [1970]) refers to as the "whole-nation bias" in political science – implies that the analysis contains a relatively high

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[2]   Localized codings based on the RAS scheme have since been completed for Switzerland by Helbling and Traunmüller (2016).

level of generality; i.e., findings are not nuanced or specified depending on local particularities (Snyder 2001; Høyland, Moene, and Willumsen 2012; Glasius et al. 2018). The local – territorialized – expressions of the vulnerability of religious minorities therefore risk going unnoticed.

Although RFATs acknowledge that the observation of religious freedom violations should not be limited to the behavior of the national government, most of the variables chosen by most RFATs refer precisely to this aspect. Variables describing restrictions on religious freedom (or persecution of religious groups) by non-state actors are comparatively less used, with three exceptions: the Pew Research Center's Social Hostilities Index (considering the broad range of non-state actors, the social hostilities category is too broad for a single index in my opinion), the new societal module of the RAS Project, and Open Doors International's World Watch List since its methodological revision in 2012.

In general, RFATs tend to focus on traditional sources of persecution but do not consider non-state actors such as organized crime or indigenous authorities – very important in Latin America – as players that can restrict the religious freedom of religious minorities, either by taking advantage of their impunity or by effectively taking over control of government. The "over-attention on the state," as Owen (2003a:10) calls it, thus makes it difficult to observe the role of non-state actors.[3]

Finally, another critical element is the way religion is considered and defined in RFATs. In my view, the adopted definitions of religion in the RFATs are too restrictive to account for scenarios of vulnerability of religious minorities that are not (exclusively) caused by a religious motive and/or are related to how religious minorities behave in society as a result of their religious beliefs. For example, the approach to religion taken by the Pew Research Center does not integrate most behavioral aspects of religion, defining a religious brand as "an organized group of committed individuals that adhere to and propagate a specific interpretation of explanations of existence based on supernatural assumptions through statements about the nature and workings of the supernatural and about ultimate meaning." The RAS Project uses Fox's broad behavioral definition of religion, but nevertheless defines religious minorities only by identity.

Moreover, sociometric tools mainly consider only organized religious groups, ignoring new forms of religion such as new religious movements (or including

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[3] The predominant focus on the state can be explained by the following three factors. First, religious freedom was traditionally approached from a human rights perspective, which considers the state as the primary addressee of human rights violations. Second, the first RFATs emerged towards the end of the Cold War period, characterized by the widespread presence of communist regimes, during which religious freedom was restricted mostly by government action. Indeed, a large number of restrictions on religious freedom still originate from the state today. Finally, observing social dynamics related to religious conflict is more complex than observing whether religious freedom is respected by the state in law and practice; as a result, the state is the easiest actor to code.

them as part of a catch-all category in the case of the Pew Research Center). Thus, the RFATs' restrictive definitions of religion become a major limitation because it does not enable them to observe cases of vulnerability of religious minorities that result from their behavior rather than from their identity.

In general, RFATs look at religious identification and its consequences but not at the role of religion in society, and they insufficiently acknowledge the multidimensionality of religious freedom, i.e., the degree to which it is respected in each sphere of society. Moreover, the reviewed RFATs place their primary emphasis on variables related to religious identity (religious affiliation) and some forms of religious behavior (such as church attendance or following certain dress codes), while not considering how specific behavior of members of religious minorities, inspired by their religious convictions, can create vulnerability.

3. The relevance of human security for the observation of the vulnerability of religious minorities

The human security paradigm emerged in the 1990s as an alternative to the traditional security discourse in the period following the end of the Cold War. Although it had been used earlier – it has philosophical roots in early liberal philosophical writings (Owen 2003a:7-10) – the term "human security" was formally introduced in the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) 1994 *Human Development Report*. Conceptually, Owen proposed a definition of human security that has the merit of being concrete and specific, while remaining true to its original conceptualization by the UNDP:

> Human security is the protection of the vital core of all human lives from critical and pervasive threats. Individuals require protection from environmental, economic, food, health, personal and political threats. (Owen 2003a:38)

Although religion is not usually considered in human security literature, this paradigm introduces a new way to consider security and conflict that is particularly relevant for the analysis of the vulnerability of religious minorities. As Owen (2004:21) claims, "The very point of human security is to shift our attention to threats usually not considered, and most likely not measured."

Two shifts introduced by the concept of human security, as highlighted by Glasius, are particularly relevant. First, the state security paradigm that based a state's sovereignty on its control of a territory is reversed and replaced by a view of state sovereignty that is dependent upon the way the state serves and supports its people. It puts the focus on the security of the individual citizen and on every human being. It also recognizes the participation of nongovernmental actors in the security field.

This shift has implications for the observation of threats to religious minorities at the pertinent level of analysis, which often is the subnational level. A traditional security focus would not even consider conflicts involving religious minorities before they become manifest. Furthermore, a traditional security focus that looks mainly at interstate conflicts (or inter-ethnic conflicts, in the case of conflict theory) would not take transnational threats or threats against a minority group into account. This shift away from vertical understandings of security opens the door for the recognition of the responsibility of non-state actors, such as drug cartels or indigenous authorities, for human rights abuses of religious minorities.

Second, the shift towards the subjects of security is equally relevant for the observation of the vulnerability of religious minorities. One practical consequence of this shift is that it views vulnerable individuals and groups not only as victims that require protection, but also as active agents that can be empowered to engage the threats they face (Glasius 2008:44), in line with Rodin (2014). The most relevant feature of this shift, however, is its open-ended outlook. It constitutes an invitation to inventory the human security risks that threaten a religious minority in the broadest possible way. Because of its open-ended feature, the human security perspective is therefore not constrained by any predetermined laundry list of indicators that might be too limiting.

Notwithstanding its paradigm-shifting features and its considerable resonance among both policymakers and academics, the human security perspective has remained contested because of its perceived conceptual vagueness, which poses a series of measurement and operationalization challenges. Indeed, how can human security be measured if there is no clarity about what this concept entails (Owen 2003a, 2004; Debiel 2005; Werthes and Bosold 2006; Glasius 2008)?

Owen's approach to human security addresses these challenges in a way that is also useful for assessing the vulnerability of religious minorities. First, Owen recommends observing human security at the most pertinent geographical level (the subsidiarity principle), which will often be the subnational level. Borrowing from geography, he suggests conceiving human security as "an analytical concept with a specific meaning in a specific place. Human security in one location means something very different than human security in another" (Owen 2003a:1). The relevant human security threats in a particular location must be inventoried (preferably using the input of experts) and data must be collected to describe these threats. Owen recommends doing this without respect to motive, responsible actor, legal category, or any other variable. Once the threats have been observed, they can be analyzed and interpreted, without pre-defined analytical categories getting in the way of the observation of human security threats.

Owen thus suggests getting rid of any predetermined sets of factors or indicators (laundry lists) and instead focusing "only on relevant threats, those that surpass the human security threshold" (2003a:41), which he defines, following Alkire, as

anything that threatens "the vital core of all human lives in ways that advance human freedoms and human fulfillment" (2003:2). This suggestion is relevant for the observation of religious minorities' vulnerability to human security threats, because it does not restrict the observation to a set of pre-defined categories such as the indicators of an RFAT or the variables of a theoretical model. It also does not limit the observation to the national level. Specifically, it allows us to observe threats that existing frameworks fail to detect but that nevertheless constitute human rights abuses, such as threats that are the result of religious behavior, do not have a religious motive, are perpetrated by non-state actors, or can be observed only at the subnational level. Such an approach inevitably sacrifices the opportunity for quantitative cross-national comparisons, but it increases the possibility of observing threats that are usually not considered.

Owen further emphasizes that the data collection process must be flexible; any form of available information, whether quantitative or qualitative, can be used, as long as it is relevant to describing the identified human security threats. Glasius et al. (2018:64-66) make a similar point concerning the limitations of information gathering in authoritarian contexts. Again, this point is useful for observing the vulnerability of religious minorities, because standardized datasets that describe the specific human security threats to which they are vulnerable probably do not exist. Through piecing together public information from various sources, legal analysis, and anecdotal evidence such as interviews and news reports, a picture of the specific vulnerability of a determined religious minority can emerge.

Owen proposes to apply existing methodologies for hazard identification and risk assessment – commonly referred to as vulnerability assessments – as tools to measure human security. A great number of vulnerability assessment tools (VATs) have been developed in recent years in different academic disciplines and policy fields. Originally, the focus of hazard identification research was on tracking environmental disasters (Barrows 1923; Cutter 1996; Food and Agriculture Organization 2003; Tresman 2004; UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction 2004). The application of this field progressively broadened from physical events to hazards caused by human actions, such as technological failure. Later, VATs were applied to energy supply, transportation, and communication systems (Makoka and Kaplan 2005). VATs are also used in the field of information technology, to assess the vulnerability of computer systems to security risks. With the trend of broadening the application of VATs to minorities, it is only a small additional step to apply VATs to religious minorities.

4. Construction of the Religious Minorities Vulnerability Assessment Tool

A new vulnerability assessment tool should enhance the strengths of the RFAT approach while at the same time overcoming most of its shortcomings. This goal can

be achieved by applying the VAT methodology, which must be adapted to observe the position of religious minorities. The following requirements of an ideal tool to assess the vulnerability of religious minorities can be enumerated. It must:

- Be sufficiently open-ended, contextual, and forward-looking to comprehensively observe the vulnerability of religious minorities (no laundry list and consideration of all threats, not only executed threats);
- Take the local scale into account, i.e., it must have the capacity to observe pertinent dynamics at the subnational level;
- Take non-state actors into consideration;
- Focus on the minority suffering the human rights abuses, so that self-identified religious minorities, even within intra-ethnic contexts, can be considered;
- Adopt a broad definition of religion that accounts for its behavioral dimension; and
- Acknowledge the multidimensional nature of religious freedom (as a concept that is expressed in different spheres of society).

The human security approach, complemented by the VAT methodology used by Owen, suits a great number of the formulated requirements, or at least approximates them to a large extent. Regarding the first requirement, I do not use any predetermined sets of indicators (laundry lists) as RFATs do, but I try to inductively uncover the most pertinent human security threats to which the selected religious minority is vulnerable.

The second requirement is directly inspired by Alwang, Siegel, and Jorgensen (2001) and Owen (2003a), who recommend the observation of vulnerability at the most pertinent geographical level. It follows that the RM-VAT must have the flexibility to zoom in to the subnational level that is most relevant for the observation of human security threats. It is also inspired by the literature on subnational undemocratic regimes (O'Donnell 1993; Snyder 2001; Gibson 2005; Dabène 2008; Giraudy 2012).

The third and fourth requirements are implicit in human security's "shifting security" feature and the shift towards the subjects of security, respectively, as described by Glasius (2008). One important difference from Owen and other approaches to human security is that I focus on one specific group rather than on a particular territory. The focus on specific groups is not uncommon among VATs (Hoogeveen, Tesliuc, Vakis, and Dercon 2004), even though human security has never been applied to religious minorities.

As for requirements five and six, they are dealt with by using a behavioral definition of religion and a multidimensional conception of religious freedom, respectively, to guide the application of the RM-VAT. This is, of course, the main departure from existing approaches to human security, which do not explicitly focus on religion. Inspired by Fox (1999, 2013) and (Hall 1997), I define religion as follows:

> A belief system that includes a more or less coherent set of beliefs in which reference is made to (a) transcendental being(s), which is seen by its adherents as important for who they are and which influences their individual and collective behavior.

To operationalize this behavioral definition of religion, I develop a continuum of religious identity and behavior, ranging from religious self-identification and participation to missionary activity and civic participation (Figure 1).

Religious identity	Religious behavior		
Passive	*Semi-active*		*Active*
Religious self-identification	Religious participation	Religious lifestyle	Missionary activity
			Civic participation
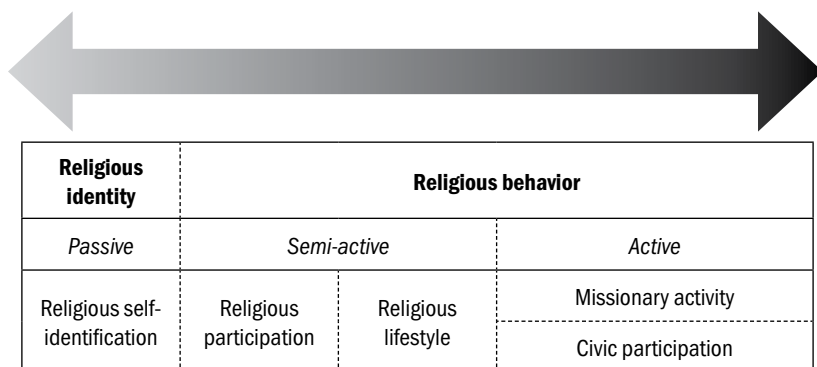
Figure 1. Continuum of religious identity and behavior – Source: Author's elaboration

To account for the multidimensional nature of religious freedom, I propose that human security threats can be understood as restrictions on religious expression that can be observed in different spheres of society (Petri and Visscher 2015). Based on this model, six spheres can be distinguished: family, church, the social sphere (school and health care), business (the marketplace), culture (media, arts and entertainment), and government.

In line with the open-ended feature of human security, this categorization offers the advantage of broadening the traditional perspective on religious freedom beyond the church sphere (freedom of worship) and beyond issues related to the separation between church and state. It also serves as a handy memory aid to identify human security threats to which religious minorities are vulnerable but that may not immediately be taken into consideration in discussions of religious freedom or persecution.

After listing all threats, I categorize them using two variables: the continuum of religious identity and behavior and the spheres of society in which they are manifested. This allows me to interpret the human security threats I observe as 'restrictions of religious expression within any sphere of society', in agreement with the multidimensional nature of religious freedom (Figure 2).

Spheres of society	Continuum of religious identity and behavior		
	Religious identity	Semi-active religious behavior	Active religious behavior
Family sphere			
Church sphere			
Social sphere (school and health care)			
Business sphere (marketplace)			
Cultural sphere (media, arts and entertainment)			
Government sphere			

Figure 2. Tool for the assessment of human security threats by sphere of society.
Source: Author's elaboration.

5. Improvements to religious freedom assessment tools

The RM-VAT is essentially a tool to organize data on human security threats and coping mechanisms. Thanks to its inductive nature, the RM-VAT makes it possible to observe religious freedom violations that are overlooked by RFATs. It could inspire changes to the methodologies of the RFATs that could easily be implemented so as to expand their scope. After all, qualitative research regularly produces insights that have informed the development of quantitative tools. In this way, the RFATs would still be subject to the limitations that characterize quantitative analysis in general, but they could cast their net a little wider by measuring other variables that can be compared in a large *n*-format.

First, the RFATs could be improved by developing variables that describe overlooked aspects that the RM-VAT reveals, such as the multidimensionality of religious freedom, notably religious freedom violations that occur in spheres of society other than the church sphere. This improvement could be implemented by creating more variables that constitute proxies for each of the spheres. To some degree, the World

Watch List of Open Doors International already does this, because it has elaborated a list of questions for five "spheres of life" (private, family, community, national, and church), but it does not specifically consider the social sphere or the business sphere. The RAS Project covers elements of some spheres, but could also be expanded. Particular attention should be given to variables describing subjective elements such as fear, frustration, or discouragement. RFATs could also be somewhat more flexible in their data collection process by broadening the number of sources used, which, particularly in the case of the Pew Research Center, is limited.

RFATs could also take the role of non-state actors in restricting religious freedom more fully into account. The Pew Research Center's Social Hostilities Index (SHI) and the societal module of the RAS Project already do so, but these indicators could be unpacked to a larger extent. To account for subnational variation, RFATs could be applied below the national level, in line with the broader trend of discovery of the subnational dimension; for example, the V-Dem (n.d.) project takes the subnational level as its unit of analysis when making comparisons regarding the quality of democracy. Most RFATs state in their methodologies that they take relevant subnational factors into consideration, but only in a few instances do they actually treat the subnational level as their unit of analysis. Apart from some pilots by the World Watch List and the RAS Project, this has not been done systematically.

Another major blind spot in most RFATs is that they insufficiently account for behavioral characteristics of religion. To address this issue, RFATs could develop more variables that describe forms of semi-active and active religious behavior. Alternatively, the availability of more survey data about such variables would be helpful. In two 2018 reports, the Pew Research Center stresses the sociological relevance of making the distinction between religious identification and religious behavior in a Western context (2018a, 2018b). In Mexico, the RIFREM survey is a useful source of information about semi-active forms of religious behavior, but lacks questions about more active forms. A practical problem with existing surveys that needs to be addressed is that we often cannot determine to what extent active forms of religious behavior, of which only a few measurements exist and often only at the national level (one exception is the Latin American Public Opinion Project at Vanderbilt University, which collects data at the state and municipal levels), are a consequence of religious convictions.

6. Concluding remarks

Due to space restrictions, in this article I have covered only the threat assessment, which is the most substantial part of the RM-VAT. My tool also contains two other parts, a specificity assessment and a resilience assessment, which I discussed in two earlier volumes of this journal (Petri 2016, 2017). The specificity assessment seeks to determine how specific these forms of discrimination are to religious groups and behav-

iors. The resilience assessment aims to do justice to the agency of religious minorities and to observe the coping mechanisms religious minorities use or could use to defend themselves against human security threats. In my PhD dissertation, *The Specific Vulnerability of Religious Minorities*, I apply the RM-VAT to three Latin American case studies, based on original fieldwork: (1) the vulnerability of actively practicing Christians caused by criminal violence in the states of Nuevo León, Tamaulipas and San Luis Potosí, Mexico; (2) the vulnerability of cultural dissidents among the Nasa ethnic group in the *resguardos indígenas* (indigenous reserves) of the southwestern highlands of Colombia; and (3) the vulnerability of Christians in Cuba.

I developed the RM-VAT as a result of my dissatisfaction with existing frameworks and tools to adequately observe the vulnerability of religious minorities in selected Latin American contexts. The methodology I developed enables us to cast the net wider than existing frameworks and tools, thanks to the inclusion of behavioral aspects of religion and the conceptualization in terms of spheres of society, and to consider all pertinent threats, including those that have a lower degree of specificity. Although the RM-VAT indeed observes aspects of the vulnerability of religious minorities that are not detected by existing tools and frameworks, it is not necessarily better on all points. For example, the RM-VAT is not suited for cross-national whole-of-country rankings and comparisons as the RFATs are. The RM-VAT also does not claim any causality or generalizable explanatory power, as other frameworks do. Therefore, the RM-VAT should be viewed as a complement to existing frameworks and tools, which continue to have their place. The RM-VAT merely highlights dimensions that are less intuitive but at the same time very real in terms of the human security concerns they raise.

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Opportunities and challenges for international religious freedom research to inform U.S. foreign policy

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Abstract

The promotion of international religious freedom (IRF) has been a consistent foreign policy goal across the past four U.S. presidential administrations. The form and implementation of approaches to advancing IRF, however, have varied. This article explores these differences and their implications for how scholarship can inform government initiatives to protect and promote IRF. Particular attention is paid to the Trump administration's expansion of IRF policy into the development space. On the one hand, that recent shift increased demand from certain departments and agencies for new data and analysis. On the other hand, those calls were also often ad hoc and uneven in nature as policymakers sought to quickly develop innovative ways to incorporate IRF into their programming. The article recommends that scholars can best respond to moments of policy change by remaining committed to nuanced, objective, and critical research that responds to empirically driven problems related to religious freedom and discrimination.

Keywords   international religious freedom, foreign policy, FoRB promotion, policy, discrimination.

1. Introduction

In March 2020, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) released the latest updates to its operational model. It would be easy to overlook, in that 159-page document, the single mention of religious freedom at §201.3.2.11 (U.S. Agency for International Development 2020:33-34). However, that reference introduced a critical change in how one of the largest official aid organizations in the world administers civilian foreign and development assistance. For the first time ever, certain missions were required to incorporate religious freedom into their five-year Country Development Cooperation Strategies.[2]

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[2]   This directive covered missions operating in countries listed on Tier 1 (Countries of Particular Concern)

USAID's amendment points to a broader policy shift regarding the advancement of international religious freedom (IRF) under the presidential administration of Donald Trump. Although religious freedom has been an explicit foreign policy priority for each of the last four presidents, Trump expanded IRF policy into the development space in novel ways. Most notably, an executive order issued in June 2020 allocated $50 million for foreign assistance programs that advance IRF (The White House 2020).

These policy changes raise important questions for IRF researchers seeking to inform government officials.[3] What are the key opportunities and challenges when new strategies are adopted? Do certain pitfalls arise? And what should policymakers consider when drawing on IRF research produced in response to their calls for data and analysis?

This article draws on the extant literature on IRF policy, primary source material from U.S. government agencies, and informal conversations with policymakers in Washington, D.C. between January and June 2020 to shed light on these questions. I begin by outlining the variation in how U.S. administrations have promoted religious freedom since the passage of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA). The Clinton administration focused on the institutionalization of this new legislation. Presidents Bush and Obama prioritized direct engagement with faith-based organizations (FBOs), although they applied different models to do so. The Trump administration shifted attention and resources toward development aid.

I then draw attention to how policy change, especially the modifications that occurred under the Trump administration, can influence opportunities for and the impact of IRF research. On one hand, the Trump administration's expansion of IRF policy into the development space increased demand from certain agencies and actors. It also opened space to discuss what religious freedom means in the first place and how federal agencies can effectively incorporate it into their programming. On the other hand, responses from federal agencies remained ad hoc and ran the risk of being viewed as partisan.

I conclude with modest recommendations as to how academic research, especially by a growing cohort of new scholars, can maximize its impact during periods of policy change. Most importantly, analysts need to remain committed to nuanced,

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or Tier 2 (Special Watch List) of either the Annual Report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom or the Department of State's International Religious Freedom Report. Although USAID has long emphasized the promotion of the free exercise of religion, it has not previously required missions to integrate religious freedom into their program cycles.

[3] This article focuses on periods of policy change, rather than policy reform. The former refers to incremental shifts in existing structures, including new policies and offices to carry out those policies. Policy reform denotes larger and/or more rapid structural changes (see Bennett and Howlett 1992).

objective, and critical research that responds to real-world puzzles, not the whims of electoral cycles.

Understanding the development and divisions surrounding IRF as a U.S. foreign policy goal is important for scholars and practitioners in a variety of contexts. For those who study religious freedom, it underscores the importance of clear conceptualization and measurement, as well as causal, not casual inferences (Musci and Stuart 2019). Decision makers sometimes latch on to findings that support their positions. Scholars, therefore, need to employ thoughtful research designs and explicitly acknowledge what their findings do and do not show. Officials and activists, in turn, must think carefully and critically about the data they draw on to inform the policies they advocate for and implement.

2. IRF and U.S. foreign policy

The promotion of IRF has remained a consistent foreign policy goal across the past four U.S. presidential administrations. Since the IRFA's passage in 1998, President Bill Clinton and his successors have all, though to varying degrees, expressed support for the promotion of freedom of religion as a universal human right, a strategic national interest, and a key foreign policy objective. The strategies used to advance religious freedom have varied, however. These diverse efforts can be broadly understood as reflecting three primary approaches.

2.1 The institutionalization of IRF policy: 1990-2001

IRF emerged as the dominant framework for incorporating religion into American foreign policy following the end of the Cold War (Bettiza 2019:184). One reason for the concern about religion, in general, was the seeming increase in conflicts fought along ethnoreligious lines, such as the Yugoslav wars. The publication of Huntington's (1996) "clash of civilizations" thesis, along with other studies that documented the resurgence of religion in world politics, further fueled anxieties about a post-Cold War era dominated by interreligious conflict (see Klocek and Hassner 2019). But why should the response to this threat focus on international religious freedom?

The answer to that question is closely related to the rise of an expansive and vocal community of IRF advocates. It began as a loose arrangement of Christian groups that had been documenting for many years the persecution of Christian minorities around the globe (Hertzke and Philpott 2000). By the mid-1990s, numerous Christian churches and their policy arms, including the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Episcopal Church, the Southern Baptist Convention, and the National Association of Evangelicals, had joined this effort. As awareness continued to grow regarding both the prevalence of religious freedom violations and the limit-

ed U.S. response to such abuses, a wide-ranging and unlikely alliance of activists of other faiths and no faith developed. It included Tibetan Buddhists, Iranian Baha'is, and mainstream Jewish organizations, as well as the Congressional Black Caucus and various feminist groups (Farr and Saunders 2009; Hehir 2001; Hertzke 2004).

President Clinton responded to the growing concerns and the mounting pressure to address IRF through a number of policy initiatives (see Farr 2008:ch. 4). Among the most notable actions was the convening of the Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad by Secretary of State Warren Christopher in 1996. This was followed in 1997 by a congressionally mandated State Department report on the persecution of Christians abroad. Also in 1997, Congressman Frank Wolf (R-Va.) and Senator Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) introduced the Freedom from Religious Persecution Act. It would have mandated automatic sanctions against governments responsible for religious persecution, but this became a contentious issue within the Clinton administration.[4] In response, Senators Don Nickles (R-Okla.) and Joe Lieberman (D-Conn.) introduced the revised IRFA, which Congress passed in fall 1998.

The IRFA formally institutionalized international religious freedom as a U.S. foreign policy objective. It sought to create new offices at the State Department and on the National Security Council that were devoted to the issue, an Ambassador-at-Large position to manage the effort within the State Department, and a bipartisan, independent commission to conduct fact-finding studies, provide policy recommendations, and monitor the State Department's performance.[5] Additionally, the IRFA require the State Department to release an annual report on the status of religious freedom around the world and on the actions that the U.S. government was taking to address violations (see U.S. Congress 1998).

The new legislation and its tools remained the primary avenue for promoting IRF during Clinton's second term. This process, of course, was not without its challenges and critiques.[6] First and foremost, disagreement arose around the IRFA's implementation. State Department efforts initially concentrated on the release of religious prisoners. Although this was an admirable goal, some officials worried that the focus was too narrow (Farr 2008:16). Others remained unsatisfied with the practice of "double hatting," or designating already existing sanctions on a country

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[4] Opposition to Wolf and Specter's bill also emerged within the State Department over fears that it would create a "hierarchy among human rights" and was linked to the Christian right (see Farr and Saunders 2009:952).

[5] The IRFA required the establishment of the Office of International Religious Freedom within the State Department; it encouraged, but did not mandate, the establishment of a religious freedom advisor on the National Security Council.

[6] For more on the history of the IRFA and its critics, see Gunn (2000).

as fulfilling the IRFA provisions. Still others worried that the new Office of International Religious Freedom (OIRF) was being isolated from broader operations in the State Department because it was placed within the existing Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) rather than being given its own purview (Birdsall 2016; Hertzke 2008). Policy changes under the Bush and Obama administrations sought to address these concerns.

2.2 IRF policy and faith-based organizations: 2001-2016

President George W. Bush drew on and expanded many of the same tools used by the Clinton administration. The OIRF, for instance, remained in the DRL but grew from a handful of staff to more than 20 full-time members. It also assumed full responsibility for the production of the annual IRF reports (Birdsall 2016).

President Bush further initiated several policy changes to advance IRF. In particular, he prioritized direct engagement with faith-based organizations as a broader strategy to promote religious freedom at home and abroad. This included the establishment of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (WHOFBCI), as well as the establishment of affiliate centers in a number of executive departments and USAID.[7] These new offices expanded the federal government's institutional capacity and generated new ideas about how to work with religious actors in the construction of foreign aid policy and the delivery of development and humanitarian assistance abroad (Bettiza 2019:2-3).

President Barack Obama built on this idea of advancing IRF through engagement with faith-based organizations after taking office in 2009. For instance, he expanded the WHOFBCI – renaming it the Office for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships (OFNP) – within his first 100 days in office (The White House 2009). In 2013, Secretary of State John Kerry established a new Office of Religion and Global Affairs (S/RGA), which was tasked with directly advising the Secretary of State on policy matters as they relate to religion and with serving as the first point of contact for both religious and secular organizations seeking to engage the State Department on matters of religion. Additionally, it consolidated a number of existing offices by incorporating the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, the Special Representative to Muslim Communities, and the Special Envoy to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (U.S. State Department n.d.).[8]

The Obama administration also continued to expand the work of the OIRF. In September 2015, for example, it appointed a Special Advisor for Religious Minori-

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[7]   The executive departments affected included Agriculture, Commerce, Education, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Housing and Urban Development, Justice, Labor, and Veterans Affairs, along with the Small Business Administration. For more details, see The White House (n.d.).

[8]   Although each of these was housed in the S/RGA, they maintained their specific mandates.

ties in the Near East and South and Central Asia (Bettiza 2019:192; Birdsall 2016).[9] In 2016, President Obama also signed into law the Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act, which stipulated that the Ambassador-at-Large for Religious Freedom should report directly to the Secretary of State. The Wolf Act further amended the IRFA's understanding of "freedom of thought, conscience, and religion" to include both theistic and non-theistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess or practice any religion (see U.S. Congress 2016).

2.3 IRF policy and development: 2016-present

The Trump administration followed a similar pattern to its predecessors, while also demonstrating a notable expansion of IRF policy into the development space. One of the first changes was a reorganization of the S/RGA and OIRF, announced by Secretary of State Rex Tillerson in 2017 and implemented the following year. The S/RGA was formally folded into the OIRF and a new Ambassador-at-Large, Sam Brownback, was appointed to an expanded role.[10]

One part of this increased responsibility involved the development of the Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom. In 2018, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo hosted the first of these summits in Washington, D.C.[11] The Ministerial brought together more than 1,000 civil-society and religious leaders, along with more than 100 foreign delegations. A second summit took place a year later. And, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland virtually convened a third meeting in November 2020.

Additionally, the State Department launched the International Religious Freedom Alliance in February 2020. According to Secretary Pompeo, its aim was "to bring together senior government representatives to discuss actions they can take together to promote respect for freedom of religion and belief and protect members of religious minority groups worldwide" (Ochab 2020). As of December 2020, the Alliance included some 28 countries.

Finally, the Trump administration considerably broadened IRF policy into the development space, especially in 2020.[12] This expansion included the appointment

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[9]   While this position was established under the Obama administration, it was a result of congressional mandate rather than executive branch policy. The position was officially established through H.R. 301, 113th Congress (2013-2014).

[10] In addition, the positions of Special Representative to Muslim Communities and the Special Envoy to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation were restructured and the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism was reorganized within the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. See Calamur (2017).

[11] The Ministerial was initially proposed by senior staff within the OIRF and approved by Secretary Tillerson. After Tillerson resigned, Secretary Pompeo reaffirmed and moved forward with the summit.

[12] The desire to condition foreign aid on other countries' treatment of religious minorities has not been without its controversy. For example, fierce debate emerged in late 2019 when USAID announced two grants to Iraqi organizations – a charity that primarily serves Christian minorities and a Catholic

of two new religious freedom advisors to USAID. Additionally, the 2020 Executive Order on Advancing International Religious Freedom directed new attention and funding toward the implementation of IRF in development programs. Fifty million dollars per fiscal year were allocated for programs that advance IRF. Under the order, executive departments and agencies that fund foreign assistance programs were required to ensure that faith-based and religious entities are not discriminated against on the basis of religious identity or belief. The order also mandated that the Secretary of State, in consultation with USAID's Administrator, "develop a plan to prioritize international religious freedom in the planning and implementation of United States foreign policy and in the foreign assistance programs of the Department of State and USAID" (The White House 2020).

3. IRF research and practice during periods of policy change

The promotion and protection of IRF has been a consistent foreign policy goal of U.S. presidential administrations over the past three decades. That said, the approaches taken to advance IRF have varied. What implications do periods of policy change have for those seeking to link research on religious freedom to U.S. foreign policy? In this section, I outline a few of the most common opportunities and pitfalls.

3.1 Opportunities

On one hand, policy shifts in the advancement of IRF can lead to increased demand for data and analysis, especially when offices expand or responsibilities grow. This is because new policies shift resources and require new or increased expertise. The creation of the S/RGA under President Obama led to the hiring of new personnel with experience in religious engagement, including S/RGA director Shaun Casey. The shift of focus back to the OIRF under the Trump administration, in turn, led to an expanded role for Ambassador Brownback, along with the various initiatives discussed above. Each of these undertakings has required additional study for their preparation and implementation.

Moreover, changes in how to advance IRF can catch federal agencies off guard. One way for them to quickly come up to speed is to commission studies and reports from IRF researchers. Under the Obama administration, the USAID Conflict Management and Mitigation Office commissioned a report on religious freedom and conflict (Finke and Martin 2012). More recently, USAID's Center for Faith and Opportunity Initiatives (CFOI), in partnership with the U.S. Institute of Peace, con-

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university – that career officials had previously rejected for not meeting the organization's criteria. Leaked emails suggest that Vice President Mike Pence pressured political appointees within USAID to overturn the prior rejections (see Torbati 2019).

ducted a two-year research project to investigate the relationship between religious freedom, political stability, and socioeconomic development.[13] The project also aimed to provide policy recommendations for how missions can incorporate religious freedom into their programming cycles (see Klocek 2020).

The broader aim behind this and other initiatives has been twofold. First, policymakers want to ground their policy decisions in an evidence-based framework that increases the efficacy of programming. They want, for example, more information on the causal relationships between development, democratization, and peacebuilding. Just as importantly, there is a growing call to better understand how these processes vary across different contexts and when they complement or counteract one another (Petersen and Marshall 2019).

Second, as new actors enter the IRF policy space, they are also asking challenging questions about what the concept refers to in the first place. Some decision makers, especially in the development space, come to the issue with an understanding of IRF advocacy as addressing political or economic persecution of religious minorities. Several scholars and activists, however, focus more on restrictions that limit adherence to or practice of one's faith (see Fox 2020:ch. 2).

3.2 Challenges

The demand for research on and a deeper understanding of IRF are, of course, not the only consequences of policy change. Obstacles also surface between researchers and decision makers. Three of these are worth noting.

The first concerns the potential unevenness of calls for more study on IRF. As of 2020, a handful of actors and organizations have led the charge in Washington, D.C. These tend to be people or organizations who are already committed, either institutionally or in principle or both, to incorporating religion into foreign policy, such as USAID's CFOI and the OIRF. Whether other agencies will follow this lead and whether the current demand will be sustained remain open questions.

A second challenge is to find ways to incorporate the initiatives and findings of current research projects into the broader foreign policy apparatus. As former OIRF director Thomas Farr (2008:17) noted more than a decade ago, a central reason for the ineffectiveness of IRF policy has been its isolation from overall national security strategy. How can contemporary studies inform a whole-of-government approach within USAID? Despite an increase in funding and support for IRF, those resources still remain quite small relative to the budgets devoted to foreign policy and development assistance. Therefore, efforts to support scholarship on IRF

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[13] In 2021, the Center for Faith and Opportunity Initiatives (CFOI) became the Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships (CFBNP).

and incorporate it more fully into the work of U.S. federal agencies face daunting obstacles.

A third, and perhaps the greatest, challenge with regard to how research on religious freedom can inform policymaking is perceptual. When research is funded by and/or primarily used by a particular administration, will other scholars and practitioners assume that it is inherently biased? Moreover, how will federal agencies view research that contradicts or calls into question their administration's approach to advancing and protecting international religious freedom? Will they ignore these analyses? Or, will they take them as opportunities for additional study of particular conditions that bolster or constrain policy goals?

These are, of course, not easy questions to answer. And their importance seems all the more pressing today as criticisms persist about successive U.S. administrations placing greater or lesser emphasis on IRF as part of their domestic political strategies. I conclude with modest recommendations for moving forward.

4. Recommendations and conclusion

During the early years of the IRFA, scholars were just beginning to catalogue religious freedom violations and persuade officials of its policy relevance (Farr and Hoover 2009; Grim and Finke 2011). Today numerous datasets exist, religious freedom remains a salient topic among decision makers, and more analysts than ever are studying the topic. How can this growing cohort of scholars continue to engage effectively with the policy world?

First, researchers should not let short-term requests, or a particular policy climate, define the questions they investigate or the findings they present. It can be tempting, especially among those with a principled commitment to the reduction of religious freedom violations around the globe, to capitalize on an uptick of interest in IRF. However, policymakers sometimes latch on too quickly to particular studies in their zeal to advocate for a cause. At other times, they apply research to policymaking simply because it fits their prior worldview. Scholars who rush to be policy-relevant without considering the politics behind research on religious freedom may find that their work contributes to misunderstanding and further polarization, or even to policies that intensify rather than reduce religious discrimination. Instead, researchers must remain guided by disciplinary norms for the collection and analysis of data, which sometimes means not being able to supply the answers policymakers want.

Second, analysts should develop, draw on, and bring attention to the most recent and accurate evidence available. Considerable new data have been collected on the regulation of and discrimination against religious groups over the past decade. Nevertheless, policymakers continue to gravitate to many of the same earlier sources.

For instance, it has seemed almost obligatory, at the start of any discussion on IRF in Washington, D.C., to reference the Pew Research Center's Global Restrictions on Religion dataset (Birdsall and Beaman 2020). This is certainly an important resource, but other datasets – such as those developed by the Religion and State and Varieties of Democracy projects – offer opportunities for analysis over longer time periods and/or with additional detail, as well as important robustness checks (see Fox 2020).

Third, researchers should not abandon nuance. Policymakers typically prefer direct, concise arguments and findings that can be applied to a broad set of cases. However, this desire for simplification can also lead to casual rather than causal inferences. The best policies are informed by scholarship that clearly acknowledges the strengths and weaknesses of its empirical work, the conditions under which its findings are most likely to apply, and what questions remain unanswered. For instance, Daniel Philpott's (2019) study of religious freedom in Islamic nations highlighted important heterogeneity in the Muslim world while also underscoring the need for locally developed policies to advance religious freedom.

Fourth, scholars must be sensitive to the motivations and processes underlying the increasing demand for more research on IRF. As we have seen, each new administration adopts its own approach to advancing religious freedom around the world and for its own reasons. The Trump administration's expansion into the development space further underscored how policy changes can fuel partisanship. As such, the continuation of new policies across changes of administration is far from certain. Scholars should, therefore, consider how best to engage with policymakers over the long-term. One way to do this is to remain committed to objective scholarship that addresses empirical puzzles and informs all participants in the debate.

Ultimately, the implementation of IRF policy in the United States and beyond has substantial real-world consequences. How policymakers and officials understand the concept and global trends in IRF will influence not only the direction of U.S. foreign policy and development assistance, but also the extent to which millions of people around the world will be free to practice their faith or choose no faith at all. Researchers in this field should, thus, maintain a consistent focus on better understanding the causes and consequences of religious persecution, rather than how to advance particular domestic policy or political interests.

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The use of documentation in refugee determination in Canada

Can we do better?

Janet Epp Buckingham[1]

Abstract

This paper examines the use of research on religious freedom to assist in adjudicating religion-based claims within the Canadian refugee determination system. The Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board compiles National Documentation Packages for countries from which refugee claimants have come. These include a section on religion. This paper assesses the types of reports included in the National Documentation Packages and identifies reports that could be included to enhance them.

Keywords   refugees, Canadian refugee system, religion-based refugee claims.

1. Introduction

The last two decades have seen a significant increase in systematic reporting of incidents and trends of religious persecution around the globe (Årsheim 2018:86). More reports are being produced, and their reliability has improved as well. But who is using these reports and for what purposes? This paper examines one very specific use of religious freedom reports in Canada, where the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) compiles National Documentation Packages on most countries with respect to their records on human rights protection. One section of each such package focuses on religion. The tribunal uses this documentation in making decisions on refugee claims. It is therefore critical that this information be current and accurate, as lives may be at stake.

The National Documentation Packages are not uniform. They are updated by staff at the IRB and are thus dependent on the staff's awareness of various sources and their reliability. The section on human rights usually includes reports from the United Nations Human Rights Council, relevant United Nations Special Rapporteurs, the U.S. State Department, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International. Under

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the religious freedom heading (section 12), U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) reports are included, as well as reports from Human Rights Watch and occasionally other human rights organizations such as Freedom House. Furthermore, the IRB itself produces reports on specific topics that are included in the Packages, and academic articles are also occasionally included.

I will first review the Canadian refugee determination system, to understand how the National Documentation Packages are compiled and used. I will then analyze the different types of reports referenced in the National Documentation Packages to assess their reliability, using China as a primary example. Finally, I will consider what types of reports could be included but are not currently referenced.

2. The Canadian refugee determination system

In Canada, the IRB's Refugee Protection Division (RPD) is the tribunal responsible for determining if claimants are refugees under the 1951 Refugee Convention (UN General Assembly 1951). A claimant may initiate a claim upon entry into Canada by speaking to a Canadian Border Services officer or an IRB officer. The claimant then completes a Basis of Claim form. The IRB has a Claimant's Guide that instructs claimants in how to make an application (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2018). It refers to the National Documentation Package, which is publicly available online, and informs claimants that these documents may be used to determine refugee status.

A single RPD member holds a hearing to determine whether a claimant meets the definition of a refugee under the 1951 Refugee Convention. These hearings typically take half a day. Claimants are entitled to have a translator and can introduce documents and witnesses. An appeal process is available, through the Refugee Appeal Division and then to the Federal Court of Canada. All levels of hearing rely heavily on James Hathaway and Michelle Foster, *The Law of Refugee Status*, 2nd edition, in interpreting the 1951 Refugee Convention. The section on religion covers a mere six pages, so it is far from comprehensive (Hathaway 2014:399-405).

The IRB regularly recruits new RPD members. Some of these hold government appointments for a limited time period, but others are civil servants. They are not required to have legal training or experience with refugees, although these qualifications are preferred. Members receive training in how to hold fair hearings, how to write decisions, and how to determine if a claimant is entitled to refugee status. The IRB has approximately 1,000 staff (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2019). The RPD is the largest of the four tribunals under the IRB. Overall, the IRB has a chronic backlog of cases due to inadequate staff resources (Vineberg 2018).

At the hearing, the RPD member reviews the Basis of Claim and any other evidence that the claimant brings forward. The member may ask the claimant ques-

tions, both to determine the facts and to assess the claimant's credibility. A case from the Refugee Appeal Division, Re X (2017), provides a good example of how National Documentation Packages can be used in this process, although this example is from an appeal. The claimant stated that he would be persecuted in Iran, his country of origin, because he had converted to Christianity from Islam. The RPD questioned his conversion to Christianity because he could not provide proof of baptism. In paragraph 77, the appeal tribunal referred to a document that explains why Christian converts in Iran are often not baptized. In paragraph 78, the appeal tribunal referred to a document stating that apostasy from Islam is punishable by death in Iran. On the basis of these two observations, the appeal tribunal overturned the RPD decision and found the claimant to be a refugee.

The 1951 Refugee Convention lists religion as one of five grounds for persecution that may qualify a person for refugee status. However, there is little guidance on what constitutes religion or "persecution on the basis of religion" in the Convention itself (Musalo 2004:170). In 2004, the UN High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) issued *Guidelines on International Protection* specifically related to religion-based refugee claims. These guidelines reference the plethora of human rights law on which those determining refugee status can draw. Nevertheless, religion-based claims remain complex. The Guidelines identify three elements that religion-based claims may rely on:

1. Religion as belief (including non-belief);
2. Religion as identity;
3. Religion as a way of life. (UNHCR 2004)

Religious persecution can come from the state or from non-state actors (Masalo 2004:168) In addition, claims can be grounded in either inter- or intra-religious conflict. It would be difficult for anyone making refugee determinations to be well versed in all types of religion-based claims. Therefore, it is very important for the people making such determinations to have accurate and current information on which to base their decisions. The National Documentation Package could literally mean life or death for claimants who may otherwise have a difficult time proving that they would face death or imprisonment for their religion if returned to their country of origin (see Badoeva 2000).

3. Reports included in the National Documentation Packages

3.1 United Nations reports

The National Documentation Packages rely on reports and documents produced by UN agencies. The UN has had a long history of engagement on both human rights and refugee issues. There is widespread agreement that the UN is impartial and that the information in its reports has been appropriately verified.

3.1.1 UN High Commissioner for Refugees

The United Nations established the Office of the UNHCR in 1950 and adopted the Refugee Convention in 1951 (UN General Assembly 1951). The UNHCR currently works in 134 countries to ensure that the Refugee Convention is observed (UNHCR n.d.), assisting both refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). Any data or reports from the UNHCR are treated as credible. National Documentation Packages include UNHCR reports on countries with a high number of refugees and/or IDPs; for example, the one for Syria contains a 2017 report from the UNHCR (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2020b).

3.1.2 UN Human Rights Council

The United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) is entrusted with addressing human rights in countries around the world. It has received criticism because countries known to be human rights abusers have frequently been elected as members: including Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, Somalia, Eritrea, China, and Bahrain. The HRC was created in 2006 by UN General Secretary Kofi Annan to replace the Human Rights Commission, which had been criticized on the same basis (Cox 2010:87). It is unfortunate that the HRC has been unable to avoid this problem.

One aspect of the HRC's work that is very useful for refugee determination is its Universal Periodic Reviews (UPRs). Every UN member state is reviewed in rotation, once every three years, on its human rights record. The HRC solicits stakeholder submissions and holds hearings in Geneva to receive reports from interested parties. Although member states can circumvent and politicize the UPR process, it is an important venue for human rights organizations to highlight concerns (Cox 2010:115-117). The IRB includes both stakeholder submissions and the final report of the UPR in its National Documentation Packages.

The HRC can appoint special rapporteurs, which are "independent human rights experts with mandates to report and advise on human rights from a thematic or country-specific perspective" (UNHCR n.d.), by resolution. The HRC has used this authority to appoint both thematic and country-specific rapporteurs. For the purposes of this paper, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) is the most important. Other issues can also intersect with religion, including cultural rights, disabilities, education, food, freedom of association, freedom of opinion and expression, health, housing, human rights defenders, women and girls, and minorities. The Special Rapporteur on FoRB often issues joint reports with other special rapporteurs to address intersectional human rights issues related to FoRB. The Special Rapporteur on FoRB's annual and thematic reports are frequently included in the National Documentation Packages.

As of the end of 2019, there were 12 country-specific UN Special Rapporteurs (UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights n.d.). Annual reports from any of these special rapporteurs would be included in the National Documentation Packages. These reports typically present documentation of violations of religious freedom if this is a problem in the particular country.

3.2 Government reports on religious freedom

Several countries and regions have established government bodies that issue regular reports on religious freedom, including the United States and United Kingdom. Since these reports are compiled by bureaucrats with input from embassies, they are presumed to have a high level of accuracy and are usually included in the National Documentation Packages.

3.2.1 United States

Every country's National Documentation Package includes, near the beginning, links to the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) World Factbook (Central Intelligence Agency n.d.). This virtual almanac includes a wide variety of information about every country in the world, including religious demographics, under the "People and Culture" tab. Legal restrictions on religious freedom are also noted.

The U.S. Congress passed the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) in 1998. The IRFA established a bipartisan Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) that operates outside the U.S. State Department (Shea 2008:29). The USCIRF produces an annual report by May 1 each year that identifies "countries of particular concern," or CPCs (United States of America n.d.).

The IRFA also established an Office of Religious Freedom within the State Department. It is headed by an Ambassador for Religious Freedom, who advises both the President and the Secretary of State. The Ambassador delivers a Report on International Religious Freedom to Congress, prepared from information gathered by U.S. embassies "based on information from government officials, religious groups, nongovernmental organizations, journalists, human rights monitors, academics, media, and others" (U.S. Department of State 2018). This report addresses the religious freedom situation in every foreign country, unlike the USCIRF report, which deals with only the most egregious violators (U.S. Department of State 2018). Thomas Farr, who served as director of the office from 1999 to 2003, argues that placing the Ambassador within the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor hampered the position's effectiveness (Farr 2012:269).

Laura Bryant Hanford, who was a key proponent of the IRFA, has described one important success of the legislation: "The Annual Reports have become the gold standard for religious freedom reporting. In addition to the solidarity conveyed to

embattled victims around the world, they serve as a springboard for negotiations with host governments and as evidence in refugee or asylum adjudications" (Hanford 2008:37).

3.2.2 United Kingdom

The British Home Office produces country-of-origin reports for use in determining asylum and humanitarian protection claims (United Kingdom Home Office n.d.a). The Home Office compiles these reports from external sources. In 2009, the UK established the Independent Advisory Group on Country Information (IAGCI) to advise the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration (ICIBI) about the content and quality of the information relied upon in the reports (United Kingdom Home Office n.d.b). The reports themselves invite feedback to the Country Policy and Information Team and to the IAGCI on the veracity of the information. These reports are well documented and include links to other reliable sources. The National Documentation Packages frequently include links to UK Home Office country-of-origin reports.

3.2.3 Other Countries

The National Documentation Packages occasionally reference reports produced by the Australian Refugee Tribunal. For example, an Australian report issued in 2013 on Protestant Christians in China was referenced in section 12, the section on religion, on the China National Documentation Package. Similarly, reports from the European Asylum Support Office and the Office français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides are sometimes referenced.

3.3 Non-governmental Organization Reports

The primary non-governmental organization reports included in both the general human rights section and section 12 come from Amnesty International, Freedom House and Human Rights Watch. In the case of China, additional resources include reports from ChinaAid and Falun Gong.

3.3.1 Amnesty International

Founded in 1961 as a grassroots movement to seek the release of political prisoners, Amnesty International now advocates for a broad array of human rights. It was founded in London, England, but now works in over 70 countries (Amnesty International n.d.). One of its major emphases has been to make human rights abuses public:

> Amnesty International shines a light on human rights by making its research findings public. We publish 1000s of reports, press releases, and public statements

and produce videos and other materials. We hold press conferences, do media interviews, and share the information in our publications, through our digital channels, and through our supporter networks. We present our research findings directly to government officials, and regional and international bodies. We engage in public awareness and education work to make sure that no human rights violations are hidden in the darkness. (Amnesty International Canada n.d.)

The organization has built a reputation for thoroughly documenting human rights abuses. It is non-partisan and not allied with any government. Amnesty International has a Canadian office that advocates on human rights issues to the Canadian government. Amnesty International reports are usually referenced in National Documentation Packages.

3.3.2 Freedom House

Freedom House, established in 1941, has a venerable history as the first U.S. organization founded to promote democracy internationally. It was formed by prominent journalists and included Eleanor Roosevelt as one of its founding honorary chairs. Its website states, "Freedom House is founded on the core conviction that freedom flourishes in democratic nations where governments are accountable to their people" (Freedom House n.d.).

In 1973, Freedom House developed a template for assessing freedom. Since then, it has issued an annual report on the state of freedom around the world; categorizing countries as free, partly free, or not free. This report has become highly respected. Freedom House also uses the template to assess the status of specific freedoms, including media and religion (Freedom House n.d.)

The National Documentation Packages often include Freedom House reports in both the General section and the Religion section. The China National Documentation Package, for example, includes Freedom House reports in the sections on Human Rights, Media, and Religion (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2020a).

3.3.3 Human Rights Watch

Human Rights Watch began in 1978 as "Helsinki Watch" with a particular focus on monitoring Soviet Bloc countries for compliance with the Helsinki Accord (Human Rights Watch n.d.). Its "naming and shaming" approach contributed to the democratic transformation of this region in the late 1980s (Thomas 2001). Throughout the 1980s, Watch Committees were formed in various regions of the world, resulting in the renaming of the organization as Human Rights Watch in 1988. Human Rights Watch gathers information about human rights abuses from citizen groups

and its own on-the-ground investigations. It has developed a strong reputation for accurate information from areas of the world where it is notoriously difficult to obtain evidence:

> Human Rights Watch has also begun using statistical research, satellite photography, and bomb-data analysis, among other new methodologies. Combining its traditional on-the-ground fact-finding with new technologies and innovative advocacy keeps Human Rights Watch on the cutting edge of promoting respect for human rights worldwide. (Human Rights Watch n.d.)

With its history and reputation for accurate information gleaned from difficult circumstances, it is not surprising to find reference to Human Rights Watch reports in the National Documentation Packages. These reports are usually found in section 2, the Human Rights section. Occasionally, they are also found in the Religion section, section 12.

3.3.4 Swiss Refugee Council

The Swiss Refugee Council formed in 1936 and has been advocating for the rights of refugees since that time (Swiss Refugee Council n.d.b). Its main focus is to ensure that Switzerland complies with the requirements of the 1951 Refugee Convention. In the process, it produces reports on countries of origin (Swiss Refugee Council n.d.). These reports are referenced in both the General and the Human Rights sections of the National Documentation Packages.

3.3.5 Other organizations

Many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) address issues specific to a particular country or minority group. For instance, Bob Fu founded the NGO ChinaAid in the United States in 2002 to highlight instances of persecution of Christians in China. The organization has since expanded to address religious freedom and the rule of law (ChinaAid n.d.) The National Documentation Package on China includes the ChinaAid 2018 report "Chinese Government Persecution of Churches and Christians in Mainland China" (ChinaAid 2018).

Falun Gong, also known as Falun Dafa, is a religious minority founded in China and persecuted by the Chinese government. The Federal Court of Canada ruled in 2001 that Falun Gong is a religion (Yang 2001). There is a significant Falun Gong population among expatriate Chinese in Canada, so it is not surprising to find several reports on their plight in the National Documentation Package. Of the thirty documents referenced in the Religion section of the China National Documentation Package, eight are from Falun Gong.

3.4 Academic publications

Although academic literature is not commonly referenced in the National Documentation Packages, the one for China, as of 2020, includes an article from the 2008 *Chinese Theological Review*, which describes a particular theological agreement completed in that year (Foundation for Theological Education in South East Asia 2008).

4. What is missing?

This review of materials referenced in National Documentation Packages raises the question of whether important documentation or reports are missing. Practitioners in the field of religious freedom would immediately identify government and NGO reports that are considered credible but are not included.

Documents from the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief (IPPFoRB) are conspicuous by their absence. This group of parliamentarians from many countries was formed in 2014 to "combat religious persecution and advance freedom of religion or belief for all" (IPPFoRB n.d.). It has commissioned reports on religious freedom in Asian countries (IPPFoRB n.d.). These reports are well documented and could be a valuable addition to the National Documentation Packages.

In 2019, the Bishop of Truro, UK, the Rt. Rev. Philip Mounstephen, was tasked by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office to undertake a review of the Office's support for persecuted Christians. He submitted his report in July 2019 (Bishop of Truro 2019a). Evidence received from persecuted Christians in the course of this review is available on a website with an interactive map (Bishop of Truro 2019b). However, this information has not been referenced in the National Documentation Packages. It could be referenced in the future, either directly or through its inclusion in country-of-origin reports produced by the Home Office.

Several credible NGO reports could be included. There is no reference to Pew-Templeton *The Future of World Religions* reports. The Pew Research Center was established in the United States in 2004 and has been conducting high-quality research on the state of religion in the world since that time.

In 1992, Open Doors started to produce an annual World Watch List of the 50 countries where it is most dangerous to be a Christian (Open Doors n.d.). This report is developed through a comprehensive survey process to get information directly from those living in the countries.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) also produces reports documenting violations of the right to FoRB (Christian Solidarity Worldwide n.d.). CSW regularly releases comprehensive reports on the state of religious freedom in particular countries. Although both Open Doors and CSW are Christian organizations, they advocate for religious freedom more generally, not limited to Christians.

It could be helpful for the National Documentation Packages to include content from NGOs; often NGOs have inside information that may not be publicly available. Moreover, the range of groups could be widened. For China, there is considerable information about Falun Gong but nothing from any organization concerned for Uighur Muslims, even though it is well known that Uighur Muslims have been persecuted in China (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2020a).

The IRB invites recommendations of documents to be included in its packages (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada n.d.), and its website includes dates when specific country packages are updated. This allows anyone to peruse the National Documentation Package for a country to determine if the content is accurate and up to date. If it is not, anyone can recommend additional or updated documents. Of course, there is no guarantee that the IRB will accept a recommendation, but it is helpful that the IRB discloses the process of submitting one.

5. Conclusions

The Canadian IRB's National Documentation Packages provide an excellent case study of how documentation on religious freedom is used. As the documents referenced provide the primary source of evidence for refugee claims, it is very important that they be accurate and up to date. My general review, with specific reference to the National Documentation Package for China, reveals heavy reliance on other government sources, especially reports from the U.S. State Department and USCIRF. There is information on Protestant Christians, particularly those persecuted in the House Church movement, but the situation in China has been changing rapidly and so this information should be brought up to date. There is no specific information about Uighur Muslims, meaning that decision makers would have to find this information in general reports on religious freedom should they receive a refugee claim from a member of this group.

The IRB website provides opportunities to recommend documents for inclusion in the National Documentation Packages. Canada has several ministries working on behalf of the persecuted church. Open Doors, for example, which produces a comprehensive annual report on religious persecution, has a Canadian office. Drawing on information from these organizations could help to improve the information in the National Documentation Packages with respect to religious persecution around the world, so that legitimate religious refugees could qualify for asylum in Canada.

Refugee claimants basing their claim on religion face many challenges. The Canadian system is severely backlogged. Those making decisions often have little background in or knowledge of religion, let alone country-specific situations of religious discrimination or persecution. Claimants frequently do not have financial resources to obtain legal assistance. Maintaining current and accurate National Documentation Packages can therefore be of great assistance to these claimants.

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Assessing public support for international religious freedom

Evidence from the 2018 Cooperative Congressional Election Survey

Luke M. Perez[1]

Abstract

The International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA) provides the US government with additional tools and information to promote the rights of religious minorities around the world. In addition to mandating annual reporting by the State Department, the law created an independent watchdog agency to monitor religious freedom around the world and provides the president with additional sanctioning powers for states that abuse religious minorities. Little is known, however, about the extent of American knowledge of and support for these policies. Most studies to date have focused on the influence of religious affiliation (using the tri-partite schema of "believing," "belonging," and "behaving") on respondent preferences for discrete US policies. This paper investigates the contours of American public opinion regarding international religious freedom, relying on original data from the 2018 Cooperative Congressional Election Survey. The data suggest that many respondents are unaware of the law, but among those who are knowledgeable of the scope of IRFA, support for international religious freedom remains strong. The data also indicate that US respondents who believe US-China competition is among the most important national security concerns are among those most likely to believe that IRFA policies strengthen US national security.

Keywords   International Religious Freedom Act, FoRB promotion, religious freedom, policy support, public opinion, Cooperative Congressional Election Survey.

1. Introduction

In 1998, the US Congress passed the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA; Public Law 105-292) by overwhelming margins and, in doing so, gave the US President broad powers to defend international religious freedom in US foreign policy. Since then, the law has been modified several times, most recently in 2016 when

a Republican-controlled Congress passed – and a Democratic President signed – provisions that added atheism as one of the protected religious classes and elevated the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom to report directly to the Secretary of State. IRFA requires the State Department to produce annual reports on the status of religious freedom in every country in the world. Moreover, it established the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, which is tasked, among other things, with evaluating and critiquing the State Department's report from the previous year. In 2018, the US State Department held the first ever Ministerial – a high-level diplomatic conference – on international religious freedom, and another one took place in the following year.

Given the long history of religion and politics in American history (Morone 2004) and the breadth of international engagement in US foreign policy (Snyder 2018), none of those developments are terribly surprising. What is surprising, however, is how little we know about public attitudes toward these policies. To date, no study has asked Americans what they think about international religious freedom, or whether they approve, disapprove, or don't care about their government's pursuit of this goal.

The US is unique in its approach to advancing religious freedom. Although nearly every developed country in the world has an office of international human rights, only the United States has offices inside its foreign affairs institutions for both international religious freedom and human rights. Maintaining two such offices increases internal costs, and Congress could easily have subordinated or collapsed the two. Their ongoing separate existence indicates a genuine interest in making international religious freedom a core objective of US foreign policy.

This paper explores the link between public knowledge and support for international religious freedom. Testing the American electorate on this issue is a first step toward understanding views of religious freedom globally, because of the magnitude of influence that the US exerts on global affairs. The original data for this project are drawn from the 2018 Cooperative Congressional Election Survey (CCES). The data show that traditional predictors of respondent attitudes such as gender, education, and partisanship influence support for international religious freedom in foreign policy. Stronger support appeared among those who tend to be more religious, and also among those who think long-term competition with China is the most important foreign policy issue in the US.

2. Literature review: international religious freedom as an objective of US foreign policy

The history of US foreign relations features a tight coupling of religion and politics. However, we do not know much about the independent influence of foreign policy decision making on religion, religious freedom, and related ideas. Although the

passage of IRFA in 1998 could imply that religious freedom foreign policy emerged relatively late in American history, policy antecedents can be found throughout the twentieth century and even as far back as the nineteenth. As Philip Hamburger (2002) demonstrates, Americans thought of religious freedom narrowly in the nineteenth century, but twentieth-century public beliefs toward religion became more inclusive, first acknowledging Catholics, then Jews, then others.[2]

One important watershed in the twentieth-century development of US foreign policy and religious freedom occurred during the American annexation of the Philippines. President William McKinley's justification for annexing the Philippines was, in part, framed in terms of a Christian duty to evangelize, but then American policymakers faced the task of ensuring religious freedom for Muslims and Catholics against indigenous violence (Preston 2012:207-32; Su 2016:11-35). Other such junctures can be found, such as Woodrow Wilson's (eventually aborted) effort to add a religious freedom clause to the League of Nations Charter (Su 2016:46-47).

The Cold War transformed the US understanding of religious freedom and elevated its role to a core objective of national security. Both Presidents Truman and Eisenhower wasted little time ensuring that the strategy of Soviet containment was matched with rhetoric designed to mobilize the American public (Herzog 2011). Both relied heavily on theological rhetoric, casting the United States as defenders of Christendom or, at least, of religious freedom against atheistic Soviet communism (Inboden 2008). The religious freedom component of Cold War strategy reached its apogee in the 1970s when Henry "Scoop" Jackson successfully advocated for his landmark bill requiring the Soviet Union to permit Jews to emigrate before it could be granted Most Favored Nation trading status with the United States (Beckerman 2010; Feingold 2007).[3] The networks of activists that formed during the closing decades of the Cold War to advance the goals of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment and the Helsinki Final Accords continued even after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Snyder 2011; Morgan and Sargent 2016; Morgan 2018).

These policies were not limited to the Cold War context either. Many of the IRFA's original drafters looked to the Jackson-Vanik Amendment as a template (Hertzke

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[2] The constitutional jurisprudence of the First Amendment is crucial to understanding American attitudes about religion. As Hamburger notes, the standard history begins with a letter by Thomas Jefferson (1802) to the Danbury Baptists, a letter that has become somewhat mythical in stature but that set the tone for American thinking on the separation between church and state. James Madison's 1785 Memorial and Remonstrance is also important. There, the "Father of the Constitution" argued, two years before the 1787 Constitutional Convention, that religious freedom protects religion as much as it protects government.

[3] Feingold observes that the Jackson-Vanik Amendment was "the first piece of human right legislation passed by Congress aimed at ameliorating the condition of an oppressed foreign minority" (p. 146). It may have been the first international human rights law passed by a domestic lawmaking body.

2004). American policymakers have continued to promote religion in the subsequent decades. Although the US policy priorities would become distracted by the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Presidents Bush (Bumiller 2002), Obama (Mandaville 2013), and Trump (Schwartz 2019) all supported religious freedom as a core objective of US foreign policy.

3. Conceptualizing mass attitudes toward international religious freedom

Given the thoroughness of religion's role in US foreign policy, the lack of a robust research literature investigating American attitudes toward these policies is all the more curious. When scholars have examined the relationship between religion and foreign policy, their emphasis has usually been on how religion influences voter preference on discrete policies (Guth 2009; Collins et al. 2011). However, US foreign policy is not made in a vacuum. Policymakers are accountable, at least in principle, to the general electorate, not to certain religious or secular groups to the exclusion of others. The absence of a link between public opinion and US foreign policy toward religious freedom would raise concerns over democratic accountability.

Scholars of US public opinion often conclude that connections between policymakers and the general public are relatively weak. Jacobs and Page (2005) argue that foreign policy outputs often track the attitudes of elites in think tanks and business more closely than those of the general public. This does not mean that no signals from the general populace reach policymakers; on the contrary, the policy preferences that do reach leaders exert some measurable influence. But the link between opinion and policy is perhaps best understood as an imprecise thermostat that sends only rough signals of hotter or colder (Wlezien 1996). During periods of intensive international competition, this mechanism can often send clear and unambiguous signals, leading to the maxim that "politics stops at the water's edge." In practice, however, even when public signals do reach those who occupy high offices, decision makers can employ lumping or splitting interpretive strategies to defend the decisions they want to make (Druckman and Jacobs 2011). Additionally, as Mo Fiorina (2017) has argued, the polarization among elites has distorted the vote choice among the electorate. As a result, the standard linkage between voters and policy may be artificially weaker than it would be under more optimal conditions.

Overall, scholars' findings in this regard seem rooted in the underdeveloped theory of voter-elite linkages over foreign policy. In his description of the domestic sources of foreign policy, Hill (1993) discusses the "belief systems debate," which began with Philip Converse's (1964) examination of the disparity between mass and elite opinion. At issue is whether the horizontal range of beliefs among the general public constrains elite agency. If it does not, then what the public thinks matters lit-

tle in policymaking. In contrast, the model developed by John Zaller (1992:40-51) serves as a useful way to conceptualize respondents' attitudes about international religious freedom policies. According to Zaller, respondents accept (or resist) arguments commensurate with their level of cognitive engagement, to the extent that the message confirms (or challenges) their prior beliefs. Voters who are more engaged will tend to have stronger opinions than those who are only tepidly engaged.

These findings imply that a similar process may shape attitudes regarding religious freedom. Because of religion's tumultuous history in world and American politics, it is not altogether clear what researchers should expect to find. Religious freedom may be perceived as a domestic barrier to social progress (e.g., for advocates of gay marriage or abortion), a human right (related to freedom of conscience or worship), or potential coalition partner for activism (e.g., on behalf of civil rights or against sex trafficking). On these domains, political ideology greatly influences perceptions (Goidel, Smentkowski, and Freeman 2016; Margolis 2018). Additionally, most of the research on foreign policy preferences focuses on discrete issues rather than on a matrix of issues simultaneously. When issues are examined as a set, elite cues can influence voter attitudes, but, consistent with Zaller, they do so only to the extent that they do not conflict with ideological polarization (Guisinger and Saunders 2017).

Since Republicans in the US tend to be more religious than Democrats, one might expect Republicans to be more supportive of international religious freedom, but this is not a certainty. Religious conservatives were instrumental in the passage of IRFA, but it is possible that many Republicans view religious freedom narrowly as important for their domestic life, but not as something that should be exported overseas.[4] Conversely, Democrats tend to favor human rights more than Republicans, as well as viewing international cooperation as a way to avert military force.

Regardless of how opinions may be shaped by ideology, additional confounding stimuli may also shape respondents' opinions, though filtered through partisanship, education, and other primary worldview commitments. For instance, Republicans more often interpret foreign affairs in security terms (hard power) rather than in humanitarian or economic terms (soft power). We might therefore expect them to characterize their support as making America safer. Those with higher education should, *ex ante*, be more informed about foreign policy and may already be aware of such policies. But how education might influence their thinking remains an open question. Finally, if respondents are knowledgeable about national security issues, they may view religious freedom in positive or negative terms, depending on the extent to which they believe those policies make the US safer.

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4   I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for help in thinking through this logical connection.

4. Data

Because no prior data exist on this topic, I designed a survey for the 2018 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES), which is conducted nationally in the US every two years, during each congressional election year. The primary aim of the CCES is to give scholars of public opinion access to voter attitudes in relation to congressional elections. Participants in the survey are asked a battery of regular questions, such as ones on their level of ideological partisanship (often referred to as "Party ID" or "PID"), socioeconomic status (SES), and level of education. In addition, election-related questions inquire how frequently they vote. Survey modules designed by researchers are then introduced to gather more discrete data. One strength of the CCES for political survey research is its direct connection to the upcoming election, linking the practical reality of US politics to the theoretical nature of survey questions. Each module is administered to a nationally representative sample of 1,000 respondents. Finally, the survey occurs twice, once in the summer of each election year and again in the fall after the November election of that year (commonly referred to as "pre" and "post"). Although some research designs are applicable to either the pre-election and post-election version of the survey and others must be contained in both versions, my data are not sensitive to this factor, since it is generally assumed that few respondents are familiar with laws and policies promoting international religious freedom.

The dependent variable under investigation was whether respondents think that US foreign policies on religious freedom make the US safer. It can be difficult or even impossible to grasp what respondents think about international religious freedom as a concept or value, because their understandings of religious freedom could vary widely. This survey instead informed participants about IRFA and related policies and then asked whether they think such laws and policies make the US safer. The survey module included two questions to determine whether respondents have high or low levels of knowledge.[5] Additional questions helped to situate their responses in foreign policy terms by asking whether participants supported economic sanctions or military interventions to protect human rights, religious freedom, and prevent ethnic genocide. Finally, the survey also asked what participants considered the most important foreign policy issue when voting.

Overall, the responses from the survey revealed broad support for international religious freedom, with 431 respondents somewhat or strongly agreeing with the proposition that international religious freedom makes America safer and only 135 saying that they somewhat or strongly disagreed. The largest group of responses, however (432),

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[5] The first question asked respondents which branch of government declared war, and the second asked which branch of government approved treaties. As discussed below, because the two questions were very strongly correlated, only the first question was used in the data analysis.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Don't know	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Observations
Male	0.42	1.38	5.5	4.67	2.46	334
Female	0.87	2.01	9.45	5.88	1.9	275
No HS	0.21	0.1	0.69	0.24	0.1	284
High School	0.45	0.66	4.47	2.53	1.35	417
Some College	0.14	0.76	3.43	2.28	1.11	581
2-year degree	0.1	0.42	1.25	1	0.31	334
4-year degree	0.17	1.11	3.22	2.73	0.87	275
Post-grad	0.21	0.35	1.9	1.77	0.62	284
Democrat	0.35	1.66	5.23	3.36	0.97	39
Republican	0.38	0.66	2.91	3.57	2.01	273
Independent	0.28	0.87	4.81	2.94	0.93	223

Table 1: Proportional Support for IRF laws and policy by Gender, Education, and Party ID

selected ''do not know.'' Table 1 shows the responses broken down by gender, education, and 3-level Party-ID scale.[6] The null hypothesis specifies no correlation between any independent variable and beliefs that IRFA policies make the United States safer. A Pearson's chi-squared test between responses for ''IRF security'' and party ID yielded the following results: $x^2=84.817$, $df=16$, $p=0.001$. For gender, the results were $x^2=17.529$, $df=4$, $p=0.001$, and for education, they were $x^2=39.209$, $df=20$, $p = 0.006$. These are sufficient to reject the null hypothesis of no correlation.

An empirical model was used to examine the relationship between the dependent and explanatory variables. Because the responses are ordered categorical variables, the model relied on ordered probit regression.[7] The main explanatory variables considered were gender, education, and 3-level party ID. Models 1-3 are presented in Table 2. The same models were rerun on a subset of those respondents who answered the first knowledge question correctly.

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[6] For simplicity and to save space, 48 "not sure" and 57 "other" responses were dropped from this summary table. 3-level Party-ID is a common metric in US survey research. It is a measure of respondent self-reporting of "Democrat," "Republican," or "Independent."

[7] Recent scholars have argued that the presence of "don't know" and "no opinion" answers on surveys about foreign policy should not be thought of as missing data or placed in an ordered position relative to other responses. See Kleinberg and Fordham (2018) for a detailed treatment of this methodological debate. I thank the anonymous reviewer who brought this issue to my attention.

	Dependent Variable: IRF laws make the US safer		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Gender (Female)	-0.244***	-0.235***	-0.233***
	-0.068	-0.069	-0.074
High School		0.276**	0.362***
		-0.122	-0.131
Some College		-0.211*	-0.217*
		-0.121	-0.129
2-year		0.258***	0.300***
		-0.096	-0.103
4-year		-0.062	-0.114
		-0.082	-0.087
Post-graduate		-0.029	-0.064
		-0.09	-0.094
Independent			0.456***
			-0.088
Republican			0.072
			-0.087
Observations	998	998	893
Note: *p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01			

Table 2: IRF Models 1–3

I ran both ordered logit and ordered probit regressions on the dependent variable, against the independent variables of gender, education, 3-level party ID. I also tested the dependent variable against two control variables that measure political sophistication in foreign policy. One control variable derived from the question on which branch of government declares war, the second from a question asking which branch of government ratifies international treaties. These questions should help sort which respondents gave answers based on their prior knowledge or understanding of foreign affairs and which are not. For the question on what branch of government declares war, 617 respondents answered correctly while 257 incorrectly chose another option; 546 correctly answered the question on treaty ratification, and 420 answered both questions correctly. A chi-squared test of the two questions found $x^2=39.209$, $df=9$, p-value <0.00, suggesting a correlation between knowledge of the correct answers.

The correlation results for the independent variables were significant in a handful of cases (see Table 2). Women are negatively correlated with support for international reli-

gious freedom. Respondents with a high-school diploma or two-year degree were more likely than those with no high school degree to be more supportive of international religious freedom. In those cases, results were statistically significant. Although the results were not significant, support for international religious freedom is negatively correlated for those with some college, a four-year degree, or a postgraduate degree. The lack of significance for these education groups could be due to a lack of sufficient numbers since there are fewer individuals with two-year degrees (89) and post-graduate degrees (140) than the other variables. Party ID is only significant, and positively correlated, for Independents (measured against those who identified as "Democrat").

5. Analysis and Discussion

When the data are examined as a whole, a complex picture of support for international religious freedom emerges. For instance, when the data are filtered to include only high knowledge respondents (see Table 3), the negative correlation of support for international religious freedom and women loses statistical significance. Similarly, high-knowledge respondents gain significance for those holding a 2-year degree. Independents are more supportive of international religious freedom policies than Democrats while maintaining statistical significance. Although Republicans are more supportive among high knowledge respondents, there is no statistical significance. Nevertheless, it would seem that political knowledge might carry more explanatory power than gender, education, or party ID.

Although it is unclear why gender loses significance among high knowledge respondents, one possibility is that gender and religiosity are not linearly correlated. Compared to men, women report both attending church more frequently ("more than once a week," "once per week," or "once or twice a month"), and less frequently ("seldom," or "never"). Additionally, because education and religiosity are negatively correlated, and, since reported church attendance declines with one's level of education, it is unclear which of the two is a stronger predictor of support for international religious freedom.

To test the possibility of whether religiosity is an important predictor of support, I turned to the general religion questions in the CCES survey (Table 4). All participants were asked how often they attended church, with six possible choices ranging from seldom to more than once per week. These answers were grouped into low, medium, and high frequency. Another question asked respondents if they considered themselves born-again Christians. The Evangelical community, since its modern emergence around the turn of the 20th century, has distinct attitudes about foreign policy relative to their co-religionists (Amstutz 2014; Curtis 2018).

The final set of analyses shows a significant correlation between those respondents who reported competition with China as an important factor for their support

	Dependent Variable: IRF laws make the US safer (high knowledge)		
	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Gender (Female)	-0.088	-0.085	-0.101
	-0.085	-0.086	-0.092
High School		0.328**	0.492***
		-0.165	-0.172
Some College		-0.458***	-0.498***
		-0.162	-0.169
2-year		0.230*	0.277**
		-0.129	-0.134
4-year		-0.071	-0.098
		-0.108	-0.114
Post-graduate		-0.006	0.014
		-0.115	-0.121
Independent			0.519***
			-0.115
Republican			0.1
			-0.108
Observations	615	615	558
Note: *p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01			

Table 3: IRF Models 4–6

for international religious freedom (see Table 5). This result seems to reinforce the view, prominent in the Cold War period, that competition with authoritarian regimes leads respondents to associate the most egregious human rights violations with national security. Chinese suppression of churches is well known, as is the forced conversion to atheism of Uighurs (Bhattacharji 2008; Matusitz 2016). The salience of this issue could therefore be driving support for international religious freedom among those who view the long-term competition with China as an important security concern. But more data are needed to confirm this possibility, since other unobserved variables may be driving these results.

The empirical conclusion that US foreign policy strategy influences support for international religious freedom would influence future work on both strategy and public opinion. On one hand, scholars may continue to find that the general public has no real influence on policy. In this case, democratic accountability on political issues

	Model 7	Model 8
Born-Again Christians	0.215***	
	-0.076	
Medium Attendance		0.421***
		-0.138
High Attendance		0.005
		-0.115
Observations	994	417
Note: *p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01		

Table 4: IRF Models 7–8

of utmost importance would remain weak. On the other hand, overall strategy may be a function of public opinion even if discrete policies are not. Writing in *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville (2012 [1835]:13) once remarked that "it is in the leadership of the foreign interests of society that democratic governments seem to me decidedly inferior to others." This comment has often been interpreted as suggesting that democratic states lack the ability to implement genuine grand strategies because electoral pressures perversely incentivize decision makers to seek short-term, personal gain rather than long-term national benefit. But the evidence here suggests, consistent with previous scholarship, that policymakers respond to large-scale signals from voters ("more," "less," "different") but then rely on policies that reconcile as many as possible of the competing stimuli they receive from the electorate.

Dependent variable: IRF laws make the US safer	
(Not all that important) **1**	−0.113 (0.444)
2	−0.051 (0.314)
3	0.054 (0.292)
4	−0.359 (0.296)
5	−0.125 (0.215)
6	0.134 (0.267)
7	−0.034 (0.253)
8	0.731*** (0.248)
9	0.491 (0.322)
(Extremely important) **10**	0.764*** (0.255)
Note: *p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01	

Table 5: IRF Support and China Competition

One note of caution. If long-term support for international religious freedom is shaped by religiosity (as measured by church attendance), then as the United States continues to secularize, we should expect support for international religious freedom to decline in the years ahead. Education too may be correlated with secularization. Although few respondents had postgraduate degrees, higher levels of education may be correlated with secularization, partisanship, or both.

6. Conclusion

This paper has examined the factors that drive support for international religious freedom. It discussed the origin and development of international religious freedom in Cold War strategy, as well as briefly surveying the literature in foreign policy public opinion to develop our understanding of the relationship between international religious freedom policies and public opinion. Measuring these potential relationships has heretofore not been possible because few data exist. By asking several questions about IRFA policies on the 2018 CCES, this paper provides the first empirical look at public attitudes on this central and core objective of US foreign policy. The evidence suggests a rough, positive correlation between party ID and support for international religious freedom, and possibly also a similar correlation for church attendance. Other potential links yield mixed results, but concern for competition with China tracks strongly with support for international religious freedom policies.

Although the general public often knows little or nothing about US policies concerning international religious freedom, when people do learn of their existence, support seems to be correlated with well-known predictors such as partisanship. More research is needed, but the evidence presented here suggests that policymakers can increase support for international religious policies if they educate the general public about their existence and, more importantly, their purposes. As strategic tools, they offer policymakers flexibility in their efforts to sustain the broad-based underpinning of the liberal international order. Moreover, these policies have been enshrined in law on multiple occasions and are thus unlikely to be curtailed or otherwise rolled back anytime soon. But it may be possible for savvy policymakers to increase support for international religious freedom by this issue to national security. In short, religious freedom will continue to be a mainstay of US national security strategy, and scholars would be prudent to investigate public support of or opposition to such policies.

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Freedom of religion or belief in urban planning of places of worship
An interreligious participatory mechanism in Manizales, Colombia

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Abstract

Freedom of religion or belief can be violated in different spheres of people's lives, such as schools, homes, hospitals or workplaces. This article considers issues in urban spaces, where planners make decisions that may affect the establishment and development of worship in the places designated for it. In Manizales, a Colombian city, an interreligious participatory mechanism was created to help identify these issues in greater detail. The article discusses how this mechanism helped to generate some proposals for the prevention of violations of freedom of religion or belief in urban planning.

Keywords   interreligious dialogue, freedom of religion or belief, urban planning, places of worship, participatory action research, contextual theology.

1. Introduction

Decisions made by urban planners can directly or indirectly violate the freedom of religion or belief of those who establish places of worship in urban spaces. Identifying and understanding the factors related to such violations is especially important in situations where religion is not an important concern for planners (Mazumdar and Mazumdar 2013). Since 2016, I have been observing places of worship in various countries, seeking to understand their relationship with the surrounding environment. From 2017 to 2019, I led the participation of religious entities in urban planning in Manizales, Colombia, which allowed me to understand that multiple related factors are involved in these situations.

In Morocco, Islamic places of worship have many privileges over others, as they are established even in airports and marketplaces and are part of the social fabric

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in a deeply rooted way. In contrast, the relatively few Christian places of worship are continually fighting for recognition of their religious freedom. In the United States or South Africa, the urban setting is very different, and one finds places of worship of various religious entities located almost naturally in the urban landscape. Places of worship appear in tourist areas such as New York's Fifth Avenue or in commercial areas of the streets of Durban. Unfortunately, due to concerns about religious extremism, rules for establishing mosques have been debated in generally free countries such as the United States (Lugo 2016) and Spain (Rodríguez 2017).

One way in which freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) could be violated is through zoning laws that prohibit places of worship in some areas. For example, in Montréal, Canada, tensions have arisen due to zoning restrictions that are incompatible with the appearance of new religious expressions in the territory. In 2011, the Superior Court of the province of Québec ordered the Church of God Mont-de-Sion to move its place of worship to another neighborhood, because it was in an area authorized for commerce and not for religious use. The Badr Islamic Center was threatened with a similar fate, but the Superior Court declared the zoning regulations inapplicable because it viewed them as violating the FoRB of the members of this religious group.

Guardia (2011) argues that places of worship should not be located far from communities, such as segregated commercial areas, but should be part of residential sectors, since proximity to religious services is one attribute of decent housing. Other factors such as public transportation should also be related to FoRB. In this regard, Ponce and Cabanilas referred to a situation in Mississippi, USA, where a Muslim group could not find adequate conditions to establish a place of worship near the urban center. The authors stated: "By making a mosque relatively inaccessible within city limits for Muslims who do not have a car, the city restricts the exercise of their religion" (Ponce and Cabanilas 2011:37).

Although this issue is a topic of increasing debate, there are few examples in the countries discussed above where the interreligious community participates in urban planning. Religious entities can help to identify ways in which FoRB may be violated. In Manizales, Colombia, an interreligious participatory mechanism was created to assist in identifying factors in planning processes, including natural risk management, road signs, urban safety, public lighting, georeferencing and zoning, that may affect FoRB. This article describes how that participatory mechanism was constructed, as well as factors identified and interventions proposed to improve the urban planning of places of worship in Manizales.

2. The state, urban planning and freedom of religion or belief

In 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which contains a guarantee of freedom of religion. Many

Figure 1. Examples of places of worship in urban spaces. From left to right: **(1)** The Heritage Mosque Masjid Maryam, Durban, South Africa, in front of a housing facility and adjacent to an office area; **(2)** the Church of God Ministry of Jesus Christ International in Montreal, on Rue Sauvé E close to the metro station, markets, shops and schools; **(3)** places of worship on corridors of Jemaa el Fna Square in Marrakesh, Morocco; **(4)** St Patrick's Cathedral on Fifth Avenue, New York, in a popular tourist area. Source: Author.

other countries have adopted the UDHR and have committed themselves to guaranteeing FoRB (as it is now widely called) to their people. Over the years, FoRB has come to be understood as a multifaceted and multidimensional right that encompasses different spheres of human life, such as the guarantee of religious practice in all types of places of worship.

Because they are physical structures located in urban spaces, these worship places are regulated by urban planning, which deals not only with places of worship, but also with educational, safety and health facilities, among others. Urban planning implies an exercise of state intervention, since it constitutes "a regulatory, bureaucratic and procedural activity" (Tewdwr-Jones 1999:123). The question arises: to what extent can or should a state guarantee FoRB through the urban planning of places of worship?

Mazumdar and Mazumdar (2013:222) affirm that religion is not greatly considered in planning, and they describe this as an "unfortunate neglect." They add that due to secularization, the role of religion is often overlooked, but that there are many reasons why it should be understood and included in urban planning. Bielefeldt, Ghanea, and Wiener (2016) reflect on the secularity of the state and argue that it has been understood in two ways: in a positive sense, related to a state's commitment to FoRB as part of religious pluralism, or negatively as an antireligious attitude.

Depending on their conception of the state, urban planning may seek to benefit all religious entities equally, or it may not seek to benefit any. The approach is related to the state's approach to religious neutrality, which theoretically can be understood either as non-intervention in religious matters or as offering support to all religious entities without taking into account the prevalence of Anyone of them and without favoring any particular religious group.

To enjoy the positive sense of secularity, various authors have recommended that the state, while not identifying itself with any particular belief group (political secularism), should also differentiate itself from "doctrinal secularism." Manouchehrifar (2018) describes secularism in planning from a positive perspective, calling on planners to separate their personal religious affiliation from the political status they hold as planners so that the accommodation of a multiplicity of religious beliefs and identities can be achieved. In addition, he believes that secularism forces planners to ensure that their interventions do not infringe upon FoRB, and he advises planners to be self-critical of government structures.

Bielefeldt, Ghanea, and Wiener (2016) also presented a general criticism of the states, arguing that none of them comply or even attempt to comply, in practice, with the norms of normative universalism. They emphasize that FoRB must protect the rights of members of both large and small communities, as well as minorities. Thus, the state must guarantee through urban planning the FoRB of religious communities, regardless of the size of their religious buildings or how long they have been there. These authors also point out that FoRB cannot have the status of a human right unless it shares a universalist character, which defines the UDHR's approach to human rights in general. To reflect the universalist character of FoRB, urban planning must grant inclusive treatment to the different religious entities that establish their places of worship in urban spaces. Bielefeldt et al. add that "respecting the self-understanding of all human beings must remain the starting point and a guiding principle for any universalistic conceptualization of Freedom of Religion or Belief" (2016:19).

The foregoing discussion implies that planners must know the religious panorama of the territory where their work is carried out. To achieve this goal, it is advisable to carry out an interreligious dialogue that listens to the different voices of local residents and groups. If we start from the postulate that respect for self-understanding is the first step toward guaranteeing FoRB, then we could deduce that any urban planning policy that does not know the self-understanding of religious entities is at risk of violating the FoRB of these religious entities. In fact, Bielefeldt et al. affirm that the state, as part of its responsibility to protect human rights, must provide an adequate infrastructure to make rights effective and must carry out various actions, including the promotion of "interreligious dialogue initiatives" (2016:34).

The exercise of listening to communities through participatory mechanisms in order to grasp their self-understanding in urban decisions is known as Participatory Urban Planning (Oliveras 2008). In the case of places of worship, interreligious dialogue is important not only for this purpose, but also to guarantee FoRB in its universalist conceptualization. Taking into account that urban planning is also "the set of social mechanisms and processes through which different behaviors

and movements affect the transformation of the city, are consciously controlled and determine its development'' (Ledrut 1985:43), I propose the following compilation of the above-mentioned principles:

> The state must implement participatory mechanisms based on interreligious dialogue within urban planning in order to guarantee FoRB from its universal perspective. In this way, a positive sense of secularity is established in the state, allowing religious entities to participate, to present their self-understanding of how they and their places of worship inhabit the territory, and to propose urban planning solutions.

I emphasize the word "mechanism" because interreligious dialogue must entail more than a simple meeting of people and must be established as a fundamental urban element within planning processes.

3. The Colombian context

Colombia belongs to the UN General Assembly and was a signatory of the UDHR in 1948. Later, it signed the American Convention on Human Rights in 1969 and included the protection of FoRB in its 1991 constitution. Afterwards, Law 133 of 1994, or the Law of Freedom of Religion or Belief, was enacted.

Subsequently, Colombia passed Law 388 of 1998, which establishes the conditions for planning a territory but does not require the participation of religious communities to make decisions about places of worship, neither are there any binding policies that ensure the inclusion of the perspective of religious communities in the planning of their places of worship.

According to Open Doors (2016), Colombia is the only country in Latin America in the top 50 of countries with some level of persecution of Christians. In 2018, the Public Policy of Freedom of Religion or Belief was decreed in Colombia, and in the same year, Manizales became the first city in the country to adopt a policy to protect its inhabitants' FoRB. Between 2017 and 2019, the Interreligious Dialogue for Urbanism (INDIUR) was created in Manizales as a mechanism to guarantee FoRB in urban planning.

4. The methodology for developing the interreligious participatory mechanism

Manizales, founded in 1849 and located in the western part of Colombia, has 430,000 inhabitants and is highly multi-confessional (Moreno 2012). It has 65 religious entities, including Buddhists, Christians, and Hindus, among others. Of these religious organizations, 45 participated in this research (69 percent); these participants have a total of 160 places of worship in Manizales.

Before selecting a methodology, the initiative first needed to identify the scope and objectives of the project. The participants decided that they wanted a mechanism, composed of different religious entities, that could influence state decisions concerning places of worship based on the self-understanding of each religious group. In other words, we wanted not just to establish an interreligious dialogue, but also a participatory mechanism in urban decision making.

Having clarified our purpose, we selected the Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology, which Park (1992:137) describes as "an intentional way of empowering people so that they can take specific actions to improve their living conditions." PAR is a qualitative method that combines study and action. As those involved carry out collective actions, participation itself becomes the research activity, since participants go from being research objects to research subjects. According to Gonzales-Laporte (2014), this methodology was promoted in Colombia in the 1970s by researchers such as Borda and Rahman (1991), who saw participatory research as a way for the social sciences to apply knowledge for the purpose of human transformation. This methodology has transcended borders and has been used with great effectiveness in North America, Latin America, and Europe.

Some features that characterize the application of PAR are continuous and participatory observation; experiential, active, and dynamic techniques; a focus on self-description; and the systematic return of the knowledge obtained to the studied group with ongoing feedback (Borda 1992; Murcia 2002). In this research, information gathering entailed six focus groups, two interviews, two surveys, one exercise of social cartography, and theological reflections. Finally, our methodology included a documentary review of theology related to interreligious dialogue, which was subsequently discussed with the INDIUR team.

5. Contributions from theology to the construction of INDIUR

How does one establish an interreligious dialogue that can serve as a mechanism for the urban planning of places of worship? This question involves not only sociology, but also theology. Debates have persisted for centuries over how a dialogue between religions can be not only initiated but sustained over time. Theology is related to the PAR methodology, as long as it is done in a contextual manner (Meza, Suárez, and Martínez 2017).

Contextual theology refers to doing theology not with dogmatic exclusivity but in relationship with social problems and situations. There exist, for example, feminist, ecological, indigenous, African American, black, Amerindian, interreligious, intercultural, and economic theologies (Vélez 2005). In this regard, Lonergan (1972:9) states:

> Talking about contextual theologies implies definitively changing the conception of theology. It cannot continue to be understood in its classical sense as a reflection

on God, but as a mediation between a certain cultural matrix and the meaning and value of a religion within that matrix.

The dialogue conducted at INDIUR is social and political in nature, seeking to investigate and intervene in urban matters. Pannikar's reflection is very appropriate here: "Interreligious dialogue does not only take place within religious institutions. The religious dimension of human beings permeates each and every political activity." (2017:224).

In a context such as INDIUR, all participants must sense that their spiritual identity is respected, since otherwise they will not return and the interreligious dialogue will not last. Torradeflot (2012) explains that the dialogue does not imply the mixing of religions or the loss of their individual religious identity. Pannikar (2017:126) says, "Apologetics has its own function and place, but not here, in the encounter between religions."

Instead of discussing beliefs, INDIUR became a place to build consensus regarding ways to ensure FoRB for all. As Knitter (2007:103) states, "Interreligious dialogue can be used for common social, environmental or even political concerns, so that different religions can cooperate with each other creating a social or political space, a more specific place in which to live."

Knitter describes four models of interreligious dialogue. He begins with the model of substitution, in which each participant seeks to prevail and persuade the other through theological argumentation. That is not what happens at INDIUR. Instead, the activity there is closer to Knitter's acceptance model, which recognizes that "the religious traditions of the world are really different and we have to recognize and accept those differences" (Knitter 2007:330).

Implementing the acceptance model allows us to create a welcoming and respectful setting for interreligious dialogue. However, that alone is not enough, since the purpose of INDIUR is also to reflect on and act in relation to FoRB in urban planning.

Therefore, the acceptance model is complemented by the Global Ethic Project of Küng (1998), who allows us to reflect on places of worship as contributors to change within an area, regardless of the religious beliefs held. There are ethical values or a "global ethos" that must be known in urban planning so that better projections can be made as to how land use will impact urban space. Küng (1998:80) explains that in all religions there is a "Golden rule" equivalent to that of Christianity: "Do to others what we want them to do to us." In this way, common points can be found in which the religious entities are in solidarity with each other in the search for respect of FoRB, without this collaboration implying the loss of the identity of each one.

Based on this commitment to an "ethical model of acceptance" and a participatory approach to urban planning, along with other theological reflections, the following guidelines were adopted for INDIUR:

1. Understand that other people's places of worship have a sacred character to them, even if it does not for you.
2. Allow other individuals to be themselves in their urban space and respect their way of inhabiting the territory.
3. Accept the religious identity of one another while firmly retaining your own identity.
4. Acknowledge the areas in common with others without entering their private space to try to convince them of your belief.
5. Achieve interreligious cooperation to identify global ethical values that are taught in places of worship and that impact each territory where they are located.
6. Serve as mediators in urban planning before government entities.
7. An impartial actor can be invited to the Dialogue who takes the reflections of religious entities and helps them turn these into public actions.

6. The identification of violations of the freedom of religion or belief in urban planning

For this exercise, religious entities were represented by their leaders. A diverse set of techniques were applied over a two-year period. First, a preliminary survey helped us identify the situations about which religious leaders were most strongly concerned. Eighty percent of respondents expressed concern about safety and inadequate lighting in the area around their places of worship. One religious organization said that the number of believers attending one of their churches had dropped from 200 to 100 in the past year because the surrounding area had become unsafe, showing a close connection between security and FoRB in urban spaces. Likewise, 60 percent indicated that the state had not provided sufficient road signage around their places of worship, causing a heightened risk of accidents, especially as people were arriving at or departing from worship. Several other concerns were expressed by between 20 and 30 percent of respondents: external noise affecting their services, the absence of parking areas, or interruptions caused by traffic authorities during worship times. Finally, between 10 and 20 percent noted concern about physical damage to their places of worship, the high cost of renting property, and exposure to natural risks such as landslides and fires.

Focus groups were convened to discuss these issues and understand the perspectives of religious leaders more deeply. For example, some minority communities expressed their dissatisfaction with the fact that in urban spaces, small places

of worship are often compared to garages, with the result that many Colombians somewhat contemptuously call these fellowships "garage churches." They emphasized that their facilities are places for religious celebrations and not garages! It was also noted that urban planners required places of worship to provide the same number of parking spaces as for shopping centers. The leaders expressed the view that these two functions are very different: whereas shopping centers receive people 14 hours a day throughout the week, many places of worship are open only two days a week for 2 hours each.

The focus group discussion also highlighted the experience of one place of worship, located on a mountainside, that had to be evacuated as a preventive measure due to the risk of landslides. The participant suggested that such risks should be mitigated in order to enable the church to continue holding worship services.

Moreover, it was found that the municipal government had identified only had 72 places of worship, whereas in reality there were more than 180. Therefore, urban planners have been making their decisions based on their knowledge of fewer than half of all existing places.

These observations showed that FoRB in a particular location is related to natural risk management, urban safety, signage, and georeferencing, among other factors.

A social mapping exercise was carried out with the religious leaders who have their places of worship in the 11 districts of the city, in which these leaders located on a map their places of worship, as well as nearby schools, transportation routes, business districts, areas of poor security, and anything else they considered important. This helped to understand the ways in which the religious entities function in their communities. Among the most important observations, the leaders confirmed that places of worship are places of social cohesion. Many relationships exist between these places of worship and their environment – they are not isolated points in the urban space, but rather they coexist with commercial establishments, houses, schools, and the places of worship of other religious organizations, among others. We found that religious leaders are interested in making their places of worship visible in their local communities and that they seek to select locations in areas of high population density. Therefore, it can be deduced that any urban planning activity that prevents the location of places of worship in these spaces, would ignore these characteristics, interests and self-understanding.

INDIUR participated in the elaboration of the city's land use plan, which is updated every 12 years, and discovered that a restriction had been adopted declaring that places of worship should be located more than 50 meters away from games of chance or gambling places. But in Manizales, there are about 300 gambling sites, distributed throughout all the neighborhoods. This means
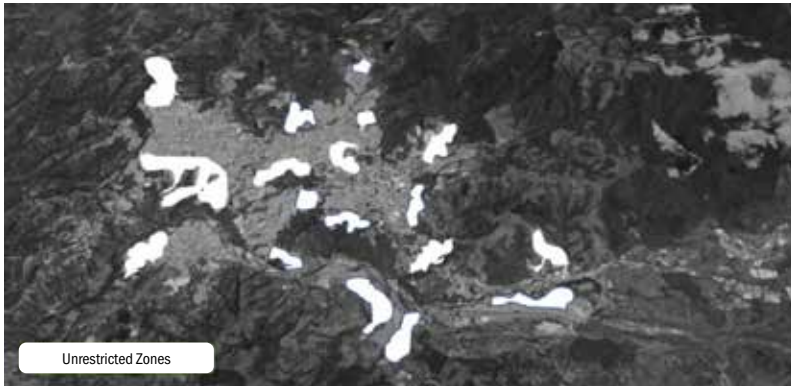
Figure 2. Unrestricted zones. Source: Prepared by the author.

that the restriction would leave very few options available for the location of new places of worship. Figure 2 shows (in white) the only areas that would have been available to locate places of worship had this restriction been approved.

Finally, interviews were conducted with the religious leaders of the INDIUR team, who were asked why they were attracted to their particular urban location. The result of this inquiry is perhaps the most important part of this research, since we learned that many religious entities locate their places of worship as a direct consequence of their religious beliefs. For example, some religious entities choose central sites in the city because they affirm that God is at the center of everything, while others are located high in the mountains because they consider that God is in the heights. Most of the religious organizations are located in urban spaces according to their characteristic doctrinal criteria. For example, the Church of God Ministry of Jesus Christ International believes it has a message from the Holy Spirit to establish a place of worship in every neighborhood. That is why it is of great interest to this religious organization to be able to locate its places of worship in any area of urban space. The Hare Krishna community and the Anglican community, for their part, seek to locate their places of worship, exclusively in vulnerable areas, because they believe that the poor are those in greatest need of God's help. Roman Catholics and Orthodox located their main places of worship in the center of the city because they think that God must be close to everyone. Therefore, from this research we observe that if urban planning makes decisions without taking these religious beliefs into account, then it can violate FoRB through these urban decisions.

Situation Places of Worship (PW)	Places of Worship by year				Entity in charge
	2017	2018	2019	2020	
PW in landslide risk areas	2	0	0	0	Risk Management Unit
PW at risk from fire	15	15	15	15	Firefighters
PW with high insecurity	21	19	17	17	Secretary Government
PW with moderate security	24	24	20	20	
PW with poor road safety	55	48	44	39	Secretary Traffic
PW far from public transport route	25	27	25	25	
PW with low public lighting	18	10	8	8	INVAMA
PW ith blows or graffiti	4	7	7	5	Secretary Government

Table 1. Situations faced by places of worship. Source: Municipality of Manizales.

7. Proposals for the prevention of violations of freedom of religion or belief

Below are the most outstanding accomplishments of INDIUR:

- The team succeeded in including Line 4 in the Public Policy on Freedom of Religion or Belief of Manizales, "Inclusion of Freedom of Religion or Belief in Urban Planning." It contains such actions as carrying out a security assessment of places of worship and developing a road safety plan to protect believers from the risk of traffic accidents (Municipality of Manizales 2018).
- INDIUR managed the construction of two retaining walls to stabilize the slope of two places of worship, which were at high risk of suffering landslides.
- A protocol was developed for giving priority attention to places of worship that are exposed to fire risk because they are made of wood, straw, bamboo, or other flammable materials.
- With the help of the Secretary of Traffic, the team posted signs at 12 places of worship that were at high risk due to frequent traffic accidents. The signs contain the national logo, but it was modified to be neutral for all religious entities.
- As for the city's land use plan, the team presented its concerns regarding the number of parking spaces required and managed to extend the condition of building a parking space for every 40 square meters of worship area to one parking space for every 50 square meters. It also secured a provision indicating that the construction of parking lots is required for places of worship greater than 200 square meters in size (Municipality of Manizales 2017).

• The team helped to create a table of indicators that allow citizens to monitor the actions carried out each year by the local government for the benefit of places of worship (see Table 1).

8. Conclusions

Many factors have been identified by religious entities as related to violations of FoRB in urban planning. They include:

• Failure to locate places of worship on the cartography of the city.
• Failure to identify places of worship in areas facing natural risks such as landslides.
• Not having a protocol of attention for places of worship in case of fire.
• Not managing urban safety around places of worship through such actions as good public lighting and the nearby location of police facilities, among others.
• Not providing proper signage and signaling on roads near places of worship so as to prevent traffic accidents, especially when worshippers are arriving or leaving.
• Not guaranteeing access roads or transport routes and platforms wide enough for people to reach the place of worship.
• Equating places of worship with shopping centers with regard to requirements for parking.

Theology enables important reflections so that interreligious dialogue does not remain at the level of transitory encounters but becomes a lasting and transforming mechanism in which the self-understanding of each person is acknowledged, the identity of all participating religious entities is respected, and cooperation between participants is promoted. In addition, theology has provided some useful parameters and guidelines that would facilitate the application of a similar mechanism in other locations to help in guaranteeing FoRB in urban planning. The discovery that theology can make an important contribution to urban planning was itself significant.

The most interesting contribution of this initiative, in my opinion, was the awareness that religious entities located in an urban space have operational criteria specific to each religion. Much research has been conducted on how theology and doctrine are reflected in the architecture of places of worship, but little is known about how theology and doctrine affect the choice of a worship location in an urban area. This is an important point to consider in urban planning so as not to violate the FoRB of any citizens.

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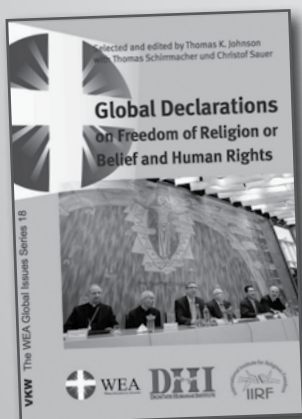
Religious challenges and risks to the Belt and Road Initiative

James C. Wallace[1]

Abstract

A serious gap exists in research into the religious dimensions of the "new Silk Road," which stretches from the east coast of China to the heart of Europe. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), announced by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013, is one of the most ambitious infrastructure projects ever conceived. Yet it is more than a commerce and communications corridor. Religious peoples, beliefs, ideas, and practices transverse the BRI, challenging China and the United States as they advance competing visions of religious freedom. This article offers an historical and policy perspective on the religious challenges facing the BRI rather than an advocacy approach.

Keywords Belt and Road Initiative, BRI, religion, religious freedom, FoRB, Xi Jinping, Xu Yihua, Asia-Pacific, Sino-U.S., Sino-American, Vatican.

1. Introduction

On 14 May 2017, Chinese President Xi Jinping officially opened the inaugural Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing. His speech anchored the event in the 2,000-year history of the "transcontinental passage connecting Asia, Europe and Africa, known today as the Silk Road." As the "ancient silk routes spanned the valleys of the Nile, the Tigris and Euphrates, the Indus and Ganges and the Yellow and Yangtze Rivers," Xi explained, "they connected the birthplaces of the Egyptian, Babylonian, Indian and Chinese civilizations as well as the lands of Buddhism, Christianity and Islam" (Xi Jinping 2017). The ancient Silk Road pulsated with commerce, communications, knowledge, arts, culture, and military forces. It was an artery through which Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Confucianism, and various folk religions flowed east and west, assimilating sacred beliefs and traditions into diverse cultures along the way.

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"Rooted in the ancient Silk Road," Xi articulated a vision for the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that was future-facing – "an innovation-driven development" incorporating "areas such as digital economy, artificial intelligence, nanotechnology and quantum computing," as well as "big data, cloud computing and smart cities" creating "a digital silk road of the 21st century" (Xi Jinping 2017). The New York-based Council on Foreign Relations labeled the BRI "one of the most ambitious infrastructure projects ever conceived" (Chatzky and McBride 2020). *The Economist* (2018) calculated that the BRI is easily the most expensive infrastructure project of all time, significantly surpassing the post-World War II Marshall Plan. It reaches from the east coast of China to the heartland of Europe, encompassing almost all of Eurasia, portions of Africa, and the Pacific Islands, as well as partner countries in the Americas.

To date, most scholarly research on the BRI has focused on the implications for trade, transportation, communications, economics, diplomatic relations, and strategic balances of power. However, a serious gap exists in the research on the religious dimensions and challenges of the Belt and Road. This article offers an historical and policy perspective – not an advocacy approach – on the religious challenges and risks facing the BRI, which may impact Sino-American relations. Its goal is to provoke deliberate discussion and debate among scholars, religious practitioners, and government policymakers on the religious ramifications of the BRI.

First, I provide an overview of the BRI – its origins, scope, and purposes. Sadly, China's BRI plans have too often encountered ignorance and ambivalence in the West, particularly in the United States (Khanna 2019). Second, I examine some of the religious demographics and cultural dynamics along the Belt and Road routes. In this section, the challenges and risks posed by religion become more evident. Third, the religious freedom policy dimensions of the BRI will be considered. Finally, I explore the strategic and security strife that religion may foment.

Questions abound. Will religions along the Belt and Road be a source of peace and harmony, or conflict and discord? Will the great powers of the United States and China use religion policy along the BRI corridors as a pretext for cooperation or confrontation? Will 21st-century believers learn from the religious history of the ancient Silk Road or, as philosopher George Santayana's prescient aphorism warns, be doomed to repeat its tragedy, pain, and death (Santayana 1905:284)?[2]

2. Overview of the BRI

The BRI was introduced by President Xi Jinping at Nazarbayev University in Astana, Kazakhstan, on 7 September 2013. Invoking the history of his home province of Shaanxi,

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[2]   Santayana's original quotation was "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

China as the starting point for the ancient Silk Road and Kazakhstan's strategic positioning astride the historic route, Xi proposed that the two "friendly neighbors" – "as close as lips and teeth" – should take the "innovative approach" of jointly building an "economic belt along the Silk Road." Xi declared, "This will be a great undertaking benefitting the people of all countries along the route" (Xi Jinping 2013).

At the time of Xi's announcement, his bold vision was more aspirational than actual. As Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Ian Johnson observes in *The Souls of China: The Return of Religion After Mao,* "Content always comes slowly to Chinese projects. China is a land of soft openings: projects are first announced to big fanfare, structures erected as declarations of intent, and only then filled with content. … If viable, the project goes ahead; if not, backing out is easier" (Johnson 2017:79). Over the next four years, Xi's vision took shape along two geopolitical lines – the overland "Silk Road Economic Belt" (the Belt) and the "21st-Century Maritime Silk Road" (the Road) – collectively referred to at first as the "One Belt, One Road" initiative (OBOR). By 2017, Xi proudly called it the "Belt and Road Initiative," boasting that it "is becoming a reality and bearing rich fruit" (Xi Jinping 2017).

In Xi's 2013 speech, he made clear that the BRI did not arise *ex nihilo.* It is a part of China's strategic long game of building alliances and expanding international influence (Ye 2020:115-143). The origins of the BRI date back to the formation of the Shanghai Five in 1996 (China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan), which morphed in 2001 into the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) with the addition of Uzbekistan. By 2017, India and Pakistan were admitted into the SCO as full members along with four "observer states" and six "dialogue partners" (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation n.d.; United Nations n.d.; Gill 2001).[3] In 2010, the SCO gained official status with the United Nations.

On a parallel policy track, China turned outward in the late 1990s with a foreign direct investment (FDI) strategy called "go out," which encouraged Chinese corporate participation in international markets and businesses. "Go out" became much more than a fiscal strategy. It grew into a central tenet of Chinese foreign policy and became a foundational rationale for the BRI (Nash 2012). China's foremost expert on religion and international affairs, Dr. Xu Yihua of Fudan University's Center for American Studies, argued in a 2015 journal article that religion should be central to China's "go out" strategy and the BRI: "During China's implementation of the BRI, religion is one of the most effective means to enhance relations and influence public opinion. … If we want to tell a good story about China to the rest of the world, we have to tell a good story about religion." Dr. Xu concluded by wrap-

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[3] The four "observer states" are Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran and Mongolia. The six "dialogue partners" are Azerbaijan, Armenia, Cambodia, Nepal, Turkey and Sri Lanka.

ping the "going out" strategy in Harvard professor Joseph Nye's metaphor of soft power: "Promoting Chinese culture to the world and forming a cultural soft power commensurate with China's international status has become an important part of China's 'going out' diplomatic strategy" (Xu Yihua 2015:1-8; Nye 2004).

According to a 2019 World Bank report, the overland Belt comprises six economic corridors linking China to Central and South Asia, Russia, Turkey, and Southeastern and Central Europe. The maritime Road links China to Southeast Asia, India, the Gulf States, East and North Africa, the Middle East, and Western Europe. As of March 2019, official Chinese sources asserted that 125 countries had signed BRI collaboration agreements, although some of the partner countries are not located along BRI corridors (World Bank 2019:xi, 3).[4] The World Bank report specifies seventy-one "Belt and Road corridor economies" that are directly impacted by the initiative and lists ninety BRI road, rail, and port investment projects that China has undertaken (World Bank 2019:135-40).

The BRI promises economic and geopolitical benefits to China and its partner countries. It provides much-needed capital investment for infrastructure projects in China and in the seventy-one partner countries, which collectively represent over two-thirds of the world's population (Chatzky and McBride 2020). It breaks the "bottleneck in Asian connectivity," according to President Xi, with its railways, highways, energy pipelines, communications networks, and streamlined border crossings (Xi Jinping 2014). It provides a network for the expanded international use of Chinese currency and new markets for Chinese goods. Yet China's ambitious initiative is not without blowback. BRI projects are funded by low-interest loans rather than grants, creating debt traps for poorer countries and financial pressures for the Chinese economy, particularly in a post-COVID-19 world (Nyabiage 2020). As well, accusations proliferate concerning corruption, opaque bidding processes, price gouging, abandoned half-finished projects, and political backlash. Some speculate that with the BRI "China may be doing more damage to itself than others" (Chatzky and McBride 2020; FP Editors 2019).

3. Religion and the BRI

The countries that span the Belt and Road are some of the most religiously consequential and diverse in the world. A Pew Research study on "Global Religious Diversity" names China as having one of the highest religious diversity scores among the 232 countries in the report. In addition, the Asia-Pacific region overall ranks as the most religiously diverse among the six global regions in the Pew Religious Diversity Index and is the only region rated "very high" on the scale (Pew Research 2014:6-7, 15).

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[4]   According to the World Bank, the BRI is an open arrangement that welcomes all countries as participants. To date, an official list of participating countries has not been released.

Moreover, a large number of BRI partner countries have (1) the most restrictive laws and policies towards religion, (2) the highest levels of government harassment of religious groups, and (3) the highest levels of social hostilities related to religious norms. The Pew Research Center's tenth annual report on "How Religious Restrictions Have Risen Around the World" provides persuasive data affirming that many of the seventy-one BRI partner countries rank high on the religious restrictions scale. Indeed, Pew's Government Restrictions Index and its Social Hostilities Index both identify the regions of the Asia-Pacific, Middle East-North Africa, and Europe as highest on their respective lists. These three regions comprise the bulk of the BRI (Pew Research 2019).

The ubiquity of religion along the routes of the Belt and Road is further magnified when one compares the data on religious traditions from Boston University's World Religion Database with the World Bank's list of seventy-one BRI partner countries (Johnson and Grim 2020; World Bank 2019:135-40). A comparison of the data illustrates the influence of the world's great religions in BRI countries. For example, of the six countries with the world's largest Buddhist populations, five are BRI countries (China, Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka). The six countries with the largest Hindu populations are all BRI countries (India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan). As the overland and maritime portions of the Belt and Road head west into Central Asia, the Gulf States, the Middle East, and North Africa, the routes cross vast Muslim lands. The BRI includes the five largest Sunni Muslim populations (Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Egypt), as well as the six largest Shi'a Muslim populations (Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, India, Yemen, and Turkey). In the Middle East, the Belt and Road includes the world's largest Jewish nation – Israel. As it moves into Africa and Europe, it penetrates the heartland of the Christian world. The BRI includes five of the six largest Orthodox Christian populations (Russia, Ukraine, Romania, Greece, and Egypt); two of the five largest Roman Catholic Christian countries (the Philippines and Italy); four of the ten largest Protestant Christian populations (China, Kenya, India, and Indonesia); and four of the ten largest Independent Christian communities (China, India, the Philippines, and Kenya). If one overlays a map of the overland and maritime routes of the BRI with a map showing the prevalence of world religions in each country, the diversity and influence of religion along the BRI is striking.

On 8 November 2014, Xi Jinping gave a speech in Beijing on the importance of connectivity between BRI nations. Xi said that the success of the Belt and Road depends on more than roads, bridges, and linear surface connections. "More importantly," he stated, it involves a "three-way combination of infrastructure, institutions and people-to-people exchanges" and a process that includes "understanding among peoples." In the speech, Xi also acknowledged the religious dimension of

the free flow of peoples east and west along the Belt and Road: "China supports inter-civilization and inter-faith dialogue [and] welcomes cultural and people-to-people exchanges among all countries" (Xi Jinping 2014).

Already, the BRI has become a highway for heightened religious interchange and activity. Indigenous Chinese Christians have promoted a "Back to Jerusalem" movement since the 1920s, aspiring to take the gospel into Islamic Central Asia, the Middle East, and back to its origins in Jerusalem. Currently the official "Back to Jerusalem" mission organization has a goal of sending over 100,000 Chinese missionaries to work in fifty-one countries along the Belt and Road. In Africa, Evangelicals are actively and zealously evangelizing Chinese workers sent by Chinese companies to work on projects across the continent, including the construction of many churches. However, conflict between Christians and Muslims along the BRI spilled over in 2017 when two Chinese Christian missionaries were killed by Islamists in Quetta, Pakistan, creating a diplomatic dilemma for the Chinese government (Luedi 2018; Dawes 2019; Masood 2017).

With the increasing flow of peoples facilitated by the BRI, how does China propose to regulate religious expression, mission work, and institutions along the BRI to harmonize partner country practices with its own policies on religion? As religious people – merchants, workers, tourists, and ordinary folk – increasingly cross China's borders via the Belt and Road, how can China constrain religious beliefs and practices so they do not overpower Chinese Communist Party precepts? The crackdowns on religious practices in Tibet and Xinjiang have precipitated widespread criticisms of the People's Republic of China (PRC) for using an iron fist to subjugate religious peoples. Such actions and reactions could multiply exponentially with the international growth and advancement of the Belt and Road. Empirically and logically, religion along the BRI poses a challenge and possible threat to China, and illusions of successfully restraining its spread are quixotic.

4. International religious freedom advocacy and the BRI

International religious freedom (IRF) advocacy gained its most vocal champion – the United States – with the adoption of the U.S. International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, later amended and expanded as the Frank Wolf International Religious Freedom Act of 2016. The act created the Office of International Religious Freedom in the U.S. Department of State, charged with promoting "religious freedom as a core U.S. foreign policy objective" (U.S. Department of State n.d.). As a result, governmental religious freedom monitoring and advocacy accelerated globally.

In 2000, the UN Commission on Human Rights appointed its first Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB). After several years of advocacy and encouragement by the United States, the International Panel of Parliamentar-

ians for FoRB was assembled in June 2014; it now constitutes a network of more than 70 parliamentarians representing over 40 countries. In January 2015, the European Parliament Intergroup on FoRB and Religious Tolerance was created. In June 2015, Canada took the lead in establishing the International Contact Group (ICG) on FoRB, composed of senior government officials from over 19 countries. ICG-FoRB meets annually, often on the margins of the UN Human Rights Council or the UN General Assembly. In 2016, the EU appointed a Special Envoy for the Promotion of Freedom of Religion or Belief Outside the EU to advocate internationally on FoRB issues. Moreover, many individual countries have established congressional and parliamentary initiatives, as well as caucuses to advance religious freedom issues within their legislative branches. These include the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, Brazil, Norway, Austria, and others.

In recent years, the most influential IRF initiative has been the U.S. State Department–initiated "Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom." This gathering of over 1,000 civil society and religious leaders, as well as more than 100 government delegations, was held in Washington, D.C. in 2018 and 2019. In November 2020, the Ministerial was held outside the U.S. for the first time – hosted by Poland.[5] Subsequently, it was announced that the 2021 Ministerial would be hosted by Brazil and the 2022 Ministerial would be hosted by the United Kingdom. U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom Sam Brownback announced at the opening of the 2019 Ministerial, "This is not an exercise in trying to achieve some sort of common theology. This is an exercise in protecting a common, unalienable human right. We seek to have all the religions and governments of the world come together around this concept … religious freedom for everyone, everywhere, and all the time" (Brownback 2019).[6]

To institutionalize and accelerate religious freedom globally, the 2019 Ministerial took initial steps to create a new international religious freedom alliance, which was named the International Religious Freedom or Belief (IRFOB) Alliance in August 2020. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo declared, "The formation of the Alliance marks the first time in history an international coalition has come together at the national leadership level to push the issue of religious freedom forward around the world" (Pompeo 2020). The Alliance was officially announced in Washington, D.C. on 5 February 2020 on the margins of the U.S. National Prayer Breakfast, with 27 founding member nations. As of 17 November 2020, membership stood at 32 with approximately six additional

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[5] The 2020 Poland Ministerial had to be held virtually because of the pandemic.

[6] At the first two Ministerials, "Statements of Concern" were offered on three countries: China, Iran, and Burma. In 2018 and 2019, the China "Statement of Concern" was signed by only four countries – the U.S., U.K., Canada, and Kosovo – with the Marshall Islands joining in 2019. China received the least numbers of signatories in both years. As of the writing of this article, the official statements and signatories from the third Ministerial have not yet been released by Poland.

"friend" or "observer" states.[7] Ambassador Brownback publicly stated that his goal was to have 100 member nations of the IRFOB Alliance by the 2020 Ministerial in Poland.

Over the last two decades, China has not been invited to participate, even as an observer, in any U.S.-sponsored international religious freedom events. In fact, since 1999 China has been designated by the U.S. Department of State as a "Country of Particular Concern" for its restrictive religious policies, regulations, and practices (U.S. Department of State 2019). The creation of the IRFOB Alliance along with the growth of BRI partnerships may further complicate the superpower relationships. Of the thirty-two member states in the IRFOB Alliance as of 2020, sixteen (50%) are also BRI partner countries.[8]

How will the Alliance advance its global religious freedom agenda in the face of China's growing influence along the BRI? Will the Alliance be able to advance strong positions critical of Chinese religious policies and actions when half of its membership is entwined with China on the BRI? Will China leverage investments, debt, or BRI projects to compel compliance or muzzle criticisms of partner countries over religious issues? Will U.S. leaders demand, as President George W. Bush did after 9/11, that you are either with us or against us (Bush 2001; cf. Joshua 5:13) in relationship to religious freedom policy? How will countries caught in the middle between the U.S. and China navigate the perilous gulf between IRFOB Alliance initiatives and Chinese religion policy? Whose principles or self-interest will prevail?

Given the current geopolitical dynamics between the U.S. and China, it is likely that the U.S.-backed IRFOB Alliance and the Chinese-backed BRI partnerships are headed for a confrontation over religious norms, policies, and practices. Unless the U.S. and China can establish new levels of trust and engage in meaningful diplomacy on religion policy – both bilaterally and multilaterally all along the Belt and Road – countries caught in the middle between the two great powers may be forced one day to "choose whom they will serve" (Joshua 24:14-15).

5. Religion, security, and the militarization of the BRI

A further challenge confronts the Belt and Road – the confluence of religion, security, and militarization. Chinese officials have consistently asserted that fighting

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[7]   IRFOB Alliance member nations include Albania, Austria, Armenia, Australia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Colombia, Congo, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, The Gambia, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Senegal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Togo, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and the United States. This list was obtained from U.S. State Department's IRF Office. The identities of the "friend" or "observer" states are not made public.

[8]   Member countries of both the IRFOB Alliance and the BRI are Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia, and the Ukraine.

terrorism and separatism has nothing to do with religion. Foreign Minister Wang Yi emphasized this point in Cairo, Egypt on 8 January 2020: "What happens in Xinjiang is an issue of fighting separatism and terrorism, rather than an issue of human rights or religion" (State Council 2020). Indeed, China's 2019 *National Defense White Paper* speaks of opposing "Taiwan independence" efforts, as well as cracking down on separatists pushing for "Tibet independence" and "East Turkistan [Xinjiang] independence," yet there is no mention of religion in this official State Council document (State Council 2019a:4-6). However, separate State Council documents on Tibet and Xinjiang do speak about how religion is connected to security in these two provinces (State Council 2019b:12, 32-34; State Council 2019c:19-25). Another White Paper, "Protecting Freedom of Religious Belief," pledges to fight resolutely "against the use of terrorist violence and instigation of separatism in the name of religion" (State Council 2018). Clearly, there is a linkage, however understated, between the PRC's national security strategy and religion policy.

Similarly, the 2017 *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (NSS) affirms its own linkage. Under the heading "Champion American Values," the NSS states that "the United States also remains committed to supporting and advancing religious freedom – America's first freedom." This freedom is to be promoted as a "Priority Action" by "protecting" religious minorities from "attacks" and the destruction of their "cultural heritage" (Trump 2017:41-42). Moreover, since 9/11, the U.S. government has taken extensive steps to mitigate religious radicalism and terrorism internally and externally. Thus, both superpowers recognize clear connections between religion and security.

The potential for ethnic, religious, or social hostilities along the Belt and Road is multiplied because the BRI traverses regions with long histories of ethno-religious conflict. Although the PRC proclaims that the BRI is strictly for commercial and civilian purposes, Western military experts are increasingly apprehensive about the militarization of the Belt and Road. As evidence, they cite multiple factors: (1) China's aggressive efforts to assert sovereignty over the whole South China Sea; (2) the establishment of the PRC's first overseas military base in Djibouti, Africa, at the mouth of the Red Sea abutting the Suez Canal; (3) China's development of a large commercial seaport at Gwadar, Pakistan, which some anticipate will become a dual-use overseas military base; (4) China's recent acquisition of a ninety-nine-year lease on the 15,000-acre Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka; (5) China's "costly commitment to developing aircraft carriers"; and (6) China's strategic positioning of its fleet in the Indian Ocean during a political crisis in the Maldives, a BRI partner country. In response to these concerns, the Chinese readily point out that the United States has long intermingled its global economic, commercial, and military interests and has established over 800 military bases around the world (Andresen 2019:122-35; Office of the Secretary of Defense 2020).

Should direct conflict ever erupt between the U.S. and China, it is likely that strategic spots along the Belt and Road will become war zones. If so, it is plausible that international or indigenous religious groups may be recruited by either or both sides as allies or proxies. This strategy is not new; it was employed by various parties in both World Wars and the Cold War. However, should either the U.S. or China attempt to exploit religion in the 21st century, both sides possess consequential vulnerabilities.

China's soldiers have no training in religion in the battlespace. The People's Liberation Army has no specialists in religion comparable to Western military chaplains and world religion specialists. This shortcoming has hampered Chinese UN peacekeeping troops in Africa as they serve in religiously volatile areas.[9]

The United States, in contrast, has tools and training to deal with the religious dimensions of the battlespace: for example, the principles of the Joint Staff publication JG 1-05, "Religious Affairs in Joint Operations";[10] Religious Area Assessment (RAA) tools; and Religious Leader Engagement (RLE) tools. However, the U.S. military faces a potential stumbling block in that religious strategy on the battlefield is at the discretion of the four-star commanders of the regional Combatant Commands (CCMD). The Belt and Road spans four of the six regional CCMDs – INDOPACOM, CENTCOM, AFRICOM, and EUCOM. Each CCMD tends to operate individually and distinctively, particularly with regard to how it strategically operationalizes its religion in the battlespace assets. In the face of war along the Belt and Road, U.S. CCMDs must act with unified action, particularly if facing a supranational, interconnected religious foe. If not, religiously infused proxy wars along the Belt and Road could become a Gordian Knot akin to the U.S. military experiences in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

6. The consequence of inaction

In fall 2018, I met with senior government officials in Washington, D.C. and in Beijing to discuss, among other things, the religious challenges and risks of the Belt and Road. My conversations led me to conclude that neither the U.S. nor China is significantly addressing the religious challenges and risks related to the BRI. Both research and data are lacking, and there is a paucity of policy options. Most significantly, there is a dearth of political foresight and will. I am reminded of the warning of my former colleague, the legendary sociologist Peter Berger: "Those who neglect religion in their analyses of contemporary affairs do so at great peril" (Berger 1999:18).

If the United States and China ignore the potential risks posed by religion along the Belt and Road, dire consequences may result. The possibilities include: (1) an unnecessary escalation in tensions and retaliatory sanctions between the world's two eco-

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[9] This conclusion is based on my multiple conversations with senior U.S. and Canadian military officers who served in Africa.

[10] In 2020, JG 1-05 was incorporated into JP 3-0 – Doctrine for Joint Operations.

nomic superpowers; (2) a struggle over whose values will prevail in the international arena – America's democratic-cum-Christian values or China's statist-cum-Confucian-Buddhist values; (3) territorial turf wars between China and the U.S. over economic and political dominance in BRI partner states; and (4) fault-line wars yielding perpetual conflict, which Samuel Huntington (1996:252-54) described as the "stuff of history," citing 32 different ethno-religious conflicts during the Cold War. Ultimately, key portions of the Belt and Road may become the battleground for future Sino-American showdowns, with religious peoples and ideologies playing a significant role.

Former Chinese paramount leader Deng Xiaoping was known for his famous axiom of cautious pragmatism: "Crossing the river by feeling the stones" (Liu 2018). Now is the time for China and the United States to feel for the stones and cross the river to engage with each other on religion policy issues. Is it possible? Perhaps a visionary religious leader, Pope Francis, is showing the way with his bold efforts to forge an accord with the Chinese government regarding the Catholic faith (Shan and Zhao 2020). The recently renewed Sino-Vatican provisional agreement ("feeling the stones") may eventually evolve into a permanent formal agreement ("crossing the river"). Will the U.S. and China emulate the example of the Holy Father regarding religion and the Belt and Road? Or will they risk a kinetic clash?

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Werner Nicolaas Nel

Grievous Religious Persecution:

A Conceptualisation of Crimes against Humanity of Religious Persecution

shall be equal before the law

Religious Freedom Series (IIRF) 5

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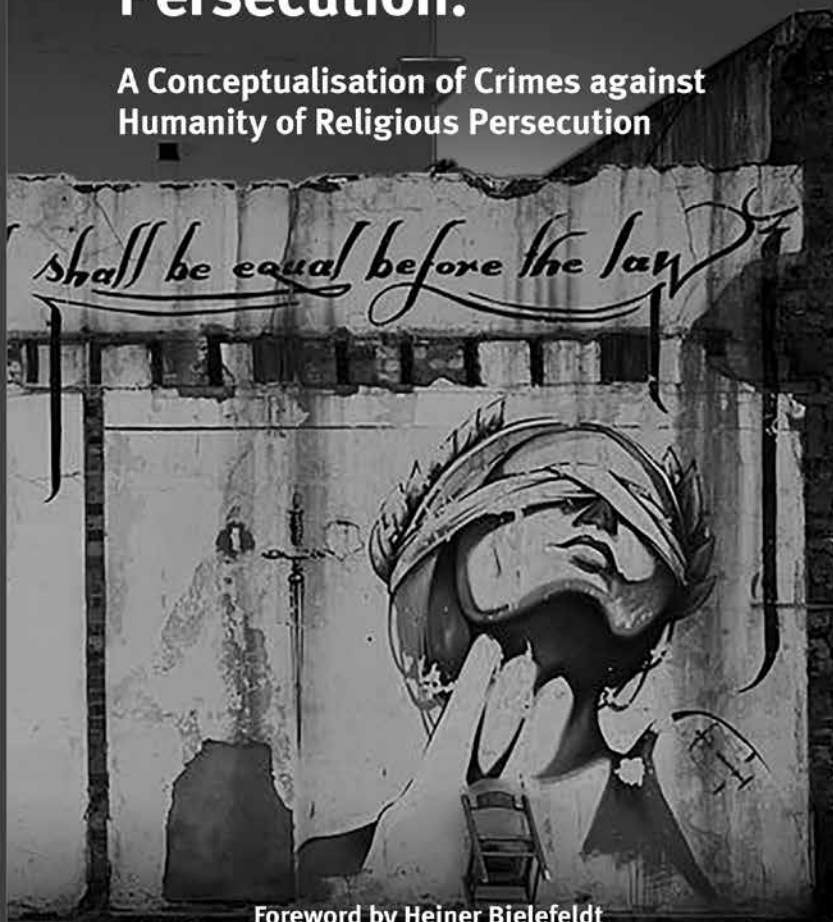
Foreword by Heiner Bielefeldt

"What's religion got to do with it?"

A case study on the regulation of religious diversity and practice in Danish Red Cross asylum centres

Kareem P. A. McDonald[1]

Abstract

This article is based on qualitative semi-structured interviews with managers of Danish Red Cross-operated asylum centres regarding religion and religious freedom at asylum centres. Three main findings are reported. First, asylum centre managers view religion as largely irrelevant while having very limited understanding of the right to freedom of religion. Second, this knowledge deficit and the general absence of any substantive guidelines on managing religious freedom issues in asylum centres has resulted in incoherent and contradictory approaches. Third, asylum centre managers' understanding of the concept of neutrality is at times overly restrictive, contradictory, and inconsistent. The article concludes with suggestions for improvement.

Keywords   asylum centres, asylum seekers, freedom of religion, religious diversity, religious practice, neutrality, Christonormativity, Denmark.

1. Introduction

On numerous occasions over the last few years, the Danish media have reported on cases in which asylum seekers have been harassed, intimidated, and in some cases physically attacked by other asylum seekers in Danish asylum centres. Religion has frequently played some kind of role in these incidents (Borg 2015; Straka and Jeppesen 2016a). In many instances, asylum centre managers have been criticised by local religious leaders over their responses to these cases and, more generally, concerning how they manage the religious diversity of asylum centres (Straka and Jeppesen 2016b). Moreover, other reports have highlighted the frustration of local religious leaders with regard to how asylum centre managers regulate religious practice in asylum centres ("Præster og imamer" 2015; "Asylcentre holder" 2016). Criticisms have focused on overly restrictive approaches to prayer rooms,

religious symbols, and visits by local religious leaders, as well as on the justification for these restrictions, especially the principle of neutrality (Birk 2015).[2]

The topic of freedom of religion at asylum centres has been extensively contested in Danish public discourse, but it is largely unregulated in international human rights law and has received scant attention in the scholarly literature on human rights, religion, and migration.[3] Moreover, the operators of Danish asylum centres have little or no framework guiding them as to how to handle matters of religious freedom.

This article does not attempt an overall analysis of human rights in Danish asylum centres, nor does it seek to explain Denmark's obligations towards asylum seekers with respect to freedom of religion or belief. Rather, it offers a glimpse into the actual conditions of asylum seekers' practice of religion at these centres, and it identifies the key challenges and issues that arise in connection with their religious practice. Numerous surveys have provided insights into these issues from the perspective of asylum seekers, but they provide only part of the picture by overlooking the views of centre managers.[4] To properly understand the situation, it is necessary to investigate the knowledge, attitudes and policies of centre managers as well – something this article seeks to achieve.

The research that forms the basis of this paper includes a series of qualitative, semi-structured interviews, conducted in 2018, with managers of asylum centres operated by the Danish Red Cross and with representatives of religious and civil society organisations in Denmark. Following the context and research methodology sections, section 4 discusses the illiteracy of asylum centre managers with respect to religious freedom. Section 5 describes their approaches to managing religious conflict in their centres. Section 6 examines how they deal with different aspects of religious practice such as the place of prayer rooms in asylum centres. Section

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[2] See also the country report by Heiner Bielefeldt (2017), then UN Special Rapporteur for freedom of religion or belief, on Denmark. He highlighted the limited opportunities for religious practice in Danish asylum centres and posited that, in some circumstances, this might amount to a violation of asylum seekers' right to freedom of religion or belief.

[3] There exist some regulations applicable to detained asylum seekers, such as the UNHCR Detention Guidelines published in 2012, but the situation of non-detained asylum seekers, who were the focus of the research that forms the basis of this article, remains an underdeveloped research area. See also notes 9 and 10 below.

[4] For example, a 2014 survey, conducted on behalf of the Danish Lutheran Church or Folkekirken, found that one-third of Christian convert asylum seekers had been harassed or intimidated in Danish asylum centres (Ejsing 2014). Furthermore, in 2016 the Danish newspaper Kristeligt Dagblad conducted a survey of Christian priests working with asylum seekers, to obtain their assessment of the situation. The priests reported that 45% of Christian asylum seekers are harassed or intimidated because of their religious beliefs (Straka and Jeppesen 2016a). The Danish Red Cross has conducted a survey of asylum seekers in their care that examined "feelings of security" amongst asylum seekers. On a scale from 1 (insecure) to 5 (most secure), Muslim asylum seekers averaged 4.1, while amongst Christian asylum seekers the score was only fractionally less at 3.9. See "User Survey Among Asylum Seekers in Denmark: Results and Assessments" (January 2016), unpublished.

7 considers the malleability of neutrality and the inconsistent way in which centre managers have applied this principle in handling matters of religious practice. The article then concludes with some reflections and recommendations as to how the situation of freedom of religion in Danish asylum centres could be improved.

2. Context

2.1 Religion and the refugee crisis

Religion has been at the centre of public and political discourse on the so-called refugee crisis across most of Europe over the last few years.[5] This is due in large part to the identification of religion as the principal characteristic by which "refugees are imagined and understood," leading to the conflation of the terms 'asylum seeker' and 'Muslim' (Wilson and Mavelli 2016, 2017). Indeed, Ulrich Schmiedel (2018:299) has written that religion has been "interpreted and instrumentalized" as a symbol to differentiate between a Europe construed as "Christian" and asylum seekers as "non-European and non-Christian." This tendency was apparent, for example, when Hungary's prime minister, Victor Orbán, and Italy's former interior minister, Matteo Salvini, claimed that Europe is experiencing an "invasion" by Muslim asylum seekers that threatens Europe's Christian roots (Goździak 2019; Monella 2019). Such rhetoric has led to calls in some countries, including Denmark, Poland, Cyprus, Slovakia, and the USA, for policies that would prioritise Christian asylum seekers over Muslims solely on the basis of religion, despite the obvious illegal discrimination that policies to this effect would represent (Eghdamian 2017a).

Beyond the supposed threats to European identity lie a myriad of other claims. Politicians across Europe have raised the spectre of terrorism, linking Muslim asylum seekers with radicalisation and terrorism (Cesari 2013; Eghdamian 2020). Meanwhile, religion has been part of discussions of the refugee crisis in Europe in other ways. The phenomenon of asylum seekers converting to Christianity (Birk 2018; Ejsing 2016), debates over the veracity of these conversions (*The Economist* 2016), and the introduction of so-called 'Bible quizzes' (Bulman 2019; Sherwood 2016) reveal religion's prominent role in the public and political discourse on the refugee situation. Although religion is commonly presented in these discourses as something undesirable and highly problematic that needs to be urgently regulated and controlled, in reality the relationship between religion and asylum is much more nuanced and complex.

2.2 Religion and religious freedom matter for asylum seekers

Although freedom of religion or belief rarely features in the "hierarchy of refugee needs", a hierarchy that typically starts with "physical safety and health, followed

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[5] See the introduction to Schmiedel and Smith (2018) for an interesting discussion of the extent to which the refugee 'crisis' can actually be understood as a crisis.

by shelter, food and … education and employment" (Eghdamian 2017b), religion and religious freedom are also of great importance to many asylum seekers, and this fact should be acknowledged and taken seriously by all those involved in receiving and caring for them. Religion matters to them because it fundamentally defines their lives and experiences. Asylum seekers are much more likely to value religion in their daily lives and have much higher levels of religious observance, such as weekly worship attendance and daily prayer, than most Europeans (Pew Research 2018).[6] Moreover, countless academic studies have demonstrated the myriad of ways in which religion represents an important resource for asylum seekers in dealing with the challenges of displacement. Religion is often a source of emotional support and an important way of dealing with loneliness and depression (McMichael 2002). Religious beliefs can serve as a source of resilience and a method of coping (Khawaja et al. 2008), while also providing asylum seekers with an alternative framework by which to make sense of their suffering (Goździak 2002). Religion can also serve as a fundamentally important and enduring part of an asylum seeker's identity in a time of great upheaval and change in their lives (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al. 2010). Moreover, the work of local churches, mosques, and religious organisations is not limited to the provision of practical assistance to asylum seekers, such as food and accommodation. Rather, they can also offer spiritual nourishment through religious guidance and counselling – forms of assistance that the state and secular organisations cannot offer. The religiosity of asylum seekers is thus not only a matter of controversy, but also an important and potentially valuable resource in the provision of care and assistance to asylum seekers.

Religious freedom matters for asylum seekers because it is essential for them to be able to draw upon everything their religious beliefs provide to them. Moreover, religious freedom is a fundamental human right to which all human beings are entitled, irrespective of immigration status, nationality or religious beliefs.[7] Everyone who values human rights should be concerned with protecting religious freedom because, as Brian J. Grim and Roger Finke (2013:203) have shown, human rights are deeply interconnected and consequently "the denial of religious freedoms is inevitably intertwined with the denial of other freedoms."

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[6]   Most asylum seekers arriving in Europe over the last few years have come from countries that, according to Pew Research (2018), have much higher levels of religious commitment than most countries in Europe. It is therefore not unreasonable to assume that many of them will highly value their religious beliefs and will want to practise them in their new setting.

[7]   In addition to the international and regional human rights provisions for freedom of religion or belief, see also Article 4 of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol, which requires that refugees receive "at least as favourable" protection of religious freedom as that afforded to the nationals of the signatory state in question.

Freedom of religion is not limited only to the right to hold religious beliefs, but also necessarily includes the right to *practise* those beliefs. This right comprises, among other things, the right to worship and assemble for religious purposes; the right to display and wear religious symbols, including religious clothing; and the right to observe religious holidays and festivals.[8] Of course, the right to practise is not unlimited, but it is absolutely necessary so that people can live in accordance with their religious beliefs.[9]

3. Research methodology

To investigate the knowledge, attitudes, and policies of asylum centre managers concerning religious diversity and religious practice, face-to-face, semi-structured, qualitative interviews were conducted in the first half of 2018 with managers of centres operated by the Danish Red Cross. These interviews were supplemented with interviews and email correspondence with representatives of civil society organisations and religious organisations working closely with asylum seekers in Denmark. All interviewees were assured of anonymity, and therefore measures have been taken to avoid the possibility of deductive disclosure, including the use of fictional names such as 'Manager A.'

At the time of research, the Danish Red Cross operated about half of the asylum centres in Denmark, with local municipalities and the Danish Prisons and Probation Service managing the other half. In total, five asylum centre managers or senior management representatives, who had responsibility for eight 'open' asylum centres were interviewed.[10] This represented about half of the total number of Danish Red Cross-operated asylum centres – although the total number of centres is constantly in flux depending on the need. The Danish Red Cross was the only operator to respond positively to requests for interviews. However, the Danish Red Cross has been managing asylum centres in Denmark for the last 25 years and, as such, is generally considered the leading expert on the topic of their operation.

The assistance of the Danish Red Cross asylum department was indispensable. The asylum department encouraged its managers to respond favourably to inter-

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[8] See Bielefeldt et al. (2016), especially Part 1, pp. 55-305.

[9] A human rights analysis of freedom of religion or belief in the context of asylum centres, with a view to defining what religious freedom means in asylum centres is urgently needed. In its absence, this article defines religious freedom in broad reference to the relevant international and regional human rights instruments, namely Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

[10] The term 'open' asylum centres usually includes reception centres (where asylum seekers live while their application is processed) and accommodation centres, and is used in order to necessarily distinguish these types of asylum centres from deportation centres in which the freedom of asylum seekers is more limited.

view requests and also provided useful documents such as the organisation's operational contracts with the Danish Ministry for Immigration and Integration, as well as internal Danish Red Cross documents such as policy guidance and investigative surveys conducted with asylum seekers. These documents were very useful in supplementing and contextualising the information acquired from the interviews.

4. Religious freedom illiteracy

All of the managers interviewed demonstrated a very limited and at best elementary knowledge of the right to freedom of religion or belief. Although they recognised that freedom of religion entails "the right to have a religion"[11] and "the freedom to choose a religion,"[12] they could not articulate a definition that went beyond these statements to encompass the right to practise one's religious beliefs.

Additionally, asylum centre managers receive very little substantive information or guidelines on how to manage religious diversity and other issues related to religious practice. The operating contract between the Danish Immigration Service and the Red Cross explains that "meals should be adapted to the cultural, religious and age composition of the residents [i.e. asylum seekers] as far as possible."[13] But beyond this single fleeting reference, religion is not mentioned anywhere else in the contract.

In light of a growing number of religion-related issues in Danish asylum centres, the Danish Red Cross has issued its own guidelines to its centre managers. They state that "in accordance with the movement's principles in all operations, including compliance with the principle of neutrality … residents should be guaranteed the right to practise their religion, as evidenced by Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights."[14] This document also explains that local religious representatives should be permitted to use the notice boards in the asylum centres to advertise religious services, and that asylum centre management teams should be knowledgeable about the opportunities for religious practice in the local community, so that they can advise asylum seekers about these options. The document undoubtedly represents a well-intentioned attempt to educate asylum centre managers about religious freedom, but it offers no specific guidance on such issues as how to handle requests for prayer rooms in asylum centres. Moreover, although all the asylum centre managers interviewed were familiar with the document, they

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[11] Interview, asylum centre manager B (22 January 2018).

[12] Interview, asylum centre manager D (19 January 2018).

[13] "Accommodation and Provision for Asylum Seekers at Asylum Centres" (Danish Ministry for Immigration and Integration, December 2018). All such quotations are translated from the original Danish.

[14] "Guidelines for the Handling of Religion in Red Cross Asylum Centres" (September 2017), internal Danish Red Cross document.

were unable to explain its practical significance for their daily work at the asylum centres. Therefore, the managers' illiteracy concerning religious freedom and the paucity of clear guidelines on freedom of religion in asylum centres have significantly negative consequences in terms of how religious diversity and religious practice are managed.

5. Managing religious diversity and conflict

Asylum seekers in Denmark are diverse in nationality, language, culture and religious belief.[15] Although the vast majority of asylum seekers arriving in Denmark over the last few years have come from Muslim-majority countries, not all asylum seekers are Muslim. Indeed, there are substantial groups of Christian asylum seekers and those who do not adhere to any particular religious tradition. People who have converted from Islam to Christianity represent a smaller proportion of asylum seekers, estimated at between 1.5% and 3.5%.[16] However, when addressing religious diversity, one must also account for the diversity within religious traditions and, by extension, amongst individual believers in terms of their beliefs and practices (Wilson and Mavelli 2016).

The mere existence of religious diversity does not mean that conflict is inevitable; however, the very particular and unique environment of an asylum centre provides an increased potential for conflict, or at least misunderstanding, on the basis of religious difference. The heightened levels of religiosity likely to be found amongst asylum seekers find expression in a context in which people are grappling with an ambiguous future and with emotional and psychological trauma, in a setting characterised by limited access to a private or personal space, and by a requirement to share bedrooms and kitchens, often with complete strangers.

Most asylum centre managers, however, saw religion as largely irrelevant in explaining conflict between asylum seekers. For example, one manager said that "religion doesn't matter" in explaining conflict[17] and another said that "we don't have a religion issue" (i.e. religious conflict) at the centres.[18] At the same time, they

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[15] Religious diversity here is understood as a descriptive term and does not imply a particular model of management. It should not, for example, be equated with religious pluralism. See, for example Spickard (2017) for a brief but useful discussion of the difference between diversity and pluralism. See also Harvard University's Pluralism Project (https://pluralism.org/from-diversity-to-pluralism).

[16] This figure is based on a simple average of asylum centre managers' estimates. In reality, it is difficult to assemble a reliable picture of the religious demography of Danish asylum centres, because there are no records of this information. Asylum centre management teams do not ask asylum seekers about their religious beliefs on arrival, nor do they have access to the records of the first interview between asylum seekers and the Danish Immigration Service, where the individual's religion is recorded. Moreover, conversions could occur without the managers being aware of them.

[17] Interview, asylum centre manager C (18 January 2018).

[18] Interview, asylum centre manager A (6 January 2018).

described conflicts between asylum seekers, such as one case in which a non-Muslim asylum seeker was verbally abused and called "dirty" and "unclean" by Muslim fellow residents because he was cooking pork in their shared kitchen.[19] In another case, an argument broke out because a Muslim asylum seeker refused to lower the volume of the Islamic call to prayer on his mobile phone.[20] Although religion obviously played some explanatory role in these cases, the managers described the cause of these conflicts as "about something practical"[21] and as the result of "issues of living together"[22] rather than as conflicts over religion.

Undoubtedly, it can be difficult to ascertain the precise causes of any given conflict; for example, there may be differences between the intentions and perceptions of the perpetrator and those of the alleged victim. Moreover, there is often a complex interplay between religious and other factors. But even if religion and religious intolerance are not always the primary explanation for a conflict, it is hard to deny that, at the very least, these conflicts often have religious undertones and that, as such, it makes no sense to remove religion completely from the explanatory equation. In doing so, asylum centre managers reveal an underlying secular bias in their conception of religion as something irrelevant and necessarily relegated entirely to the private sphere. This bias can lead them to ignore the role of religion in these conflicts.

Interestingly, in interviews with representatives of civil and religious organisations, religion-related conflict was viewed as a much more serious problem. These informants were more likely to identify religion, and more specifically religious intolerance, as the primary cause of conflict between residents of asylum centres. The under-reporting of cases of harassment and intimidation to asylum centre managers may explain why the problem is perceived differently by them. One religious organisation representative explained that asylum seekers "do not always feel comfortable sharing [incidents of harassment and intimidation] with the asylum centre management teams."[23] Fears of retribution if an incident is reported to managers and/or concerns about the consequences of a possible police investigation for the individual's asylum application could also explain the discrepancy in how the issue of religion-related conflict is perceived. However, one civil society representative stated in an email that asylum centre managers "don't pay much attention to religious minorities who don't feel secure" and "could try [harder] to work for better protection" of these minorities.[24] Unfortunately, follow-up emails failed to illumi-

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[19] Ibid.

[20] Interview, asylum centre manager C (18 January 2018).

[21] Ibid.

[22] Interview, asylum centre manager A (6 January 2018).

[23] Interview, religious/civil society representative B (12 December 2017).

[24] Email correspondence, religious/civil society representative A (November 2017).

nate any further meaning of this somewhat vague statement. But the comments of centre managers help to clarify the situation to some extent.

In terms of not paying attention to claims of harassment and intimidation, some asylum centre managers expressed strong scepticism and suspicion with regard to asylum seekers' claims of harassment and intimidation, regarding them as attempts to secure special treatment. One manager indicated that Christian asylum seekers "reported feelings of insecurity" but that "it was more of a feeling rather than anything actual" and that their situation "is blown out of proportion to sell newspapers."[25] Another manager explained that Christian asylum seekers "use [their reports of harassment and intimidation] as an argument to get more attention; they use religion as a tool for better treatment."[26]

Although all managers affirmed a zero tolerance policy towards all forms of harassment and intimidation, the effectiveness of these policies requires a willingness to accept the role religion can play in conflict situations, and this necessarily entails the suspension of cynical and dismissive attitudes towards claims of harassment and intimidation. Moreover, it also requires asylum seekers to have confidence that their reports of harassment and intimidation will be handled in a proper, fair, and non-prejudicial way.

6. Regulating religious practice

Managers' illiteracy with respect to religious freedom contributed to a situation in which the regulation of religious practice in asylum centres is often incoherent and contradictory. For example, some managers strongly opposed establishing prayer rooms in asylum centres, saying that "providing a prayer room is not our job"[27] and that "religion is a private thing,"[28] whereas others managers expressed openness to the idea. Yet even among those managers who expressed openness to prayer rooms, attitudes were sometimes incoherent. For example, one manager stated that prayer rooms should be used only for private individual worship and not communal worship,[29] whereas another manager said precisely the opposite.[30]

As for religious symbols in asylum seekers' bedrooms, most managers took a very hands-off approach, respecting bedrooms as the residents' private space. However, one manager adopted an unduly invasive approach, explaining that "you [asylum seekers] cannot decorate your rooms. If you have a prayer rug, you have to

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[25] Interview, asylum centre manager C (18 January 2018).

[26] Interview, asylum centre manager A (6 January 2018).

[27] Ibid.

[28] Interview, asylum centre manager C (18 January 2018).

[29] Interview, asylum centre manager D (19 January 2018).

[30] Interview, asylum centre manager B (22 January 2018).

take it away after praying. You cannot leave it there. You cannot convert your room into a religious room. If you have something, you have to remove it."[31] Although this manager explained that he was trying to avoid conflict between asylum seekers, this approach is overly cautious and could actually increase the potential for conflict rather than limiting it.

The absence of uniformity and consistency among asylum centre managers was also reflected in whether they permitted local religious communities to advertise on notice boards. Some managers explained that this was permitted while other managers explained that the Red Cross principle of neutrality prevented this – even though the Red Cross guidelines on managing religion in Danish asylum centres explicitly inform managers that this is permissible.[32]

Only the right of asylum seekers to follow a diet in accordance with their religious beliefs was protected across the board. In all asylum centres with a canteen, the managers explained that a vegetarian or halal meal was always served. Beyond this, however, a single and coherent approach to issues of religious practice was absent; instead, the managers' approaches represented a myriad of contrasting and contradictory positions.

7. The principle of neutrality

Asylum centre managers cited various reasons to justify their approaches towards limiting religious practice in asylum centres. Conflict prevention and logistical reasons were sometimes cited, but the requirement to be 'religiously neutral' was by far the most common justification. Managers explained that this was a Red Cross operating principle and that they had to ensure that it was upheld and respected in their centres.[33] However, neutrality, as articulated by the asylum centre managers, was understood in different ways and lacked a single, clear, and universally applicable definition.

On one hand, neutrality at times embodied a restrictive approach to religious practice akin to French *laïcité*, meaning that religion was understood as something private that should be limited to asylum seekers' bedrooms and should not be a part of the public life of the asylum centre. Some managers seemed to equate this kind of secularism with neutrality. However, this is deeply problematic because far from representing a neutral mode of regulation, it actually prioritises secular approaches

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[31] Interview, asylum centre manager C (18 January 2018).

[32] Interview, asylum centre manager E (17 May 2018).

[33] Asylum centre managers cited neutrality as one of the Red Cross' seven fundamental principles. See "Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement: Neutrality," International Red Cross (11 April 2016), https://www.icrc.org/en/document/fundamental-principles-red-cross-and-red-crescent.

over religious ones.[34] Although some managers were motivated by a commendable wish to avoid the possibility of conflict, restrictive approaches to religious practice will not always make sense to asylum seekers, whose religiosity pervades all aspects of their lives and cannot be neatly confined to their private activities.

On the other hand, neutrality did not prevent asylum centre managers from placing a Christmas tree, to which undoubtedly some degree of religious significance is attached (Warburg 2017), in public areas of their centres or organising Christmas parties for asylum seekers. Managers justified these practices as introducing asylum seekers to Danish traditions. One of them explained, "We have to prepare them for Danish society. It is our culture and it is important for them to learn about our traditions."[35] Another said this should not be considered problematic "because this is what we do in Denmark."[36] One manager did admit, however, after explaining that songs with explicitly Christian lyrics were sometimes sung at Christmas parties, that there are 'grey lines' in terms of how neutrality can be understood.[37]

In these instances, the managers prioritised not secularism but rather what has been termed Christonormativity (Langer 2019).[38] This means that although they may speak of neutrality with regard to religion, "their thinking moves along Christian norms and they imagine neutrality within Christian frames" (Langer 2019:195), leading to situations where aspects of Christian culture and tradition are privileged over non-Christian ones – even in a context where the vast majority of residents are not Christian. Moreover, such attitudes are also related to wider developments in Danish political discourse, where culturally nationalist conceptions of Danish identity have been fashioned that involve the appropriation of Christianity, and its associated symbols and traditions, as representing the foundational elements of what it means to be Danish. Such nationalist discourse is usually expressed in clear distinction and strong opposition to Islam, and Muslim immigrants and refugees, as incompatible with Danishness (Mouritsen and Oslen 2013; Haugen 2011).

The contention here is not that Christmas trees and Christmas parties in asylum centres are fundamentally problematic, but rather that asylum centre managers should be encouraged to critically re-evaluate and re-examine the partiality of their own assumptions and approaches towards the regulation of religious diversity and practice in asylum centres; whether these assumptions and approaches are rooted

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[34] See Ahdar (2013) for a discussion of how secularism, particularly of the hostile kind, cannot be understood as typifying a neutral position.

[35] Interview, asylum centre manager E (17 May 2018).

[36] Interview, asylum centre manager A (6 January 2018).

[37] Interview, asylum centre manager D (19 January 2018).

[38] Although Langer's study concerned Berlin's Neutrality Laws, his critique of these laws carries wider relevance and applicability to other contexts. As Langer writes, his goal is to show "that the West is not a religiously neutral entity" (2019:195).

in secular ideals or religious ideas; and how they could be interpreted by asylum seekers. Additionally, rather than conceiving neutrality in a fictitious zero sum framework, in which the choice is between inevitable conflict or restricting freedom of religion, asylum centre managers could be encouraged to reconceptualise neutrality in a broad, inclusive, and pluralistic way in which a variety of approaches are respected and utilised.

8. Conclusion and recommendations

These research findings represent only a relatively small case study, and one cannot infer that the situation is the same in all Danish Red Cross-operated asylum centres or in centres managed by other operators. However, it is possible to highlight a number of areas of potential improvement.

First, religion and religious freedom absolutely matter for asylum seekers, as a matter of law, and as an anthropological and sociological reality. Therefore, asylum centre managers should be better acquainted with what freedom of religion means generally and specifically within the context of asylum centres. The development of a more comprehensive set of guidelines of both a general and specific character, in conjunction with training seminars or workshops where the meaning and intention of these guidelines are expounded and elaborated, would go a long way towards addressing the religious freedom illiteracy of asylum centre managers. This, of course, would require giving the topic of freedom of religion in asylum centres greater attention than it has received thus far in the field of human rights law. Such work is of utmost importance in addressing the troubling implementation gap between the expressed meaning of religious freedom in international statutes and the reality of religious freedom in asylum centres.

Second, the incoherent and contradictory nature of asylum centre managers' attitudes and policies towards different aspects of religious practice has meant that the various aspects of religious freedom have been managed very differently across centres. Although relatively minor differences in approaches are inevitable and should be tolerated – for example, due to logistics or genuine safety concerns – the overall uniformity of approaches must be ensured so that religious freedom is equally respected and protected in all asylum centres. The guidelines and training seminars proposed above would, of course, go a long way towards achieving this.

Third and finally, a reconceptualisation of the principle of neutrality, through critical analysis of presumed meanings and assumptions, could help to precipitate the construction of a new definition of neutrality freed from secular biases. Asylum centre managers would, in other words, recognise that religion has indeed 'something to do with' their work, for better or for worse – whether in terms of its role in conflict situations in asylum centres or as a supernatural, spiritual and material

source of respite and well-being for asylum seekers. Moreover, this reconceptualised neutrality would embrace a plurality of approaches and attitudes, including the viewing of asylum seekers' religiosity as a resource rather than as something irrelevant and problematic.

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Toward the effective protection of religious freedom in Mexico

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Abstract

Although religious freedom is protected under Mexican law, its enforcement is challenging. I review the current state of religious freedom research and the legal and policy framework governing religious freedom. I identify where problems exist in the legal system or the progress of religious freedom is complicated, and whether the problems are due to a legal loophole, deficient regulation, or the absence of a public policy. I argue that the Mexican legal framework understands religious freedom too narrowly as referring only to church-state relations, overlooking the rights of religious believers, and the mechanisms necessary to make these rights effective.

Keywords   religious freedom, religious discrimination, religious persecution, Mexico.

1. Introduction

In the last 100 years, the most relevant amendments in Mexico regarding religious freedom were undoubtedly the reforms of articles 3, 5, 24, 27 and 130 of its Constitution, which were published in the *Official Gazette of the Federation* on January 28, 1992. In these reforms, religious associations were recognized as legal entities and some rules for exercising freedom of worship in the country were established.

Unfortunately, on that occasion the legislators seem to have shown no interest in consulting the academic publications existing to date, and therefore they were not taken into consideration at any stage of the legislative process (Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation 2017). As Rodrigo Guerra states, "It could be perceived that the argumentation did not rest on the understanding of the validity of the human right to religious freedom or on the need to comply with Mexico's international obligations in this matter, but on the practical need to politically improve relations with the churches" (Guerra 2005).

Almost three decades after those amendments, this paper emphasizes the benefits of building a bridge of dialogue between academia and decision makers in

the public sphere, so as to respond to the needs of practical reason[2] (Ortíz-Millán 2005) and contribute to the improvement of laws and public policies governing religious freedom in Mexico. The purpose here is not to establish special privileges in favor of religious associations, as some legislators argued during the 1992 Constitutional amendment process, but to recognize the human rights of people who want to exercise their religious freedom.

Toward this end, I first provide an overview of the current situation in Mexico, as well as the main problems that have been observed. I then examine the corresponding regulatory framework and its implications, and I close by discussing what is needed to improve the situation. My approach involves imagining the process one must follow when seeking to ensure the fulfillment of this human right, so as to detect in which areas of the legal system problems exist or the progress of religious freedom is complicated, and whether the problems are due to a legal loophole, deficient regulation, or the absence of a public policy.

In this article, I consider various federal laws that establish rights and obligations regarding religious freedom, the rules that design the structure of the public administration that currently addresses or could address violations of this human right, the rules that regulate the processes that could be used to demand compliance, and the rules establishing the regime of sanctions that could be imposed for noncompliance. I also investigate whether there is any public policy regarding religious freedom at the federal level that would facilitate its protection.

The result of this review is a preliminary diagnosis of the status of religious freedom in Mexico, which could be enriched in the future by other studies to deepen our understanding of the rights of religious believers and the relevant regulatory and public-policy framework.

2. Overview of religious freedom in Mexico

Among the main results of the 2017 National Survey on Discrimination (ENADIS 2017),[3] it is noted that the second most frequent cause of discrimination in Mexico is on the grounds of religious beliefs.[4] The portion of the population age 18 and

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[2] Ortiz-Millán, following the philosophical tradition of the Western world, explains that: "practical rationality has to do with the reasoning that leads to action or that determines what one should do, as opposed to theoretical rationality, which has to do with the discovery of what the world is like, and with the formation and justification of our beliefs."

[3] The methodology consisted of conducting a questionnaire to a national sample of 39,101 households, representing 102,245 people age 18 and older, to study the following populations or topics: indigenous people, the disabled, religious diversity, the elderly, children, adolescents and young people, and women.

[4] The leading cause of discrimination is appearance. After religion, the next six causes are sex, age, where one lives, how one speaks, social class, and sexual orientation.

above, out of the national sample surveyed, who indicated having been discriminated against in the past year on the basis of their religious beliefs was 32.3% for women and 24.8% for men. They said that they experienced this discrimination on the streets, in public transportation, at work, at school, and in the family, although the survey did not ask respondents to specify how this discrimination happened (National Institute of Statistics and Geography et al. 2018).

The main rights of which people reported having been deprived due to religion were access to medicine or medical care, support from social programs, and services from government offices (National Institute of Statistics and Geography et al. 2018).

The British religious freedom organization Christian Solidarity Worldwide, in its report on its March 2017 visit to Mexico, stated that violations of religious freedom continued in the states of Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Hidalgo,[5] and that impunity of violators was the main obstacle to any resolution of this problem. The violations that this organization denounced included (1) cutting off basic services such as water and electricity; (2) deprivation of access to education; (3) deprivation of access to medical services; (4) arbitrary detention; (5) forced conversion; (6) physical violence; and (7) damage, expropriation of property, and forced displacement (Christian Solidarity Worldwide 2017).

The Mexican Roman Catholic Multimedia Center, in its report entitled "2017: A Disastrous Year for Mexican Priests," stated that Mexico ranked first in hate crimes against Priests, religious workers, and laity in Latin America, for the ninth consecutive year (Centro Católico Multimedial 2017). In its latest annual report, the center stated that in Mexico, 27 homicides of priests and two forced disappearances of priests occurred from 2012 to 2019 (Centro Católico Multimedial 2019).[6]

In addition, 2019 was notorious for attacks on places of worship, which affected more than 26 sites per week throughout the country. Such attacks involved the theft of money from offertory boxes; the robbery of various devices or liturgical objects such as vessels, ciboria, and chalices; theft from parishioners attending liturgical services; the desecration of Eucharistic species; the theft of consecrated hosts for sacrilegious purposes; contempt or mockery of sacred places in ideological demonstrations; the closure of more than 1,000 places of worship that were damaged by the 2017 earthquakes;[7] and the theft of sacred art (Centro Católico Multimedial 2019).

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[5] These states have a high percentage of indigenous population: Chiapas 30.9%, Oaxaca 55.7%, and Hidalgo 25.9% (National Population Council 2005).

[6] For more information on the cases of violence by extortion, kidnapping, and homicide that priests in Mexico have suffered in recent years, see Sotelo (2017).

[7] Several of these places of worship are owned by the national government.

As of 2021, Mexico ranked 37th on the World Watch List of the top 50 countries where it is most difficult to follow Jesus, in the opinion of Open Doors. The following explanation was given:

> The increasing presence of criminal groups and their struggle for territorial control create an environment where Christians – and particularly Christian leaders – face the constant risk of being targeted for violence. Christians are perceived as a threat to criminal activities because they oppose corruption and drug use, or because they explicitly reject any demands or requests of criminal organizations. Christians who are outspoken about the hope of Jesus in the face of drug trafficking and violence are often targeted by gangs to remove any obstacle in their quest for control.
>
> In indigenous communities, anyone who decides to abandon the community's religious beliefs or syncretistic practices often faces rejection and punishment in the form of fines, incarceration or forced displacement.
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> Finally, there has been an increase in violent and discriminatory acts against Christians by people who believe Christians are bigoted, xenophobic or opposed to women's rights. Churches have been attacked and graffitied by protestors, and reports on the ground suggest openness to Christian ethics in the public sphere is decreasing, even though Mexico is supposed to value pluralism. (Open Doors 2021)

To more fully illustrate the serious escalation of violence and impunity at the national level, the case of the attack on Sacred Heart Church, located in the city of Fresnillo in the state of Zacatecas on 9 May 2019, could be cited. A grenade caused serious injuries to four children who were playing in the church's courtyard. Bernardo, only six years old, suffered serious injuries to his feet and lost a hand; Bryan, 11 years old, suffered perforations in his intestine (Vanguardia MX 2019). An investigation was initiated, but the party or parties responsible for the attack were not determined (Attorney General's Office of the State of Zacatecas n.d.).

Religious freedom in Mexico faces a wide range of challenges, and it would be impossible to cover them exhaustively in this paper. However, the examples cited in this paper will help us understand the context in which this human right is intended to be exercised.

3. Construction and analysis of the regulatory framework

In view of the situation described above, the first question a reader might ask is whether the laws of Mexico really recognize and protect religious freedom. To resolve this particular question, I considered the regulatory framework that determines the content and scope of religious freedom in Mexico. It is composed pri-

marily of the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States,[8] the international human rights treaties duly signed by Mexico,[9] the Law of Religious Associations and Public Worship,[10] and the regulations implementing this law. Based on the above documents, it could be said that Mexico has a regulatory framework that recognizes and protects religious freedom in general, even though it presents a significant number of restrictions and legal loopholes related to the exercise of this right.

Once the regulatory framework of religious freedom in Mexico was constructed, I review it from the perspective of its concrete application. In other words, I look at its substantive content, administrative structure, processes, and regime of sanctions, to detect where problems exist. The results obtained are described in the following sections.

3.1 Substantive content

Among the provisions that grant rights and impose obligations, several that protect religious freedom in a general manner were found in the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States and in the international treaties on human rights that Mexico has signed. However, upon reviewing the content of the related law (i.e., the Law of Religious Associations and Public Worship) and its regulations, we can see that the main priority is to regulate religious associations, ministers, and the exercise of public worship.

There are few specific articles that incorporate religious freedom in the ordinary laws and their regulations, in order to clearly establish the rights of believers and ensure their effective protection. These include Article 10 bis[11] of the General Health Law, which establishes a mechanism to guarantee the right of conscientious objection of medical and nursing personnel, and Article 38 of the Regulations of the Military Service Law, which exempts ministers from performing compulsory military service.

The lack of specific rules in the ordinary laws of Mexico (whose legal system developed under the civil law tradition) often leads concerned persons to aban-

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[8]   Articles 1 and 24 of the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States, as well as the restrictions contained in Articles 3, 27, 40, 55, 58 and 130 of the aforementioned Constitution (Constituent Congress 1917).

[9]   Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations 1948); Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (United Nations 1966); Article 3 of the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man (Organization of American States 1948) and Article 12 of the American Convention on Human Rights (Organization of American States 1969).

[10] In addition, there are laws on other matters that regulate specific aspects related to religious freedom, such as the General Education Law, the General Health Law, and the General Law of Electoral Institutions and Procedures, among others.

[11] The adjective "bis" in Latin means twice or repeated and is used when an article is inserted between existing articles and the numbering cannot be changed.

don their attempts to preserve their rights or to request the competent authorities to apply the aforementioned general provisions directly. Unfortunately, experience shows that getting the authorities' attention promptly is not always as easy as the persons concerned would like it to be. One example could be the 1,110 complaints that had to be filed with the National Human Rights Commission, between June 1991 and March 2003, to achieve the direct application of the general provisions that protect religious freedom, in the absence of a specific article in the General Education Law. Finally, after 12 years of advocacy efforts, general recommendation number 5 of the National Human Rights Commission asked educational authorities throughout the country to refrain from sanctioning students who, because of their religious beliefs, refused to honor the flag or sing the national anthem during the civic ceremonies that take place in educational centers (National Human Rights Commission 2003).

3.2 The structure of public administration

Regarding the rules that establish the design of administrative agencies at the federal level that address or could address matters related to religious freedom, the following information was ascertained.

The Ministry of the Interior has a General Directorate of Religious Affairs that is empowered to oversee relations between the Federal Executive Branch and religious associations, develop corresponding programs and actions, and attend to a series of administrative procedures.[12] However, it lacks the authority to address complaints by believers in matters of religious freedom.

The National Human Rights Commission may have up to six general rapporteurs,[13] who are in charge of various programs concerning different vulnerable groups,[14] but none of them specialize in resolving complaints filed due to violations of religious freedom.

The National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination has an Adjunct General Directorate for Complaints,[15] which reviews the claims submitted by all persons who state that they have been victims of any type of discrimination.

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[12] Article 86 of the Internal Regulations of the Ministry of the Interior (President of the United Mexican States 2019).

[13] Article 53 of the Internal Regulations of the National Human Rights Commission (Advisory Council of the National Commission on Human Rights 2003).

[14] The National Human Rights Commission's assistance programs are described at: https://www.cndh.org.mx/.

[15] Articles 11 (Section II, paragraph c) and 54 of the Organic Statute of the National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination (Governing Board of the National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination 2015).

The Attorney General's Office has a Specialized Prosecutor's Office for Human Rights,[16] among other specialized prosecutors, but none of these prosecutors have been designated specifically to resolve complaints regarding violations of religious freedom.

In summary, no specialized units were found within the federal public administration whose mission includes addressing complaints about alleged violations of religious freedom with a higher level of training and effectiveness.

3.3 Processes

Among the norms that regulate the different processes that can be pursued at the federal level to demand the effective protection of the human right to religious freedom, there are no special provisions by which to obtain expedited review. Therefore, concerned persons must use the following ordinary processes.

The first option is to present a writ of protection (*amparo*). This would have the purpose of resolving any controversy that arises from general norms, or from acts or omissions by the authorities (or by individuals when they carry out acts equivalent to those of the authorities), that violate the recognized human rights and the guarantees granted by the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States, as well as by the international treaties to which Mexico is a party.[17]

The second option would be to file a complaint before the National Human Rights Commission alleging acts or omissions by the federal administrative authorities that violate human rights.[18] In the event that the act or omission is attributable to an authority of the states that make up the Mexican Republic, then the complaint would have to be filed before the corresponding local human rights commission.

The third option would be to file a complaint before the National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination, alleging discriminatory acts, omissions, or social practices, attributed to individuals, natural or legal persons, federal public servants, or federal public authorities.[19]

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[16] Article 11, Section VII of the Law of the Attorney General's Office (Honorable Congress of the Union 2021).

[17] Article 1, Section I and Article 5, Section II, second paragraph of the Writ of Amparo Law, which regulates Articles 103 and 107 of the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States (Honorable Congress of the Union 2013).

[18] Article 6, Section II and Article 25 of the Law of the National Human Rights Commission (Honorable Congress of the Union 1992). The National Human Rights Commission was consulted to find out how many complaints it has registered regarding violations of religious freedom, since the last reform of Article 24 of the Constitution. It stated that, during the period from January 1, 2013 to February 13, 2020, it had received only nine complaints.

[19] Article 43 of the Federal Law to Prevent and Eliminate Discrimination (Honorable Congress of the Union 2003). The National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination was consulted to ascertain how many complaints of discrimination on religious grounds it has registered since the last reform

The fourth option would be to file a complaint with the Attorney General's Office of the Republic, in the case of a federal crime,[20] or with the Attorney General's Office of the corresponding state, in the case of a local crime.

An example of how an ordinary process can be used to achieve the effective protection of religious freedom in Mexico is the writ of *Amparo 854/2018*, resolved on 7 August 2019 by the Second Chamber of the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation, wherein the Legal Counsel of the National Normative Committee of Medical Specialties Councils was ordered to indicate whether it could offer an alternative date (not on a Saturday) for the interested party to take the examination of the Mexican Board of Ophthalmology and Otolaryngology or, if that was not possible, to schedule the next specialty examination on a date and time that would not contravene the religious convictions of the interested party (Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation 2019).

3.4 The regime of sanctions (punishments)

A review of the regime of sanctions is essential because, since the Enlightenment, it has been established that there must be no punishment without law.[21] This principle evolved over time and was expressed in the Latin aphorism *nullum crimen, nulla poena sine lege*,[22] which means there is no crime or penalty without law. Thus, a judge cannot deprive an accused person of liberty unless the action committed has previously been established as a crime in the laws of the country.

In this sense, the only delineation of a crime that expressly protects religious freedom in the Federal Criminal Code is genocide for religious reasons.[23] In contrast, there are many crimes that specifically call for punishment of ministers or persons who have a religious relationship with the victim, such as the corruption of

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of Article 24 of the Constitution. It indicated that from January 2013 to January 2020, it received a total of 66 complaints and claims, against individuals and legal entities), public servants and federal public authorities. Of these cases, 60 have been closed. Some Mexican states, but not all, have their own local council to prevent discrimination.

[20] Articles 221 and 222 of the National Code of Criminal Procedure (Honorable Congress of the Union 2014).

[21] In 1764, César Bonesana, Marquis of Beccaria, laid the foundations of this principle by stating that: "only laws can decree penalties for crimes; and this authority must reside solely in the legislator, who represents the whole of society united by the social contract. No magistrate (who is part of it) can justly decree at will penalties against another individual of the same society. And a penalty cannot be extended beyond the limit indicated by the laws and what it views as a just penalty; it follows, that no magistrate under pretext of zeal or public good, can increase the penalty established against a delinquent citizen" (Bonesana 1992:12).

[22] Johann Paul Anselm von Feurbach, cited in Resta (2019:25).

[23] Article 149 bis of the Federal Criminal Code (Honorable Congress of the Union 1931). The Mexican Republic is composed of 31 states plus Mexico City, and each state has its own Local Criminal Code. In this research, only the federal regulatory framework was consulted.

persons under age 18; the arrangement of sexual relations involving persons under age 18; failure to prevent a crime infringing against the free development of one's personality, human dignity, or physical or mental integrity; pederasty; and inducing the electorate to vote for or against a candidate or political party.[24]

In the administrative sphere, the Law of the National Human Rights Commission establishes that authorities can only issue recommendations suggesting the appropriate measures for the effective restitution of the rights of the affected persons and, if applicable, for the restitution of the damages caused.[25] The Federal Law to Prevent and Eliminate Discrimination contemplates various measures to prevent and eliminate discrimination, as well as to obtain reparations.[26]

4. Public policy on religious freedom

Additionally, I investigated whether Mexico currently has any public policy on religious freedom at the federal level.[27]

The authority in charge of guaranteeing the secular nature of the state, conducting relations between the state and the churches, and applying the Law of Religious Associations and Public Worship is the Ministry of the Interior.

Within the Ministry of the Interior, the General Directorate of Religious Affairs is in charge of Budgetary Program P018, called "Conduct of the Federal Government's Policy on Religious Matters."

The public services offered by the General Directorate of Religious Affairs under the aforementioned budget program consist of nine administrative procedures, described on its web page (General Directorate of Religious Affairs), and are oriented to the registration, control, and surveillance of religious associations and ministers of worship in the country.

Consequently, the aforementioned budget program has no practical significance in addressing and reducing the aforementioned violations of religious freedom, since this goal is not even among the State's priorities.

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[24] Articles 200, 201, 204, 205 bis-h, 209, 209 bis, and 404 of the Federal Criminal Code (Honorable Congress of the Union 1931).

[25] Article 44 of the National Human Rights Commission Law (Honorable Congress of the Union 1992).

[26] Articles 83 and 83 bis of the Federal Law to Prevent and Eliminate Discrimination (Honorable Congress of the Union 2003).

[27] The Organic Law of the Federal Public Administration (Honorable Congress of the Union 1976), the Internal Regulations of the Ministry of the Interior (President of the United Mexican States 2019), and the National Development Plan for 2019–2024 (President of the United Mexican States 2019) were reviewed; and three rounds of requests for access to public information were made through the National Transparency Platform on the Internet, resulting in a total of 17 queries to 15 public entities of the federation.

5. Discussion[28]

The previous discussion of the legal and policy framework governing religious freedom in Mexico raises four general questions.

The first question is directly related to the overall theme of this issue: in what ways has research on religious freedom informed this framework? The perhaps unfortunate answer to this question seems to be that it has not, as the following two examples illustrate.

The softening of Mexico's most anticlerical constitutional provisions in 1992 seems to have been mainly motivated by political concerns. Some authors, such as Rodrigo Guerra state that the main reason was the practical need to politically improve the relationship with the churches (Guerra 2005). Others, such as Michael Tangeman and political scientist Anthony Gill posit it was the outcome of a quid pro quo agreement between President Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) and church leaders in which the latter tacitly agreed not to publicly criticize the fraudulent election of the former, in exchange for a broadening of religious rights (Tangeman 1995; Gill 1998, 2018). Whatever the case, it appears that research on religious freedom has not played a role in the congressional debates leading to the 1992 constitutional amendment.

Similarly, the considerable documentation efforts by a coalition of national and international advocacy organizations during the last decade have raised awareness regarding violence against Catholic priests but had little to no effect on public policy (De Bruin 2021).

The second question logically follows: why does religious freedom research have so little impact on the legal and policy framework? Two possible explanations can be given. First, although some research on religious freedom in Mexico does exist, it is not yet sufficiently comprehensive and leaves many gaps. Indeed, most research on religious freedom in Mexico is conducted by faith-based advocacy organizations such as Open Doors International, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, the Catholic Multimedia Center, Conciencia Nacional por la Libertad Religiosa and Artículo 18.[29]

Academic work on religious freedom in Mexico, however, is relatively limited, with Gill (1998, 2008), Guerra (2005), Gómez et al. (2018), Petri (2020) and, at an organizational level, the Centro de Investigación Social Avanzada (CISAV) and the Observatory of Religious Freedom in Latin America (OLIRE) being the most noteworthy exceptions. Academic networks focusing on religious studies, such as the Red de Investigadores del Fenómeno Religioso en México, RIFREM (Network

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[28] I am grateful for the assistance of Dennis P. Petri in developing this section.

[29] Marcelo Bartolini is the founder and director of this organization.

of Researchers of the Religious Phenomenon in Mexico), or the Annual Congress on Ethnography of Religion, rarely take an interest in religious freedom. The only field related to religious freedom that has received substantial academic attention is secularism and the relationship between church and state (González 2003; Blancarte 2004; Adame 2010; Traslosheros 2012; De la Torre and Martín 2016; De la Torre Hernández, and Gutiérrez 2017; Ramírez and Porras 2018; Capdevielle, Chorny, and Maisley 2019).

The second reason for the lack of impact of research on religious freedom seems to be that the regulation of religion is more often the outcome of a political *rapport de forces*, as Gill argues in *The Political Origins of Religious Liberty* (Gill 2008) and Johnson and Koyama in *Persecution and Toleration* (2019), rather than the result of a careful review of academic reflections on religious freedom. In other words, the core assumption of interpreters in the field of religious economy – namely, that politicians will expand religious freedom only if this serves their interests, regardless of what scholars may publish – seems to apply to Mexico.

A third question arises from the overview presented in section 3 above: why have the provisions for religious freedom in Mexico, in particular since the 1992 amendment, not led to structural improvements of the overall religious freedom situation in the country, nor (as noted in section 4) to the implementation of any significant religious freedom policy? The immediate answer to this question seems to be that the Mexican legal framework understands the right to religious freedom narrowly as referring almost exclusively to church-state relations (in particular freedom of worship), thereby ignoring many other dimensions of the right to religious freedom, such as freedom of education, matters related to conscientious objection, the interface of religious freedom and organized crime, or the tensions between indigenous self-government rights and the enforcement of religious freedom (Petri 2020).

Additional, albeit speculative, possible answers to this question would deserve further research: the generalized impunity and weak state capacity in parts of the Mexican territory to enforce the rule of law (Schedler 2015), which, by extension also implies enforcement challenges of religious freedom provisions; the structural failure of the Mexican state to comply with its duty to register human rights violations (including religious freedom violations), as has been denounced by a 2015 report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, leading not only to their invisibility but to the absence of proper policy responses; and the general lack of religious literacy in public administration, which may also be related to the antireligious sentiment inherited from the country's anticlerical history (Petri 2021).

Finally, what priorities are there for research to contribute to improving the religious freedom legal and policy framework of Mexico? The discussion of the legal and policy framework governing religious freedom in the previous two sections fills an im-

portant knowledge gap, as this topic has never been analyzed in a systematic manner. However, more research is needed. In this section, I have already mentioned several research priorities, which are complemented in the concluding section of this article.

6. Conclusions

Based on the current situation concerning religious freedom in Mexico, it would be desirable for the country to attend with greater diligence to the social problems described above, so that Mexico does not become responsible for noncompliance with its duty to respect, guarantee, and adopt the necessary measures to make the right of religious freedom effectively available throughout the country, as foreseen in articles 1.1, 2, and 12 of the American Convention on Human Rights, also known as the Pact of San Jose (Organization of American States 1969). The most urgently needed step is to incorporate the rights of the aforementioned believers in the ordinary laws and their regulations, as well as the corresponding sanctions or aggravating factors of the corresponding offenses in the case of noncompliance. This should be done in such a way that the regulatory framework of religious freedom complies with the principle of the universality of human rights (Ramírez-García 2021) by protecting all persons in Mexico and is not limited only to regulating the relationship between the state and the churches.

With these legislative and regulatory changes, religious freedom would become more broadly treated as a legally protected right in itself and not only as a mere circumstance of time, manner, or place, thereby allowing it to be established more firmly in judicial proceedings.

Finally, it would also be desirable to have a public policy on religious freedom at the federal level, which would permit the hiring of specialized personnel to disseminate information in support of this human right, as well as the training of public servants within the various agencies empowered to deal with violations of this human right at the national level. These steps could help to prevent and mitigate the identified social problems related to violations of religious freedom.

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Heiner Bielefeldt

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Does persecution *always* bring growth?
Global persecutions suggest otherwise!

Ronald R. Boyd-MacMillan[1]

Abstract

While Christians have long had a theology of church growth resulting from persecution, this article develops a modest "theology of extinction" to go alongside. Five global persecutions are identified – Roman, Islamic, Mongol, Christian and Atheistic – where the persecution lasted for more than one generation, covers the known world, and leaves a permanent change. The first of these, Emperor Decius's strategy to create apostates rather than martyrs, is examined with a call to preserve a greater awareness of how persecution can really damage the church.

Keywords   persecution, Roman, revival, killing, global, Decius, penance, disunity, apostate, martyr.

1. Introduction

In teaching courses on the topic of what has become known as "persecution preparedness" since the late 1990s, I have become concerned that some influential leaders in the persecuted church were too quick to equate persecution with growth. There may be a link in some instances, but some people were happily elevating it to the status of a cause-and-effect connection. This error might not be so serious were it merely theoretical in nature, but it was having a negative pastoral impact. Where church leaders assumed that a rise in persecution would bring revival, they became depressed if it did not ensue, or they worried that they were actually being scourged by God. Their disappointment was taking away their joy and their resilience.

I first encountered this viewpoint when I lived in Hong Kong in the 1980s and 1990s. I would regularly visit a house church leader across the border in Guangzhou named Samuel Lamb. He had a three-story house devoid of domestic furniture and chock full of old wooden pews. He could cram nearly 1,200 people, mostly young adults, into his services. Lamb, uniquely among house church leaders, courted publicity as a protective strategy. He made sure to have Billy Graham speak there

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during his much heralded visit to China in 1988, even though his congregation had no legal status.[2]

To every visitor, Samuel Lamb would unfailingly trot out his consistent mantra: "Persecution promotes growth." Then he would tell us that he was praying for his Western visitors that they would "have more persecution in order to have more growth." Many pastors who visited him returned hanging their heads. One said to me, "How do we generate more persecution in the United States so our churches stop emptying out?" and added, more poignantly, "God must have given up on us."

Lamb was dead right about the Chinese church in the last 50 years. In 1949, the Chinese church numbered maybe a couple of million people; now the number is estimated by Professor Fenggang Yang, of the Center on Religion and Chinese Society at Purdue University, at between 96 and 115 million. The bulk of that growth occurred in the 1980s, following the terrible persecution by the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976. Persecution promotes growth? Certainly in this case!

But Lamb was dead wrong if one looked back not 50 years, but 1,500 years in China. Four times Christianity came to China and initially took hold, but then was persecuted severely and stopped in its tracks. The Christian gospel first reached China thanks to Nestorian Christians in 635, but the Christians were persecuted to the point of extermination by a Buddhist emperor after 845. Christianity came again in the 13th century, this time in the form of a Franciscan mission led by John of Montecorvino, who arrived in Beijing in 1294. The missionaries managed to baptize 6,000 believers in Beijing. Again, persecution arose and left little trace.

Famously in the 17th century, a Jesuit mission was spearheaded by Matteo Ricci, who entered Beijing in 1602 and made great inroads, especially among the elite. But then a new emperor opposed them, and they were finished.

The fourth great wave came in the 19th century. Protestant missionary expansion sent literally hundreds of missionaries into China's interior, spearheaded by Hudson Taylor. They made a great impact, building hospitals and schools as well as churches. After a hundred years of missionary endeavor, at the outbreak of the Second World War, it was estimated there were maybe a million Protestants and slightly more Catholics. But Pearl Buck cruelly quipped that their efforts had made as little difference to Chinese culture as "a finger drawn through water." She was no dispassionate observer. The daughter of Presbyterian missionaries to China, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature for her portrayal of Chinese peasant life in *The Good Earth*, she struggled to see good in any missionary effort. At any rate, whatever the impact, persecution in the 1950s under Mao's Communist party ripped much of this growth away.

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[2]   Sources on the life and ministry of Samuel Lamb are minimal, but there exists a useful if rather hagiographic biography by Ken Anderson, *Bold as a Lamb: Pastor Samuel Lamb and the Underground Church of China* (1991).

If Samuel Lamb had known the history of persecution in his own country, he would not have recited his mantra quite so confidently. One must not blame him. Part of the problem of being a persecuted Christian (especially in the pre-Internet era) is the lack of access to historical and theological resources that we in other countries take for granted.

2. How churches die

Persecution promotes growth? Only sometimes. The idea has a great historical lineage. Tertullian, the early church father is famous for having said, "The blood of the martyrs is seed," which has been more generously translated to "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." We know what he means. We know the worth of a martyr like nothing else in showing the world the sheer value and weight of knowing Christ. But the blood of martyrs was not the seed of the church in Tertullian's own city of Carthage! And later, the Islamic persecution from 650 AD banished Christianity *permanently* in large swathes of North Africa.

So we must ask ourselves: in what circumstances does persecution tend to kill or damage the church as opposed to reviving it?

Philip Jenkins, in *The Lost History of Christianity*, posed this challenge: "Besides the missionary theology cultivated by many churches, we also need a theology of extinction." (Jenkins 2008:249) The church today pours a lot of energy into examining how churches grow, but perhaps more energy should be expended in looking at how churches die.

This was why I added a section to my primary course on persecution preparedness.[3] The new section looks at the grand sweep of the history of Christianity and examines the great global persecutions, considering how they impacted the church. It shows that, in certain circumstances, persecution can kill the church rather than reviving it. Again, my purpose was practical. Leaders in persecuted settings needed to know what and who - is ranged against them; how important it is not to underrate those powerful forces, and how to dig in for the long haul. They needed to be aware that sometimes the persecutors seem to triumph over the church.

3. Five great waves of church persecution

There have been five great global persecutions of the church. Each one left the church dramatically weaker and different than before. For my purposes, global persecution has three characteristics:

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[3] This course, known as "An Answer for My Enemies: Persecution, The Big Picture," has been taught around the world and extensively within vulnerable communities. It provides a biblical, historical and contemporary perspective, discusses ways to influence situations of persecution, and ends with an exercise sustaining spirituality while under persecution. It was taught in an upgraded form as "Persecution, Mission and Christian Spirituality" at Fuller Theological Seminary in fall 2019, with Paul Jensen and me as co-instructors.

- It is not confined to a single country but covers the known world at the time.
- It lasts for more than a single generation.
- It radically alters the religious landscape for many years afterwards.

The first was the Roman persecution of 250 to 313 AD, which began under the emperor Decius. It sought to create apostates rather than martyrs, and thus to sow *disunity* in the underground church. Though it did not hammer the church numerically, the process of re-instating apostates divided Christianity into East and West, and it resulted in the creation of a system of penance that dominated the spirituality of the church until the Reformation, and not for the better.

Second, the Islamic persecution of 635 to 1000 persecuted Christians through *taxation*, so that over time they would tire of their second-class status and economic inferiority and eventually convert. This tactic reduced Christians to a minority in the Middle East, their traditional heartland. Their minority status has continued ever since.

Next, the Mongol persecution, of 1295-1453 (when the Mongols became Muslim) was characterized by *violence* and essentially eliminated Christianity in Asia, rendering the faith Europe-centered for the next 500 years.

From 1517 to 1648, in the aftermath of the Reformation, groups of Christians persecuted other Christians in Europe and America. These clashes were characterized by deadly disagreements over the meaning of *ritual*. These inter-faith battles resulted in the Enlightenment and in modern notions of toleration and pluralism, but also more negatively in the prevailing Western cultural idea that religion merely causes conflict. Our inability to handle our internal disagreements sowed the seeds of secular intolerance.

Finally, the atheistic persecutions from 1917 to the present spawned communist regimes and tactically sought to negate the influence of religion by controlling *education*. This has massively reduced the impact of Christianity in these societies, even though some churches, such as the Catholic Church in Poland, emerged with great credit as a focus of opposition to the communist regime.

In examining these five great global persecutions, I see two common factors that are uppermost in fatally weakening if not destroying Christianity altogether.

One is the *time element*. Christianity (and any other religion for that matter) seems to have little defense against persecution when it lasts for multiple generations. The second is the *totality element*, as the persecutor manages to create a whole culture inhospitable to the daily exercise of the Christian faith. When a society is set up to exclude or marginalize Christians, then over time it becomes too hard to keep swimming against the tide. Islamic societies are brilliant at this. They have managed to make the Christians of the Middle East feel as if they are not indigenous at all but second-class interlopers, even though their presence and culture predate the Islamic one.

When these two elements coincide, it becomes nearly impossible for Christianity to keep transmitting its faith and successfully indigenize, because the society is set up to repel the exercise of Christian witness. As Christians are forced to fight every day to be distinctive, over time weariness sets in, until eventually walking away from the Christian faith becomes the easiest thing in the world to do.[4]

Notice that this dynamic is not only about violence. Scott Sunquist, formerly dean of Fuller Seminary's School of Intercultural Studies, indicated (personal interview, August 2018) that persecution often revives the church when it is severe but intermittent or of short duration. Violence, if quite short-lived, can revive the church. But if persecution casts a long-term blanket over the daily exercise of the faith, then the witness of the Christian church can be smothered permanently.

The best way to be resilient over time in the face of persecution is to build a culture (or a subculture) that never lets Christians as a community forget Jesus Christ on a daily basis. Otherwise, the faith becomes privatized and weak.

4. Latourette's advances and recessions

After identifying these five global persecutions, I looked for another framework that marked the impact of each of them in some way. I found one helpful schema in the writing of Kenneth Scott Latourette, who posited in his multi-volume *History of the Expansion of Christianity* that the history of mission had three advances and three recessions, with each recession significantly attributable to persecution (Latourette 1945a).

In Latourette's schema, the years 33 to 500 AD were a time of Christian expansion. Christianity became the unchallenged religion of the Middle East and extended into Europe. From 500 to 950, the first great recession occurred, due mainly to the rise of Islam and the church in the Middle East and Africa becoming a minority. His second period of advance ran from 950 to 1350, covering the period when Christianity became the main religion in Europe, followed by another great recession from 1350 to 1500 as the Mongols swept across Asia and wiped out Christianity there.

Latourette's third advance period, from 1500 to 1750, covers the years when the great European civilizations of Spain, Portugal, and subsequently the Netherlands and Great Britain – all maritime powers with navies able to break the Islamic land

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4   This understanding owes much to the social theory of conversion used by Rodney Stark in *The Triumph of Christianity: How the Jesus Movement Became the World's Largest Religion* (Stark 2011). Stark stated in an earlier book, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* that conversion occurs among people "whose interpersonal attachments to members overbalanced their attachments to non-members" (1997:6).

blockade – sailed to North and South America, Africa and the Far East. The Catholic states of Spain and Portugal were not bashful in imposing Christianity on conquered populations. The concept of modern mission arose but was followed by the third great recession during 1750-1815, due to the European Enlightenment. Although I cannot fully develop the argument here, persecution was central to this recession because Enlightenment principles were an important response to the wars of religion that convulsed the European continent. As Christian states, whether Catholic or Protestant, persecuted Christians from minority churches, Christian thinkers such as John Locke concluded that religion could no longer be trusted to bring coherence to societies, and that states had to become more secular and base their governing principles on reason rather than revelation. For Latourette, this was a smaller recession than the previous too, but still an important one because people significantly lost their faith in religion as the glue of society. This has become a permanent result in the West.

The last period in Latourette's schema, from 1815 to 1950, was one of great advance due to the Protestant missionary expansion across the globe. Latourette retired in 1953, but had he continued to write he would surely have recorded further advance, perhaps the most remarkable of all, as the African Christian population grew from about 40 million to over 500 million today and as the church expanded in China.

Latourette's arrangements do not address the impact of the atheistic persecution. Since he finished his *magnum opus* in 1953, and the Roman persecution is (appropriately) not rated because of its smaller numerical impact. But his scheme certainly confirms that times of great persecution are not generally times of church growth.

I will now look more closely at one of the global persecutions Latourette does not mention, so as to show in greater detail how persecution can result in near-permanent harm to the church.

5. The impact of the Roman persecution

The Roman persecution essentially had two waves, the first under Decius and Valerian (250-260). Things weren't easy after that, but persecution did abate somewhat until another intensification under Diocletian and his son Galerius from 303 to 311. Thus the overall period of persecution spanned two generations.

This was the first empire-wide persecution of the church. If we wanted to make a list of history's most effective persecutors, he was emperor for only two years, yet according to W. H. C. Frend, the great scholar on the persecution of the early church, no one came closer to wiping out Christianity than Decius (Frend 1965). Why was he so significant? Let us profile his method to find out.

First, his *ambition*. Decius was the first person to persecute Christians on an imperial scale, across the whole Roman Empire. Until 250 AD, they were perse-

cuted only locally, usually as scapegoats for a local event such as the fire in Rome under Nero. That crazy emperor's response probably killed the apostle Paul, and possibly Peter. But Christians could flee Rome and go somewhere like Antioch to avoid trouble. No one tried to neutralize Christianity across the known world until Decius. He was the first man to see Christianity as a threat to the empire and mobilized the entire bureaucracy from Rome to Carthage to Constantinople to deal with it. All great social engineers who seek to manipulate religion across cultures and mountain ranges bob on the wake of Decius.

Second, his strategy was *perfectly cloaked*. All he said in 250 AD was "Look! We've got to stick together! The Goths are massing to the north, the Persians to the east. Let's unite and fight! Everybody should make a sacrifice to the Roman gods to bring victory. Everyone must obtain a certificate from a magistrate confirming that they've done so. Failure to do so brings death!" It was a master trap because Decius knew that Christians couldn't do this. His inside intelligence about the community was superb! He knew that Christians were completely different from all the Roman religions because they claimed a monopoly on the truth, were aggressively evangelistic, and were uncooperative in worshipping the national cult. They couldn't take an oath that required them to swear that there were other gods on par with theirs. Decius found a clever way to persecute Christians under the guise of a pro-religious campaign. All he was doing was asking people to go to the temple and call on all the gods to help. Christians would look unpatriotic if they didn't make these sacrifices.

Third was Decius' careful *conscription of historical forces*. A smart persecutor works with history, not against it. Decius' timing was brilliant because 246 AD was declared the millennium of Roman religion. This gave him a perfect opportunity to revive the cult and sideline anyone who could not follow it fully. It also had the effect of ensuring that there would be little cultural sympathy for the Christians. People would say to them, "Why can't you sacrifice to our gods? Don't you want the empire to be strong?" Decius created a cultural prejudice against Christians on top of the state pressure against them. He thus conscripted the culture in his war against religion alongside the state apparatus.

Fourth was his counter-intuitive tactic – create apostates, not martyrs. As the campaign started, magistrates came to Decius saying, "Some of the Christians want to obtain certificates by bribery – they want to buy the certificates without sacrificing, or they might even be concocting forged certificates. What should we do with them?" One would have expected Decius to say, "Kill them! How dare they try to circumvent my will!" But instead he replied, "No, that's absolutely fine. Let them bribe! Let them produce forged documents!" Why was this a masterstroke? Because by making it possible for Christians to compromise their faith, he was sowing disunity in their ranks. He knew that martyrs cause people to rally around their faith. Martyrs show that

Christ is worth dying for. But apostates divide the community. Decius was particularly pleased when bishops took this way out, because it threw the Christians into turmoil. Robert Louis Wilken wrote, "The aim was not execution, but to weaken and thin out the Christian community." (2012:69) Sadly, the vast majority of Christians recanted.

This widespread apostasy divided the community into the righteous and the unrighteous, the uncompromised and the compromised. As a result, a whole new set of questions become vigorously debated in the church: "Should we take communion with those who are compromised? Are they still Christians? Is it really that necessary to die for Christ?" In addition to the pressure from the state and the culture, Decius created pressure from within. The consternation he sowed within the Christian community functioned like a cancer, depriving Christians of the very unity they needed to stand firm while deep underground.

Of course, Decius was extremely ruthless in the prosecution of this assault. Many were indeed martyred. He knew his strategy depended on consistently killing those who refused to make the sacrifices. Otherwise, people would think it wasn't a matter of life and death. He was deadly serious, and some historians think that Decius was winning. He might have wiped out the Christians had he not died two years into his campaign. But in those years, he certainly neutralized Christianity as a force. Frend concludes that "the Decian persecution was the gravest setback the Church ever suffered." (1965:571)

Wilken describes the split that began to appear in the church:

> Persecution had divided the community between those who had stood firm and those who had, in Cyprian's words (he was the bishop of Carthage), broken their oath to Christ by offering sacrifice! Idolatry, venerating false gods, transgressed Christianity's most fundamental belief in one God. Dubbed the "lapsed" because they had either sacrificed or obtained certificates (by whatever means) stating that they had sacrificed, by Church law they were excluded from participation in the Eucharist. The other group was made up of those who had courageously confessed their faith, been imprisoned, flogged, twisted on the rack, starved in dark damp dungeons, and in some cases, executed. Their steadfastness not only brought honour, it conveyed on them unique spiritual prerogatives, and there was the rub. (Wilken 2012:69)

Christianity was unsure of what to do with these two groups, Those who had stood firm and were killed were perhaps overly venerated, but for others a whole system of how to bring people back to faith was constructed, and it became the basis for the medieval system of penance.

I would argue that this penitential system was one of the most permanent damages caused by the persecution. In terms of numbers, Decius probably didn't reduce Christianity by much, at least not when compared to other global persecutions. At

the end of the first century there were fewer than 10,000 Christians out of an estimated 60 million people in the Roman Empire, or about 0.02 percent. By the year 200, the number of Christians was around 200,000; by the year 250, when Decius launched his campaign – and this may have been why he did it – the number had probably risen to more than a million, or 2 percent of the population (Stark 1996). Rodney Stark calculated that by the year 300, Christians made up 10 percent of the population of the Roman Empire, or approximately six million people.

To finish the historical element of this story, the Decian persecution was continued by Valerian but ended in 260 by his son Gallienus, who actually published an edict giving Christians the right to property, although he did not confer official status on Christianity. Then the emperor Diocletian launched an even more ruthless persecution. A gifted administrator, he ruled from 284 to 305, dividing the empire into four parts in order to run it better. For the first 20 years of his reign, he was relatively tolerant. But over time he began to regard himself as a god – always bad news for Christianity which requires exclusive worship of God. Galerius, his son, was even more aware of the danger posed by Christianity to the state.

Four edicts were promulgated in 303 that revived the Decian persecution strategy and even went beyond it. The four edicts required all Christian churches to be destroyed, all copies of the Bible to be burned, all Christians to be barred from public office and civil rights, and all people to make a sacrifice to the Roman gods under penalty of death. Again, this was a plan to stamp Christianity out completely, with an even more determined element of violence in it. Frend put the number of martyrdoms in this period at three to five thousand (1965).

Although this was the worst persecution the early church faced in its first four centuries, it was ameliorated by the fact that in the northern part of the empire, where Constantius (the father of Constantine) was regent, these edicts were significantly ignored, as this dynasty was becoming favorably disposed to the Christian faith. The persecution ended in 311 when the ailing Galerius issued a proclamation. He claimed that the aim of the persecution had been to try to return Christians to the "institutions of the ancients," but this rank paganism was exposed as outdated and backward. Citizens who were Christians could espouse their faith openly, those in jail were released, and all confiscated property was restored. From this reversal, it was only a short step for Constantine, the first Roman emperor who was a Christian, to issue the so-called Edict of Milan in 313, granting Christianity legal status for the first time.

6. Four shifts as a result of the persecutions

We have noted that the twin empire-wide Roman persecutions did not appear to have a profoundly deleterious effect on Christian growth, but four massive shifts occurred that changed the contours of Christianity.

First, the greatest damage was the creation of permanent disunity. As Frend put it, "The ultimate legacy of the persecutions was the lasting division of Christendom into its eastern and western parts." (1965) This largely had to do with the attitude taken toward the Emperor as Christianity became a tolerated and indeed promoted religion. In the East, the Emperor was "accepted as the earthly manifestation of that Divine Reason which guided, instructed, chastened but would finally save the human race."(Frend 1965:569) This affirmation would result, quite frankly, in the church becoming far too close to the state and thus an instrument of persecuting those who disagreed with it. We can trace this pattern right up to present-day Russia, as the Russian Orthodox Church leverages its cozy relationship with Vladimir Putin to disadvantage Protestants of all hues. In the West, the relationship with the state was never so cozy, especially since Augustine's great classic *City of God* took a quite negative view of its existence.

The second great result, as discussed above, was the penitential system introduced to deal with those who had backslidden or apostatized – which was the vast majority of Christians who survived the persecution (MacCulloch 2010:173). This system increased over time and became an ever more elaborate scheme of how to get back into the good graces of God, dominating the spirituality of Christianity for the next thousand years. This taper would ultimately flare up to produce the Reformation itself in protest against a penance system that had overreached, as Martin Luther decried the crass sale of so-called indulgences to speed the soul through purgatory.

The third result was not as negative: the birth of monasteries. The persecutions created an age of martyrs, who were venerated as the ideal saints. Afterwards, when it was not possible to die for Christ due to persecution, the next best way to emulate heroic faith was to become a monk. Frend captures the link:

> In popular estimate the age of martyrs became the heroic age, venerated in legend, unrepeatable in fact. As Mennas, Pantaleon, George, Mercurious, and a host of other sufferers were relegated to the tapestries and liturgical homilies of the Coptic Church, their place was taken by the monks. The point is made very clearly in the seventh-century romance entitled *Barlaam and Joasaph*. "Monasticism," we are told, "arose from men's desire to become martyrs in will, that they might not miss the glory of them who were made perfect by blood." The monk, like the martyr, was the "athlete" and "soldier of Christ." Each fought the demons in his own way, the martyr as a witness to Christ, the ascetic in his struggle to maintain his spiritual ascent to Christ. (Frend 1965:547-548)

The desert became the new arena of battle, and literally thousands headed into the deserts of Syria and Egypt, many to perform staggering feats of self-abnegation. This focus on the individual hermit ascending to Christ would correct itself after Basil of

Caesarea challenged the monks to be more missional. As Scott Sunquist notes, "Under the guidance of Basil, monasticism began to be transformed from spiritual renewal and a school of personal holiness with limited missional concern to a missional community designed for holiness and service to the other." (Sunquist 2013:32) It is hard to overstate the importance of this change. Indeed, Sunquist tells us that from the fourth to the fifteenth century, the monasteries continued the church's mission, even though they were located at the margins of the church. Their influence became even more important as the church itself became distracted by wealth and power.

The final consequence of the Roman persecution is a long history of copycats. Today, persecutors still use the Decian option. They say to themselves, "Okay, how do we neutralize an underground church? We don't know where they are. We can't go in and just kill them all, it's not possible." Instead, they apply a variation of the tactic of creating apostates.

A recent example was provided by a house church pastor in Iran, now living in the West. A few years ago, he was arrested and taken to prison. He braced himself for torture, but he was not touched at all! In fact, the authorities kept him in a clean and comfortable cell. He wasn't placed in with mentally ill people. He was given tea and good food and, perplexingly, left entirely alone. After three days they came to him and said, "Well, you're free to go!"

The pastor hurried back to his church and told them, "They just let me go. They didn't do anything." They looked at him and said, "We don't believe you! Why don't you tell us the truth?" Some assumed he had been raped by police and was too ashamed to admit it. Others theorized that he had broken down under torture and divulged their names and addresses. Only a few believed him. He lost his ministry in the church, which divided into three groups because they couldn't be sure whether their pastor was telling the truth or was in complete denial.

That is the Decian option at work: create apostates, not martyrs. It is alive and well in the church today. Sow a virus into the church so that it compromises its own unity and sets Christian against Christian.

When persecution is sustained over generations and comes to define a culture, it can destroy the church, remove it from an entire region, or at least damage it permanently. A fuller proof of this contention would require thorough examination of additional persecutions. I acknowledge that in the short term, persecution may well revive the church. But when the time element and the totality element are both present, persecution is likely to cripple or even kill the church.

Still, we are all subject to the law of undulation despite our best efforts, and we must be careful not to make a mystery into a formula. I will give the last word to the great historian cited earlier, Kenneth Scott Latourette, speaking here from a Christian faith perspective:

In this world the Church's complete triumph is never assured. In some areas grave reverses will be met. In all areas the Church will be confronted by foes. There is that in human nature which will always be antagonized by Jesus. Yet in human nature there is always that which responds to Him. Men everywhere and of every race are both repelled and attracted. Always there will be some who will seek to crucify Jesus. But always, where He is seen, He will win followers. In these followers He will be reincarnated, even though never perfectly. Here and there the crucifiers will kill off His followers. Somewhere, however, followers will survive. From these survivors Jesus will again be carried to the lands from which he has been driven. (Latourette 1945b:134)

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Noteworthy

The noteworthy items are structured in three groups: annual reports and global surveys, regional and country reports, and specific issues. Though we apply serious criteria in the selection of items noted, it is beyond our capacity to scrutinize the accuracy of every statement made. We therefore disclaim responsibility for the contents of the items noted. The compilation was produced by Monica Rawlek Elizondo and Janet Epp Buckingham.

Annual Reports and Global Surveys

2018 Report on International Religious Freedom
US Department of State, Office of International Religious Freedoms, March 2019

https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/
The US Department of State looks to NGOs, religious groups, media, academic reports, and other sources of information to compile an overview report on international religious freedoms.

2019 Annual Report
United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, April 2019

https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf
This report documents the violations and progress in religious freedom violations in 28 countries over the 2018 calendar year.

2018 Report on International Religious Freedom
US Department of State, 21 June 2019

https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/
The US Department of State produces a comprehensive annual report on international religious freedom.

Bishop of Truro's Independent Review for the Foreign Secretary of FCO Support for Persecuted Christians
Rt. Rev. Philip Mounstephen, Bishop of Truro, July 2019

https://bit.ly/3d5vnnR
This report identifies the Christian faith as a phenomenon of the Global South or, more precisely, the global poor and seeks to make up for the deficit in defending the rights of persecuted Christians worldwide.

Combating the Persecution of Christians Worldwide
ADF International, 2019

http://bit.ly/3k5hQjN
Kelsey Zorki, with ADF International, releases this report to provide a framework for Western engagement regarding religious persecution worldwide.

Commentary on the Current State of Freedom of Religion or Belief
All Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief, November 2019

https://bit.ly/3Ah0siN
This document highlights the current state of freedom of religion or belief in the thirty countries identified as Human Rights Priority Countries.

Freedom in the World 2019
Freedom House, 2019

https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world
The aim of Freedom House is to provide a comprehensive annual report assessing the state of political rights and civil liberties around the world.

New Briefing: Peoples under Threat 2019
Minority Rights Group International, 3 June 2019

https://bit.ly/37wiFMV
The Peoples under Threat Report for 2019 focuses on how social media have played a large role in stigmatizing minority groups in various countries, leading to increases in violence and deaths.

Report of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief
United Nations General Assembly, 5 March 2019

https://undocs.org/A/HRC/40/58
The Special Rapporteur provides an overview and examples of international legal frameworks that are often imposed upon freedom of religion or belief. He highlights specific cases as well as exploring the interconnection between freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression.

United Nations Universal Periodic Review
United Nations Human Rights Council, January-November 2019

https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/CyclesUPR.aspx
The 32nd, 33rd, and 34th sessions of the Universal Periodic Review for Human Rights took place during 2019, reviewing the human rights situation in 42 countries.

World Report
Human Rights Watch, 2019

https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019
Human Rights Watch, whose aim is to defend the rights of all people, publishes an annual report examining and investigating the abuses of human rights and justice across 90 different countries. The 2019 annual report examines the major events relating to human rights that occurred in 2018.

World Watch List 2019 Compilation
Open Doors International/World Watch Research, January 2019 (password: freedom)

https://bit.ly/2N8Wzd8
This is a compilation of the main documents published by World Watch Research, excluding country dossiers. Such reports include the ranking of violence and persecution among Christians worldwide, press releases, and statements regarding trends in religious persecution.

Regional and Country Reports

Africa: Mapping Islamic Militancy – Past, Present, and Future
Open Doors International/World Watch Research, July 2019

https://bit.ly/3bjjOZO (password: freedom)
This report highlights the differences between military force and ideological power, emphasizing the importance of not conflating the two. Additionally, it describes the different Islamic groups present within Africa and identifies the threats they pose to Christianity and to one another.

Europe: Religious Diversity in Europe and the Rights of Religious Minorities
Conference of European Churches, 4 February 2019

https://bit.ly/3u7ogn9
In 2016, the Conference of European Churches brought together speakers from various minority religious groups to share about their experiences, collecting data to back up the belief that minority groups add value to the societies of which they are a part.

India: Hate and Targeted Violence Against Christians in India (2018 Report)
Evangelical Fellowship of India, January 2019

https://bit.ly/3x51ygc
This report documents targeted violence and other forms of persecution against Christians in India. Furthermore, recommendations are put forward to the Indian government regarding legislation to protect persecuted Christians in India.

India: Incidents Against Christians in 2018, with Focus on Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu
World Evangelical Alliance/Evangelical Fellowship of India, 13 February 2019

https://www.worldevangelicals.org/un/pdf/HRC40%20India.pdf

The Evangelical Fellowship of India documents the 325 incidents against Christians in 2018, with special attention to incidents occurring during Christmas 2018 and the situations in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

Iran: 2018 Annual Report Violation of the Rights of Christians in Iran
Middle East Concern, January 2019

https://bit.ly/34TKkq3

In 2018, Iranian Christians and other religious minorities, many of whom were converts from Islam, experienced unprecedented waves of violence and persecution in house churches, resulting in arrest and the threat of confiscation of church buildings.

Iran: The Reality for Christians
Open Doors International/World Watch Research, August 2019

https://bit.ly/3imsmEz (password: freedom)

The Iranian government perceives Christianity as a Western threat to its operation; as the church in Iran continues to grow, political and social persecution continues to grow as well. This report highlights the situation of Christians in Iran as one of the most persecuted religious minorities in the country.

Iraq: Freedom of Religion and the Status of Evangelical Churches
World Evangelical Alliance, 25 March 2019

https://bit.ly/2T4ozRB

The WEA highlights nine points regarding the freedom of religion and the status of churches within Iraq and recommends that the government of Iraq officially recognize the evangelical churches in Iraq in compliance with international human rights law.

Montenegro: Conclusions from Academic Conference of "Freedom of Religion or Belief in Montenegro"
Council of European Churches, May 2019

https://bit.ly/3ij2VUm

The basis of these deliberations is the core conviction that people are endowed with freedom both as a secular right and as an eternal gift from God. This report provides proposals towards a "Law on Freedom of Religion."

Myanmar: Challenges to Freedom of Religion or Belief in Myanmar
International Commission of Jurists, October 2019

https://bit.ly/3ghR3PI
This report looks at freedom of religion or belief in Myanmar in light of the country's 2008 constitution, highlighting areas and practices in which articles within this constitution are not being met.

Nigeria: Abuja Statement on the Crises in Central Nigeria
Religious Liberty Partnership, April 2019

https://bit.ly/2RwCVKf
The RLP acknowledges various instances of and the continuation of violence and oppression in Nigeria.

Sri Lanka: The 2019 Religious Freedom Landscape
World Evangelical Alliance/National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka, 11 February 2019

https://bit.ly/3zcL4EK
This report outlines 17 points regarding the religious freedom landscape in Sri Lanka, particularly with regard to the Christian and Muslim communities, and sets forth recommendations for judicial reform and policy changes.

Vietnam: Alternative Report: Vietnam
World Evangelical Alliance, 4 February 2019

https://bit.ly/3copovq
This report highlights some ways in which Vietnamese religious communities have been harassed and puts forth recommendations to limit this harassment and ensure the protection of religious minorities within Vietnam.

Specific Issues

A Closer Look at How Religious Restrictions Have Risen Around the World
Pew Research Center, 15 July 2019

https://pewrsr.ch/3fZdhXR
Beginning in 2007, the Pew Center began tracking religious persecution and identified the growth in persecution of religious minorities worldwide.

Education for Peace in a Multi-Religious World: A Christian Perspective
World Council of Churches, 21 May 2019

https://bit.ly/3w2cqLt

This document highlights the importance of peace and places a special emphasis on the fact that religion is often used as a manipulative tool to spur violence, whereas true religion leads to the promotion of peace for all.

Punta del Este Declaration on Human Dignity for Everyone Everywhere: Seventy Years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
International Center for Law and Religion Studies, December 2019

https://bit.ly/3uXsXyX
The Declaration was adopted at a conference convened in Punta del Este, Uruguay. The conference explored the notion of human dignity, its relation to freedom of religion or belief, and the important role it has played in forming, guiding, and sustaining consensus on core human rights values despite tensions in a highly pluralized world.

Statement on Blasphemy and Apostasy Laws
Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom, 18 July 2019

https://bit.ly/3ipd5CI
The US Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom issued this Statement of Concern.

The International Promotion of Freedom of Religion or Belief: Sketching the Contours of a Common Framework
Danish Institute for Human Rights, the Georgetown University Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs and the World Faiths Development Dialogue, 5 April 2019

https://bit.ly/2T4qKoq
This report, by Marie Juul Peterson and Katherine Marshall, sketches the contours of a common framework for understanding and approaching international FoRB promotion.

Theory of Change for Freedom of Religion or Belief
Commonwealth Initiative for Freedom of Religion or Belief

https://bit.ly/3uV18ax
The Commonwealth Initiative provides a theory of change to provide a framework for the advancement of religious freedoms, in order to promote effectiveness in projects and plans launched to advance freedom of religion and belief.

WWL 2019 Gender-Specific Religious Persecution: Analysis and Implications
Open Doors International, February 2019

https://bit.ly/3x5UnEC
This report examines the global trends regarding gender-specific religious persecution.

Guidelines for authors
Version 2021-1 (February 2021)

This document combines essential elements of the editorial policy and the house style of IJRF which can be viewed on www.iirf.eu.

Aims of the journal

The IJRF aims to provide a platform for scholarly discourse on religious freedom in general and the persecution of Christians in particular. The term persecution is understood broadly and inclusively by the editors. The IJRF is an interdisciplinary, international, peer reviewed journal, serving the dissemination of new research on religious freedom and is envisaged to become a premier publishing location for research articles, documentation, book reviews, academic news and other relevant items on the issue.

Editorial policy

The editors welcome the submission of any contribution to the journal. All manuscripts submitted for publication are assessed by a panel of referees and the decision to publish is dependent on their reports. The IJRF subscribes to the Code of Best Practice in Scholarly Journal Publishing, Editing and Peer Review of 2018 (https://sites.google.com/view/assaf-nsef-best-practice) as well as the National Code of Best Practice in Editorial Discretion and Peer Review for South African Scholarly Journals (http://tinyurl.com/NCBP-2008) and tthe supplementary Guidelines for Best Practice of the Forum of Editors of Academic Law Journals in South Africa. As IJRF is listed on the South African Department of Higher Education and Training (DoHET) "Approved list of South African journals", authors linked to South African universities can claim subsidies and are therefore charged page fees.

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➢ Book reviews or suggestion of books for review: bookreviews@iirf.eu
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Selection criteria

All research articles are expected to conform to the following requirements, which authors should use as a checklist before submission:
➢ **Focus:** Does the article have a clear focus on religious freedom / religious persecution / suffering because of religious persecution? These terms are understood broadly and inclusively by the editors of IJRF, but these terms clearly do not include everything.

- ➢ **Scholarly standard:** Is the scholarly standard of a research article acceptable? Does it contribute something substantially new to the debate?
- ➢ **Clarity of argument:** Is it well structured, including subheadings where appropriate?
- ➢ **Language usage:** Does it have the international reader, specialists and non-specialists in mind and avoid bias and parochialism?
- ➢ **Substantiation/Literature consulted:** Does the author consult sufficient and most current literature? Are claims thoroughly substantiated throughout and reference to sources and documentation made?

Submission procedure

1. Submissions must be complete (see no.6), conform to the formal criteria (see no. 8-10) and must be accompanied by a cover letter (see no.3-4).
2. The standard deadlines for the submission of academic articles are 1 February and 1 August respectively for the next issue and a month later for smaller items such as book reviews, noteworthy items, event reports, etc.
3. A statement whether an item is being submitted elsewhere or has been previously published must accompany the article.
4. Research articles will be sent to up to three independent referees. Authors are encouraged to submit the contact details of 4 potential referees with whom they have not recently co-published. The choice of referees is at the discretion of the editors. The referee process is a double blind process. This means that you should not consult with or inform your referees at any point in the process. Your paper will be anonymized so that the referee does not know that you are the author. Upon receiving the reports from the referees, authors will be notified of the decision of the editorial committee, which may include a statement indicating changes or improvements that are required before publication. You will not be informed which referees were consulted and any feedback from them will be anonymized.
5. Should the article be accepted for publication, the author will be expected to submit a finalized electronic version of the article.
6. Include the following:
- ➢ An abstract of no more than 100 words.
- ➢ Between 3 and 10 keywords that express the key concepts used in the article.
- ➢ Brief biographical details of the author in the first footnote, linked to the name of the author, indicating, among others, year of birth, the institutional affiliation, special connection to the topic, choice of UK or American spelling, date of submission, full contact details including e-mail address.
7. Authors are encouraged to also engage with prior relevant articles in IJRF, the Religious Freedom Series, and IIRF Reports (www.iirf.eu) to an appropriate degree. So check for relevant articles.

8. Articles should be spell-checked before submission, by using the spellchecker on the computer. Authors may choose either 'UK English' or 'American English' but must be consistent. Indicate your choice in the first footnote.

9. Number your headings (including introduction) and give them a hierarchical structure. Delete all double spaces and blank lines. Use as little formatting as possible and definitely no "hard formatting" such as extra spaces, tabs. Please do not use a template. All entries in the references and all footnotes end with a full stop. No blank spaces before a line break.

10. Research articles should have an ideal length of 4 000 words and a maximum of 6 000 words. Articles longer than that are not normally accepted, but may be published if, in the views of the referees, it makes an exceptionally important contribution to religious freedom.

11. Research articles are honoured with two complimentary printed copies.

12. For research articles by members of the editorial team or their relatives, the full editorial discretion is delegated to a non-partisan editor and they are submitted to the same peer review process as all other articles.

Style requirements

1. IJRF prefers the widely accepted 'name-date' method (or Harvard system) for citations in the text. Other reference methods are permissible if they are fully consistent.

2. A publication is cited or referred to in the text by inserting the author's last name, year and page number(s) in parentheses, for example (Mbiti 1986:67-83). More detailed examples can be found on: www.iirf.eu > journal > instructions for contributors.

3. Graphics and Tables: These must be attached as separate files. Indicate in red where they should go in the text. Every effort will be made to place them in that spot. Image Quality: minimum width must be 10.5 cm at 220dpi or simply 1000 pixels. The width of the image always goes over the entire width of the type area (10.5cm), but is flexible in hight. Please send the image in its own file (e.g. JPG, TIF, EPS ...), not in a Word document. Tables and "simple" diagrams: These will likely be redesigned by our layout expert. Please attach them in a separate file.

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5. References should be listed in alphabetical order of authors under the heading "References" at the end of the text. Do not include a complete bibliography of all works consulted, only a list of references actually used in the text.

6. Always give full first names of authors in the list of references, as this simplifies the retrieval of entries in databases. Keep publisher names short.

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