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BARBARISM AND RELIGION

THE RESURGENCE OF HOLY VIOLENCE



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The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies

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KEY FINDINGS

- Religious violence has been *steadily increasing* over the past quarter century. It is most endemic in the Middle East, South Asia and North, Central, East and West Africa. However, religious violence is a worldwide phenomenon that involves adherents of many faiths.
- Religious violence is *evolving in terms of its manifestation, geographical distribution, scope and lethality*:
 - It merges different types of formerly distinct conflict by fusing local and global grievances;
 - It progressively transcends national borders with the globalization of Jihad as its most currently visible and dangerous incarnation;
 - It is increasingly employed by non-state actors targeting other non-state actors;
 - It has become more deadly, claiming last year the highest number of fatalities in the past 25 years.
- *Religious conflict actors are a different breed* compared to ‘regular’ conflict actors for the following reasons:
 - Religious extremists are willing to make great sacrifices to achieve their demands;
 - Violent acts targeting non-combatants are more likely to be sanctioned by religious extremist groups with institutionalized cultures of violence;
 - The radicalisation and isolation of religious extremist groups makes it harder to end the cycle of violence; ‘doves’ often lose out against ‘hawks’;
 - Conflicts featuring religious violence tend to last longer and are less likely to end through negotiated settlement.
- Religious violence comes in different forms and is the *outcome of a diverse and complex interplay of factors*. There is no single root cause, and deterministic cause-and-effect relations are few and far between. Some patterns nevertheless stand out:

- The roots of religious violence are largely similar to the roots of non-religious violence. These include - but are not limited to - state ineffectiveness and illegitimacy, factionalism, repression and social exclusion;
- Religious violence is more likely to appear in societies where religious differences between groups are dovetailed with additional societal cleavages such as horizontal socio-economic inequalities, discrimination, and geographic distance;
- The politicization of these interreligious differences by political and/or religious entrepreneurs contributes to further polarization, increasing the likelihood of violence;
- The presence or emergence of extremist actors in societies is a final contributing factor to the onset of violence;
- Various individual and situational characteristics render individuals more prone to turn to and embrace extremist beliefs. But there is no one-size-fits all profile and profiling attempts often miss the mark.
- *Religious violence can and does come to an end* as the result of the military defeat of religious extremist groups, albeit seldom. The most salient causes of declining levels of violence are serious capability degradation, physical separation of warring groups, generational demise of groups, de-radicalization of key members, and the integration of groups in regular political processes following negotiated settlements.
- Today it is widely acknowledged that *addressing religious violence requires a whole-of-society approach*. This approach will never be primarily military in nature, but it does require a ‘security custodian’ to safeguard the coherence of the broader approach from a security point of view. We highlight the following contributions that European security and defense organizations can make, specifically in dealing with the religious violence along Europe’s immediate borders:
 - **Understand the Phenomenon:** Speak the language, grasp the culture, comprehend the power dynamics and understand the strategy.
 - **Monitor and Deny:** Keep a finger on the pulse of religious polarization (with a special focus on overlapping cleavages and education) and intervene preventively when it crosses critical thresholds.
 - **Mobilize Moderation:** boost the resilience of religious communities against these forms of (self-) destructive extremist tendencies.

- **Degrade, Deny and Disrupt:** If and only if religious groups possess substantial (conventional) military capabilities, degrade and deny their ability to operate conventionally (find-fix-strike), disrupt supply lines and close off exit routes.
- **Discredit and Dissuade:** Puncture the narrative, expose the cruelty, respect the religion, spread the message, lead by example, and refrain from false propaganda.
- **Build and Train:** Build up local and regional security forces which are capable, reliable and considered legitimate by the people they are supposed to protect.
- **Separate and Protect:** Separate groups and protect buffers and barriers to preclude contact between the groups.
- **Disarm, Demobilize, Reintegrate:** DDR of the (tens of thousands of) fighters to support the post stabilization and normalization process.
- **Foster Partnerships and Build Resilience:** Foster partnerships with state and non-state actors to build societal resilience against religious extremism. This is about persuasion rather than coercion, and about collaboration rather than control. The sustainability of such long-term efforts should be a central element in their design.

1 INTRODUCTION

The astonishing rise of the Islamic State (IS) put religious violence squarely back in the international limelight. For many in the West, religious wars had become a concept only found in history books in school. In 2014, however, religious violence became paramount as IS gained large areas of territory crossing national borders in a matter of months, in the process proclaiming the return of divine rule on earth. Thousands of foreign fighters from over 80 countries travelled to the region lured by this religious call to arms.¹ Some of them have since returned to commit religiously inspired attacks in Europe. The Charlie Hebdo assassinations and the attack in Denmark in early 2015 shook the Continent. However, manifestations of religious violence are as rife as they are wide. Religious violence in 2014 alone included the Pakistani Taleban's deadly attack on the Peshawar School, beheadings by Boko Haram in Nigeria, episodes of ethnic cleansing in the Central African Republic, and violent outbursts between Buddhists and Muslims in Myanmar. Religious violence is neither limited to a specific religion nor confined to one particular region.

Although widely researched in the academic literature, the notion of religious violence remains elusive. Religious violence is rarely (if ever) exclusively caused by religious differences, even if it is often portrayed as stemming from intractable and ancient hatreds about spiritual and indivisible issues. Instead, religious violence often coincides with underlying sentiments of repression on the part of the perpetrators. These sentiments are then reinforced by more secular drivers of violence, including – but not limited to – corruption, factionalism and horizontal socio-economic inequalities. Holy teachings are cited as a rallying call to arms, even though none of the Abrahamic – nor any of the other – faiths is necessarily violent in nature.² Compared to other types of conflict, religious

1 Gene Thorp, and Swati Sharma. "Foreign Fighters Flow to Syria." Washington Post, February 26, 2015. <http://goo.gl/esXSGe>.

2 Karen Armstrong. *Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence*. Random House of Canada, 2014.

conflicts are not necessarily more intense in terms of the amount of violence used, but they last longer and are less likely to be settled through negotiations.³ Non-religious conflicts are 2.5 times more likely to be settled through negotiations than religious conflicts.⁴ Dynamics in closed religious groups, fighting for what they perceive as sacred causes, instil a ‘collective sense of invincibility and special destiny’ making them more willing to die for those they associate with as their ‘religious brotherhood’.⁵ Moreover, the symbolic value of issues contested in religious conflict render them unfungible and thereby less amenable to compromise.⁶

Dealing with religious violence continues to be a pernicious problem for security organizations both within their own homelands and in foreign theaters. At the domestic level, traditional forms of punishment prevalent in criminal justice do not seem to deter the religiously inspired. Abroad, aerial bombardment can kill but does not sway. Renditions and long-term incarceration of suspected extremists often appear to only fuel the holy fire – for ideological as much as for operational reasons.⁷ The salience of religious violence in the security environment of the 2010s urgently begs for a better understanding of this phenomenon. What is it? How prevalent is it around the world? What are its sources? How does it end? And what are the main challenges to defense and security organizations? In this strategic brief we will address these questions, based on a dataset of religious violence over the past quarter century that we have specifically developed for this purpose.

-
- 3 Jonathan Fox. “The Rise of Religious Nationalism and Conflict: Ethnic Conflict and Revolutionary Wars, 1945-2001.” *Journal of Peace Research* 41, no. 6 (November 1, 2004): 715–31. doi:10.1177/0022343304047434 ; Isak Svensson. “Fighting with Faith: Religion and Conflict Resolution in Civil Wars.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 51, no. 6 (December 1, 2007): 930–49. doi:10.1177/0022002707306812. ; Susanna Pearce. “Religious Rage: A Quantitative Analysis of the Intensity of Religious Conflicts.” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 17, no. 3 (October 1, 2005): 333–52. doi:10.1080/09546550590929237. There is some debate on this: Fox asserts that religious conflicts typically last longer than non-religious conflicts, but Svensson and Pearce observe no real difference.
 - 4 Isak Svensson, “Fighting with Faith: Religion and Conflict Resolution in Civil Wars.” 941
 - 5 Scott Atran, Hammad Sheikh, and Angel Gomez, “For Cause and Comrade: Devoted Actors and Willingness to Fight,” *Clodynamics: The Journal of Quantitative History and Cultural Evolution* 5, no. 1 (January 1, 2014): 41, <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/6n09f7gr>.
 - 6 Isak Svensson, “Fighting with Faith Religion and Conflict Resolution in Civil Wars”, 932-934
 - 7 Martin Chulov. “Isis: The inside Story | Martin Chulov.” *The Guardian*. Accessed February 20, 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/11/sp-isis-the-inside-story>.

2 DELINEATING RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE

To Western ears, the term ‘religious violence’ used to conjure up images of Holy Crusades or perhaps the cataclysm associated with the Christian schism before the Peace of Augsburg. More recently, religious violence tends to be equated with extremist fundamentalists akin to well-known groups such as the Taleban, Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram and the Islamic State (IS).⁸ While these groups certainly contribute to the wide spectrum of religious violence, they do not define it.

Anyone familiar with violence and conflict definitions will note the inherent difficulty in defining the ‘religious’ element, particularly when conflicts can be classified along the lines of several salient cleavages, such as ethnic or socioeconomic divides. This issue is particularly relevant for many conflicts in Africa, where ethnic and religious drivers of conflicts often overlap. Some authors, like Karen Armstrong, therefore do not attempt to offer a clear-cut definition because they see religion as intrinsically intertwined with other factors.⁹ Other authors do offer a definition in order to assess the prevalence of religious violence empirically. Most of them take conflict as their unit of analysis. Jonathan Fox, a leading scholar in this field, defines a conflict as religious if it meets at least one of the following criteria:

“(1) it is between groups who belong to different religions; (2) it is between groups that belong to different denominations of the same religions (e.g. Protestants vs. Catholics or Sunni Muslims vs. Shi’i Muslims); and (3) the issues in the conflict include (but are by no means limited to) significant religious issues, such as state religion policy or the role of religion in the regime.”¹⁰

8 The group also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), the Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham (ISIS) or the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). We will refer to it as IS.

9 Karen Armstrong, *Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence*. 15-29 & 721-725

10 Jonathan Fox, “The Religious Wave: Religion and Domestic conflict from 1960 to 2009.”, 144

Others opt for an *identity-based* definition of religious conflict¹¹ that classifies a conflict as religious when ‘the two sides have differing religious identities, regardless of whether or not those identities are explicitly pertinent to the conflict.’¹² This differs from *issue-based* definitions of religious conflicts that hold the primary conflict incompatibility needs to be religious in nature.

We classify violent acts as ‘religious’ in cases where religion forms the principal basis for mobilization for *at least one* primary actor who is a perpetrator of violence.¹³ Religious actors in this study include formally organized groups (such as IS) and informally organized groups (such as Christians and Muslims in the Philippines). We define religious violence to be acts of physical violence perpetrated by formally or informally organized and religiously motivated actors that lead to fatalities.¹⁴ Since we rely on data provided by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) – one of the most authoritative datasets providing relatively up to date information on global conflict – we have to impose a threshold of 25 fatalities per year. We have reviewed the UCDP datasets on battle-related deaths, one-sided violence and non-state actors and

11 Susanna Pearce. “Religious Rage: A Quantitative Analysis of the Intensity of Religious Conflicts.”, 340-342

12 Ibid, 341

13 Actors identify themselves as religiously motivated when they have publicly declared affiliation to a religious or have used a religiously inspired dogma as the foundation of the group’s core beliefs. This will usually be translated as a group preaching hatred towards another religious group, as in “infidels”, “non-believers”, “Heretics”, etc. In/ out group relations dynamics will center on the religious identity. It is important to note the fine line between religious and ethnic/cultural groups. For example, even though the mobilization of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) can be debated to be take place along ethnic rather than religious lines, we ultimately included it in our dataset due to the self-declared religious motivation by LRA operatives. The Afghani Hizb-i Wahdat party was comprised of 9 factions who, even though they were primarily Shi’ite, included different clan representatives. As such, this actor was not included in our dataset. In coding our actors, we relied mostly on information from the UCDP country-level reports (available at: <http://bit.ly/Uehtqe>), academic literature and media reports. In about 15 cases, classification was difficult due to mixed reports of violence along ethnic, religious and/or socio-economic lines, as well as the fact that the UCDP data is aggregated *by year* for any given actor. In these cases, inclusion in the dataset is based on whether for the majority of the reports of violent incidents, the stated incompatibility was religious in nature.

14 In order to limit the scope of our research and sidestep the question whether governments are religious actors, we have decided not to include states as religious actors even though we are aware that some states identify themselves as religious actors, most notably the Islamic Republic of Iran. For continuity purposes, we make one exception to this rule, which concerns the Taleban government between 1996–2001.

coded those events in which at least one religious actor was present.¹⁵ An event is included in our dataset if it corresponds to the following definition:

The use of violence, involving at least one self-proclaimed religious non-state actor, directed at civilians, organized groups or governments of states, resulting in at least 25 civilian or battle-related deaths per year.

In this report, we have researched every actor present in the UCDP datasets on the basis of media reports, country-level reports provided by the UCDP itself, and the academic literature. The above definition covers all events where non-state, religiously motivated actors commit violent acts against other non-state actors (whether religious or not), civilians, or governments of states, provided that such acts cause at least 25 fatalities in any given year. Although our measure is likely to underestimate fatalities of religious violence due to that threshold, it does reveal important trends at the macro-level about the dynamics of such violence over the past quarter century. We assess different incarnations of religious violence, including internal armed conflict and internationalized internal armed conflicts, internal non-state actor conflict and one-sided violence (see Table 1).

15 UCDP does not distinguish between perpetrators and victims of the violence; it was therefore not possible to distinguish between cases in which a religious group was perpetrator or victim of the violence. More details are provided in our Methodology Annex. For more information on the UCDP definitions, see: Uppsala Conflict Data Program (2013), '*UCDP datasets: Definitions*', retrieved: 09-01-2015, URL: <http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/definitions/>

TABLE 1: RELIGIOUS CONFLICT TYPOLOGY & DEFINITION¹⁶

	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE
INTERNAL ARMED CONFLICT	A contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state <i>and</i> of which the other party is a non-state self-defined religious actor, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The government of the Central African Republic versus <i>Seleka</i>. - The government of India versus the National Liberation Front of Tripura - The Government of Pakistan versus <i>Lashkar-e-Taiba</i>.
INTERNATIONALIZED INTERNAL ARMED CONFLICT	A contested incompatibility where the use of armed force between more than two parties, of which at least one party is a non-state self-defined religious actor <i>and</i> of which at least one party is a foreign government of state or non-state actor, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Islamic State</i> versus the Assad regime in Syria & the Government of Iraq, the international coalition - The Government of Somalia & regional allies versus Al-Shabaab. - The Government of Mali & International allies versus the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Ansar Dine
INTERNAL NON-STATE ACTOR CONFLICT	The use of armed force between two organized armed non-state actors, neither of which is the government of a state <i>and</i> of which at least one is a self-defined religious actor, which results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in a year.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hizb-i-Islami-yi Afghanistan versus Taleban - Hindu versus Muslim clashes in India - Christians versus Muslims in Indonesia - Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Magreb, Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad, Movement for Oneness and Jihad in Western-Africa versus National Movement for Liberation of Azawad in Mali.
ONE-SIDED VIOLENCE	The use of armed force by a formally organized non-state self-defined religious actor against civilians which results in at least 25 deaths.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 9/11 Al-Qaeda attack - Mungiki attacks on civilians in Kenya. - Patani insurgent attacks on civilians in Thailand

16 The definitions we use are adapted from the following UCDP datasets: UCDP. UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset. Codebook. Uppsala Conflict Data Program, 2014. <http://goo.gl/QDLC5W>. Version 5.0-2014; UCDP. UCDP Non-State Conflict. Codebook. Uppsala Conflict Data Program, 2014. <http://goo.gl/14LXBP>. Version 2.5-2014; UCDP. UCDP One-Sided Violence. Codebook. Uppsala Conflict Data Program, 2014. <http://goo.gl/Q1hIQ7>. Version 1.4 – June, 2014; UCDP. UCDP/PRIO *Armed Conflict Dataset*. Codebook. Uppsala Conflict Data Program, 2014. <http://goo.gl/xhyw15>. Version 4-2014a

3 TRENDS IN RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE

Since the mid-1960s, religious violence has steadily risen and the number of religious conflicts has been growing in number.¹⁷ While only 17 out of 108 conflicts (or 16%) involved at least one religiously motivated actor in 1989, this number increased to 46 out of 119 conflicts (39%) by 2013.¹⁸ Religious violence has expanded across geographic space too. In 1989, it spanned six countries, including the Libyan-backed Islamic Legion in Chad, the Sikh insurgency in India, and the conflict between the Soviet Union and various self-proclaimed mujahideen in Afghanistan. By 2013, religious violence surfaced in twenty-three countries as diverse as Myanmar, The Philippines, Nigeria, Iraq and Syria (see Figure 3.1).

3.1 RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE ACROSS DIFFERENT TYPES OF CONFLICTS

Particularly since the 9/11 attacks, religious violence has proliferated the global sphere. Prior to 2001, it predominantly featured in domestic conflicts between state and non-state actors.¹⁹ Since, however, it has evolved and now appears in different forms and guises (see Figure 3.2). As a result, only 19% of all ‘religious conflicts’ are fought between a government of state and a non-state actor in 2013, a decrease of 39% compared to 1989. The other 81% is comprised of non-state actor conflicts, internationalized internal armed conflicts or one-sided attacks. One of the most conspicuous trends in religious violence is the fusion of different types of conflicts, which were formally distinct. Just like the local is no

17 In a comparison between religious and non-religious ethnic conflicts using the *Minorities At Risk* (MAR) dataset, Jonathan Fox shows that religious conflicts have become more volatile and have claimed more fatalities since the 1980s. For further reading, see: Jonathan Fox, “The Rise of Religious Nationalism and Conflict: Ethnic Conflict and Revolutionary Wars, 1945-2001”, 724-727.

18 Our findings are corroborated by Jonathan Fox who uses another measurement and looks at a different time period, see “The Rise of Religious Nationalism and Conflict: Ethnic Conflict and Revolutionary Wars.”, 726-727.

19 Pre-9/11, well-known conflicts include the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) and Islamic Salvation Army (AIS) in Algeria from 1992 to roughly the year 2000. Moreover, it includes the violent clashes between Muslims and Hindus from 1989-1993, the war between Hezbollah and the South Lebanon Army (SLA) from 1992 and 2000 and the conflict between Hezbollah and Israel between 1990 and 1999.

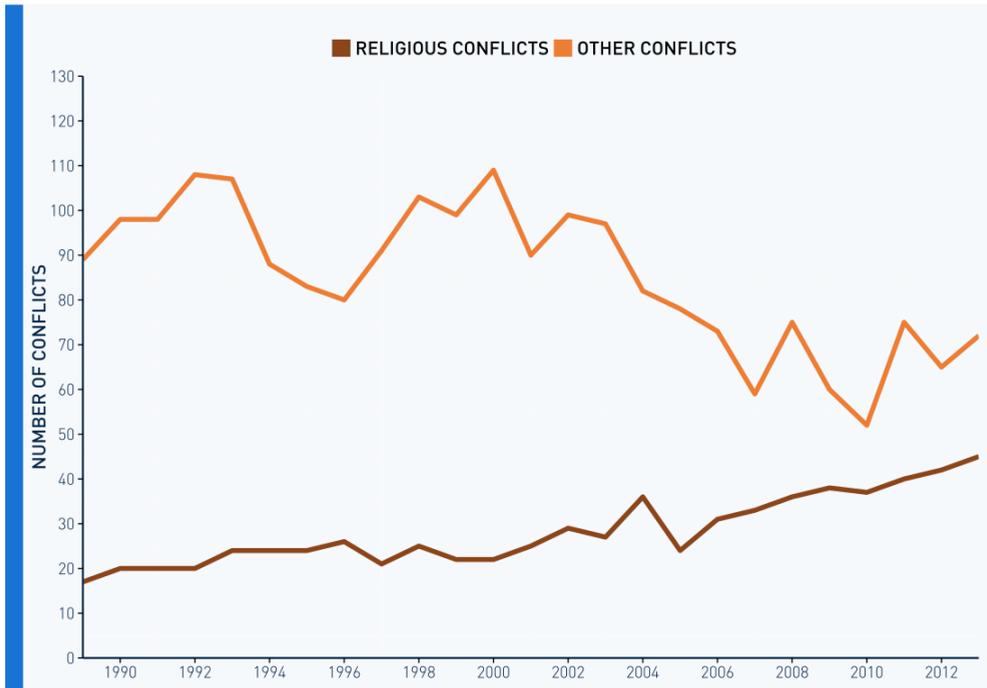


FIGURE 3.1: DISTRIBUTION OF RELIGIOUS AND NON-RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS, 1989-2013

longer strictly local, the international is no longer purely international. Violent groups fight their struggles or wage their wars at multiple levels that transcend national borders. In addition to highlighting an expanding geographic reach of violent extremist groups, it is also emblematic of their ability to bundle a variety of motives under one banner.

Of the 19% **religious internal armed conflicts** (graph: blue color) in 2013, most conflicts occurred in Asia or the Middle East. Whereas the conflict between the Pakistani Taleban and the Pakistani government had been the most intense internal armed conflict until 2012, by far the most deadly internal armed conflict resulted from clashes between IS and the Iraqi government in 2013. Other conflicts include the on-going struggle of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Movement and the government of the Philippines, the continuation of the Patani insurgency in South-Thailand, and the conflict between the government of Russia and the Forces of the Caucasus Emirate in Chechnya.

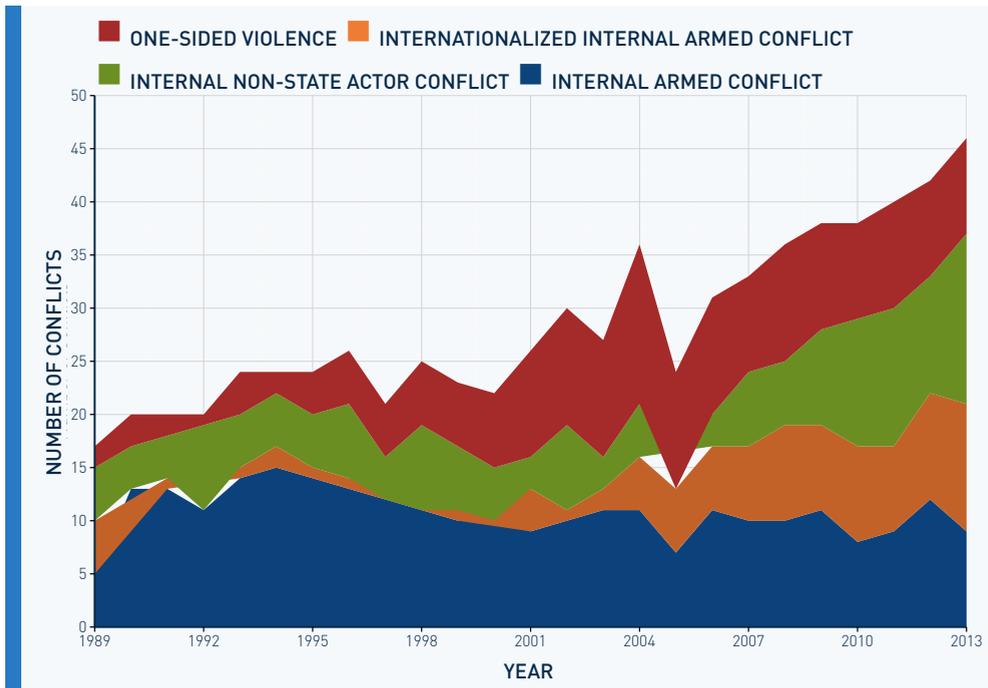


FIGURE 3.2: NUMBER OF RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS BY CONFLICT TYPOLOGY, 1989-2013

Principally, religious conflicts have surged in the form of **internationalized internal armed conflict** (graph: orange color), which often involve a large number of participants, including foreign states, and may extend into several countries. Examples over the past decade include the struggle of the Afghan government and Western states against militant groups as Hizb-i Islami-yi in Afghanistan; the Iraqi government and Western states against Al-Mahdi Army and Ansar Al-Islam in Iraq as well as the current coalition against the IS. Recent examples include the overthrowing of the government of the Central African Republic by the Seleka, as well as the actions taken by Niger and Cameroon in joining Nigeria in the fight against Boko Haram.²⁰ Not only states, but also individuals are responsible for the internationalization of such conflicts. Foreign

²⁰ Among others, see: Al Jazeera. "Cameroon Army Frees Boko Haram Hostages - Al Jazeera English." Accessed February 23, 2015. <http://bit.ly/1sUPk7j>, Siddhartha Mitter. "The Widening War Against Boko Haram." The Daily Beast, February 23, 2015. <http://thebea.st/1Emyfqf>, VOA News. "Nigerian Military Retakes Key Town from Boko Haram." VOA. Accessed February 23, 2015. <http://bit.ly/1zzcn5p>.

fighters travel abroad to partake in previously domestic conflicts, often further polarizing already diametrically opposed societies.²¹

Internal non-state actor conflict (graph: color green) involving religious actors has increased from just 5 in 1989 to 16 in 2013. The Islamic State is fighting, sometimes alongside but more often against, the alliance of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), Jabhat al-Nusra li al-Sham and the Mish'al-at-Tammu Brigade while together they fight the Democratic Union Party (PYD) in Syria.²² Lesser known examples include the moderate paramilitary Sufi group Ahlu Sunna Waljamaca, which has been in conflict with radical groups like Al-Shabaab in Somalia for several years and the group known as the Arrow Boys in South Sudan and Uganda, which fights the Lord's Resistance Army. Feuds between religious non-state actors – which include ad-hoc skirmishes between Hindus and Muslims in India and clashes between ethno-religious clans such as the Banya and Hausa in Cameroon – are becoming more frequent too.

Moreover, one-sided attacks, or **one-sided religious violence** (graph: color red) against civilians have become commonplace both within and across national borders. Actors, such as the *Lord's Resistance Army* (LRA) in Uganda, the *Vishva Hindu Parishad* (VHP) in India, and the Islamic Patani insurgents in south-Thailand, have resorted to terrorizing local populations through bombings and other forms of assaults. The internationalization of one-sided religious violence manifests itself particularly in the 'globalization of Jihad'. Epitomized by the burning towers of the World Trade Center in New York in 2001, international one-sided religious violence has manifested itself in acts perpetrated by organized non-state actors groups such as *Boko Haram* in neighboring countries, and the *Mungiki* in Kenya.²³

21 Thomas Hegghammer. "The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters: Islam and the Globalization of Jihad." *International Security* 35, no. 3 (2010): 53–94. doi:10.1162/ISEC_a_00023.

22 Svensson (2013) also observes this trend among religious groups in the MENA region. For further reading, see: Isak Svensson. "One God, Many Wars: Religious Dimensions of Armed Conflict in the Middle East and North Africa." *Civil Wars* 15, no. 4 (December 1, 2013): 411–30, 421

23 Isak Svensson. "One God, Many Wars: Religious Dimensions of Armed Conflict in the Middle East and North Africa.", 421

3.2 RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE IN A GEOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE

Over time, religious violence has increased in nearly every region, both in number of events and in number of fatalities (see Figure 3.3, Figure 3.4 and Figure 3.5). Even by our own conservative estimates, fatalities of religious violence surged dramatically across the world. In 1989, 7,116 people fell prey as a result of religious violence. By 2013, this figure had increased to 21,000, an increase of roughly 195%. The UCDP coding protocol – which we rely on – is extremely strict and allows (religious) violent actors to be identified only on the basis of hard evidence.²⁴ Currently, the lack of information²⁵ and the flurry of actors active in Syria (which the UCDP estimates to be up to 1,200) render it difficult to construct reliable, accurate and up-to-date data for the Syrian conflict.²⁶ In due time, the UCDP will likely revisit ongoing conflicts, including the Syrian one, once more information has become available. For some regions, including the Middle East and Central Africa, revised fatality numbers are likely to be substantially higher.

Religious violence appears on the fault lines of where major religious groups meet, both across and within religions, including Christian-vs-Muslims, Hindus-vs-Muslims, Muslims-vs-Buddhists, and Shi'ites-vs-Sunnis (in no specific order). These fault lines more often than not cut through national borders, and roughly run through from Nigeria through the Central African Republic on to Uganda and South Sudan where Christians and Muslims clash. Further eastwards Hindus and Muslims confront each other in India, Muslims and Buddhists in Myanmar, and Muslims and Christians in Indonesia and the Philippines. Yet, overall, most of the religious violence is intra-religious violence, with the violent escalation of the Sunni-Shiite schism in the Middle East and the violence in Pakistan and Afghanistan as prime examples (and this has been so

24 UCDP. "Complexities of Coding Syria." Accessed February 23, 2015. <http://bit.ly/1a4Czio>. For example, UCDP researchers have estimated the total number of fatalities resulting from the Syrian civil war to range somewhere between 43,000 and 60,000 fatalities, whereas other estimates double or triple that number. Similarly, most of these fatalities have been subscribed to fighting between the 'government of Syria' and the umbrella term 'Syrian Insurgents', with only known groups such as the *Islamic State*, *Jabhat Al-Nusra* and the *Democratic Union Party* (PYD) showing up as individual actors, and the fatalities resulting from the religious actors participating in the conflict are estimated at a mere 300.

25 On this point, see: Jay Ulfelder. "No One Stayed to Count the Bodies." Dart-Throwing Chimp. Accessed February 24, 2015. <http://bit.ly/1L6npEL>.

26 UCDP. "Complexities of Coding Syria." esp. 1-2

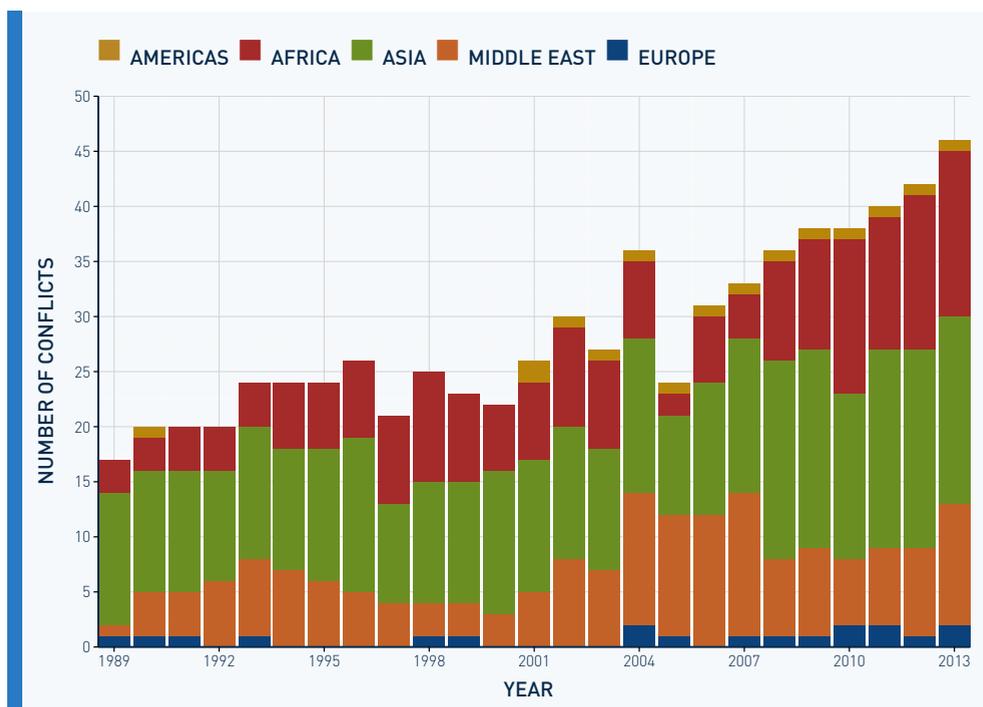


FIGURE 3.3: NUMBER OF RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS BY REGION, 1989-2013

for at least half a century).²⁷ Many conflict zones are also hotspots of religious violence, suggesting that religious grievances not only fuel conflict but also that existing conflict structures can subsume and further exacerbate pre-existing religious grievances.

The most explosive growth of conflicts featuring religious violence has taken place in Africa. In 1989, only 3 out of 17 religious conflicts occurred in Africa, a number that increased to 15 out of 46 conflicts by 2013. Similarly, fatality estimates of religious violence in Africa have increased from just below 1,000 in 1989 to roughly 4,300 in 2013. Religious violence in Nigeria has been

27 see also Jonathan Fox. "The Rise of Religion and the Fall of the Civilization Paradigm as Explanations for Intra-State Conflict." *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 20, no. 3 (September 1, 2007): 361–82. doi:10.1080/09557570701574022., 365 & 376.

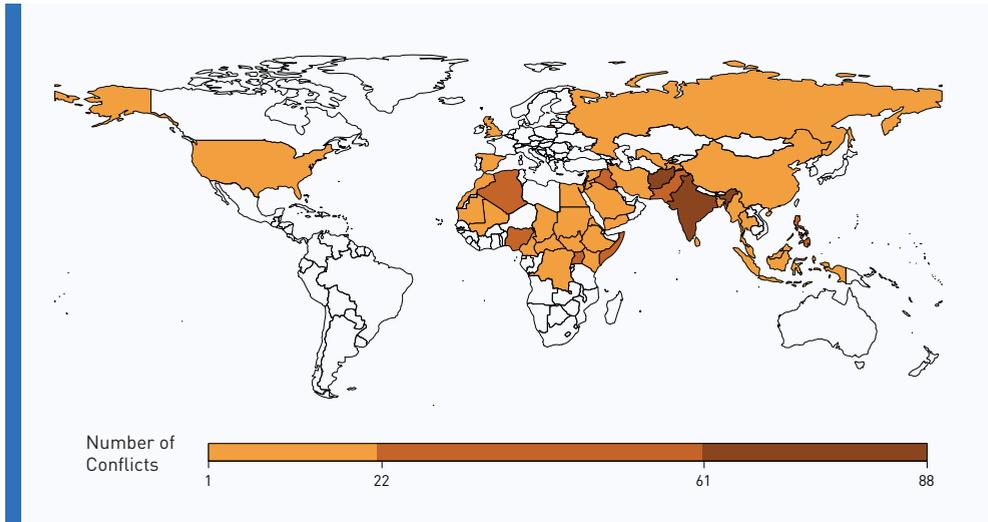


FIGURE 3.4: GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS, 1989-2013

particularly well-documented,²⁸ and accounts for a large share. Actors such as the Hausa, Fulani, Tarok and Yoruba clans, who are divided along a complicated mix of religious and ethnic cleavages, have been increasingly at odds with one another since the early aughts. Other examples involve actors such as Al-Shabaab in Somalia and the Lord’s Resistance Army in Uganda and bordering countries. In the Central African Republic there have also been repeated episodes of large-scale killing in which Christians and Muslims targeted each other.²⁹

28 Since the advent of democracy in 1998, Nigeria has been plagued by both ethnic and religious violence. Among other factors, scholars cite the prevalence of weak and corrupt institutions, oppression of minorities and nepotism as potential factors that increase religious fundamentalism and extremism in both Christian and Muslim communities. For further reading, see: Matthias Basedau, Johannes Vüllers, and Peter Körner. “What Drives Inter-Religious Violence? Lessons from Nigeria, Côte d’Ivoire, and Tanzania.” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 36, no. 10 (October 1, 2013): 857–79. doi:10.1080/1057610X.2013.823761, 861-862 and I.T. Sampson. “African Journal on Conflict Resolution Vol. 12, No. 1, 2012 | Africa Portal,” 2012. <http://www.africaportal.org/dspace/articles/african-journal-conflict-resolution-vol-12-no-1-2012>, 113-120

29 United Nations. The International Commission of Inquiry on the Central African Republic: Final Report. United Nations, December 22, 2014. <http://bit.ly/1zCpMd4>.

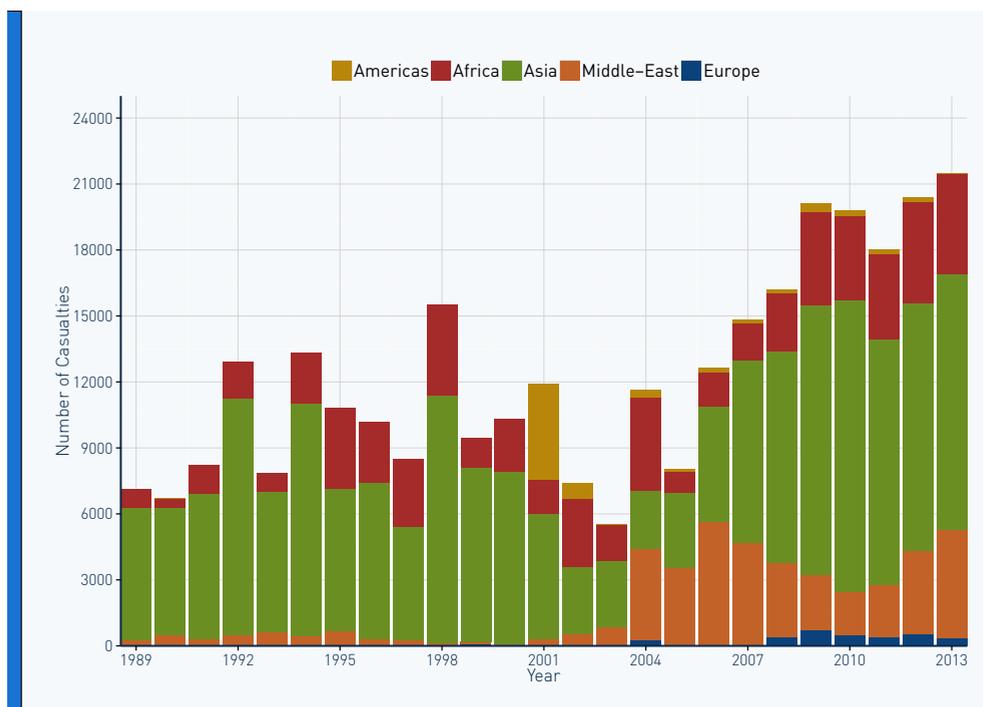


FIGURE 3.5: FATALITIES OF RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE BY REGION, 1989-2013

Beyond Africa, Asia – Afghanistan, India and Pakistan in particular – has suffered from an increasingly violent religious atmosphere that encompasses all sorts of violent conflict, both internal and internationalised and both one sided and non-state actors targeting one another. Afghanistan has a long history of violence committed by religiously motivated actors, even prior to the rise of the mujahideen in the 1980s. More recently, the military campaign against the Taleban in the post-9/11 era spurred the rise of religious actors in the country. Over the past ten years, the government of Afghanistan has had to simultaneously fight groups such as the Taleban, Al-Qaeda, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and Hizb-i-Islami Afghanistan, with no end to the conflict in sight. India’s vast number of formally and informally organized religious groups frequently clash with both the Indian government and with each other. Examples include the short but intense skirmishes between the government and the Students Islamic Movement of India (SILF), the conflict in Kashmir, and ad-hoc confrontations between Hindu, Christian, Muslim and Sikh communities. Pakistan has witnessed an increase in fatalities from ‘only’ 25 persons in 1989 to an astonishing 2747 people in 2013.

Following the destabilization of Iraq, Libya, Yemen and Syria, the Middle East is currently host to a multitude of conflicts. In the current power vacuum, various religious groups are situated opposite one another. The religious extremist group IS is “bulldozing borders” between Syria and Iraq, having attracted foreign fighters from over 80 countries to join its ranks.³⁰ It is fighting not only the governments of Syria and Iraq but also an international coalition of dozens of countries and other non-state actors. Libya has descended into chaos in the power vacuum left in the wake of Muamar Khaddafi’s fall. Regional powers provide material support to secular and religious groups fighting for control over the remnants of Libyan territory.³¹ These conflicts fuse local, regional and global grievances and opportunity structures in an explosive melting pot that illustrates the crossover between internal, internationalized internal, and non-state actor armed conflict.

While religious violence has surged in the Middle-East, Africa and Asia, occurrences in Europe and North America have been largely limited to instances of one-sided violence with the 9/11 attacks in New York (2001), the 11-M attacks in Madrid (2004), the 7/7 bombings in London (2005), and various ‘Lone Wolf’ attacks. Events in the latter category seldom crossed the 25 deaths threshold. Thus far, European societies have proved resilient in the face of violent extremism. Extremists have gathered in very small groups and have not been able to mobilize large numbers of recruits to their cause and grow into sizeable militarized movements.³² However, the unstable situation in Europe’s periphery, as well as the attacks in Paris and Denmark in January and February 2015, does not necessarily bode well for what will come next.

3.3 RELIGION AND VIOLENCE

Contrary perhaps to popular ideas in the West, during the latter half of the twentieth century (between 1965-2001) Christians were involved in a larger number of revolutionary wars, ethnic wars, and mass killings in comparison to

30 VICE News. Bulldozing the Border Between Iraq and Syria: The Islamic State (Part 5), 2014. <http://bit.ly/1LyQ9pL>.

31 Jon Lee Anderson. “The Unravelling: In a Failing State, an Anti-Islamist General Mounts a Divisive Campaign.” *The New Yorker*, February 16, 2015. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/02/23/unravelling>.

32 Monty G. Marshall and Monty G. Marshall Benjamin R. Cole Cole, *Global Report 2014 - Conflict, Governance, and State Fragility*, 15, accessed February 19, 2015, <http://www.systemicpeace.org/vlibrary/GlobalReport2014.pdf>. 8-11,

adherents of other faiths.³³ Christians also, however, outnumbered the second largest religious group (Muslims) by a factor of 1.75:1.³⁴ Controlled for population size, the level of involvement of Muslims was higher both for all conflict types and for religious conflicts over that time period. Other faiths score lower, while Christians fall somewhere in the middle.³⁵ The last 25 years has shown a shift towards more violence perpetuated by Muslims, which now accounts for the bulk of the religious violence both in absolute and in relative terms.³⁶ Religiously inspired violence perpetrated by Muslims surged in the aftermath of the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, and the subsequent civil wars in Iraq and Syria. In the Middle East, primarily Afghanistan and Pakistan, the bulk of religious violence is perpetrated by Muslims against other Muslims, both Sunni-Sunni and Sunni-Shi'ite violence.³⁷ In fact, most of the religious violence is intra-religious in nature and has been so according to various measurements.³⁸ Religious conflicts span many nations and religions, and religious violence is not limited to areas where Islam is the predominant religion. Our study documents religious conflict or violence in areas such as India,³⁹ the broader South-East Asia region,⁴⁰ and the African continent.⁴¹ Some, warning of the danger of stereotyping religions, reject the notion that 'Islam, or any religion for that matter, makes ethno-religious

33 Jonathan Fox, "ARE SOME RELIGIONS MORE CONFLICT-PRONE THAN OTHERS?," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 16, no. 1/2 (April 1, 2004): 90–91. Jonathan Fox, "Is Islam More Conflict Prone than Other Religions? A Cross-sectional Study of Ethnoreligious Conflict," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 6, no. 2 (June 1, 2000): 15, doi:10.1080/13537110008428593.

34 Jonathan Fox (2007) The rise of religion and the fall of the civilization paradigm as explanations for intrastate conflict, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 20:3, 361-382, DOI: 10.1080/09557570701574022, 365

35 Fox, "ARE SOME RELIGIONS MORE CONFLICT-PRONE THAN OTHERS?," 96.

36 Ibid.

37 Monty G. Marshall and Monty G. Marshall Benjamin R. Cole Cole, *Global Report 2014 - Conflict, Governance, and State Fragility*, 15

38 Ibid. see also Jonathan Fox, "The Rise of Religion and the Fall of the Civilization Paradigm as Explanations for Intra-State Conflict," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 20, no. 3 (September 1, 2007): 375–376, doi:10.1080/09557570701574022.

39 Erica Field, Matthew Levinson, Rohini Pande, and Sujata Visaria. "Segregation, Rent Control, and Riots: The Economics of Religious Conflict in an Indian City." *The American Economic Review* 98, no. 2 (May 1, 2008): 505–10.

40 Eugene K. B. Tan. "Keeping God in Place: The Management of Religion in Singapore." In *Religious Diversity in Singapore*. Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008.

41 Matthias Basedau, Georg Strüver, Johannes Vüllers, and Tim Wegenast. *Do Religious Factors Impact Armed Conflict? Empirical Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa*. GIGA Working Paper Series. GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies, 2011. <https://ideas.repec.org/p/gig/wpaper/168.html>.

minorities more conflict prone'.⁴² Social scientists working for the US government sponsored Political Instability Task Force have found many of the factors commonly associated with the outbreak of violence to be present in those regions where such violence is rife,⁴³ which brings us to the next question: what drives religious violence?

42 Jonathan Fox, "Is Islam More Conflict Prone than Other Religions? A Cross-sectional Study of Ethnoreligious Conflict," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 6, no. 2 (June 1, 2000): 16, doi:10.1080/13537110008428593.

43 Monty G. Marshall, *Fragility, Instability, and the Failure of States: Assessing Sources of Systemic Risk* (Council on Foreign Relations - Center for Preventive Action, 2008), <http://on.cfr.org/1DIKaOL>.

4 PATHWAYS TO RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE

Religious teachings (and typically selective readings thereof) are increasingly used as rallying instruments to mobilize people to commit acts of violence. But religion has also served as a platform of peace for many societies around the world. Karen Armstrong, for example, observes:

In religious history, the struggle for peace has been just as important as the holy war. Religious people have found all kinds of ingenious methods of dealing with the assertive machismo of the reptilian brain, curbing violence, and building respectful, life-enhancing communities.⁴⁴

As such, in order to understand when, why and how people resort to violent force in the name of God, Allah, Buddha or others, it is first and foremost relevant to consider the complex dynamics underlying it. The plethora of scholarly work published on this topic does not provide any definitive answers but does offer valuable insights.

Drivers of religious violence should not be understood in a deterministic cause-and-effect mind-set. Instead it is best served by understanding pathways leading to different forms of religious violence. Religious violence is more likely to appear in societies where religious differences between societal groups combines with additional intergroup cleavages including horizontal socio-economic inequalities, practices of exclusion and repression, and geographic distances. The politicization of such interreligious group differences leads to subsequent polarization, which again increases the likelihood of violence. Finally the presence or incremental emergence or the sudden entrance of extremist actors can act as a further trigger (see Figure 4.1).

44 Armstrong, Karen (2014), *Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence*, 44

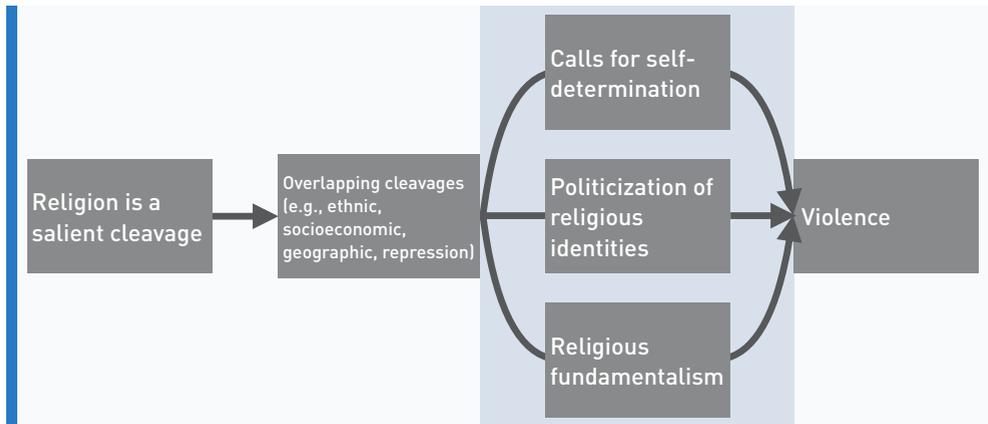


FIGURE 4.1: PATHWAYS TO RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE

4.1 SALIENT RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES AND OVERLAPPING CLEAVAGES

Unsurprisingly, in many societies plagued by religious violence, religion features as a salient societal cleavage that is not bridged by an overarching national identity.⁴⁵ Populations of such societies are divided along religious lines. These divisions tend to be magnified because of an overemphasis of in-group similarities and out-group differences. Complex social structures are often reduced to simple means of recognizing ‘other’ groups,⁴⁶ while past grievances continue to invoke images of historic injustices. Such dynamics can ultimately facilitate escalation into a spiral of violence.⁴⁷ However, the mere existence of multiple religions in one society does not spark the onset of religious violence. There exists evidence that the likelihood of violence increases when religious cleavages are accompanied by grievances rooted in horizontal socio-economic

45 Syeda Haider. “The Specter Of Intolerance: Understanding Religious Violence in Pakistan.” *Honors Scholar Theses*, May 5, 2014. http://digitalcommons.uconn.edu/srhonors_theses/377.

46 Richard D. Ashmore, Lee Jussim, and David Wilder *Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict, and Conflict Reduction*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2001.

47 Matthias Basedau, Johannes Vüllers, and Peter Körner. “What Drives Inter-Religious Violence? Lessons from Nigeria, Côte d’Ivoire, and Tanzania.”, 858

inequalities,⁴⁸ practices of discrimination and repression⁴⁹ and/or geographical clustering of religious minorities, such that some estimates assert that civil wars are 12 times more likely to occur in societies with overlapping cleavages.⁵⁰ Horizontal inequalities refer to ‘persistent inequalities between culturally defined groups’ that allow for little social mobility.⁵¹ When horizontal inequalities and religious cleavages interact, the risk of conflict roughly triples.⁵² Such conflicts often appear in the form of *informally organized non-state actor* (‘communal’) religious violence.⁵³

Indonesia is one country where horizontal inequalities have been paired with other cleavages of religious and ethnic nature, and where horizontal inequalities exist along similar lines as the demarcation of religious groups.⁵⁴

Discrimination against religious groups often leads to grievance formation due to, for example, a persistent lack of access to resources or the inability to address grievances through political or legal means.⁵⁵ This occurs in many forms and places, but practices in India provide a clear example. As recent as February 2015, Christian churches in India were attacked with local police forces reportedly unwilling to protect religious minorities in question.⁵⁶

48 Gudrun Østby. “Polarization, Horizontal Inequalities and Violent Civil Conflict.” *Journal of Peace Research* 45, no. 2 (March 1, 2008): 143–62. doi:10.1177/0022343307087169. Others find that horizontal inequalities and large wealth gaps between the rich and the poor are more likely to spark conflict. See Lars-Erik Cederman, Nils B. Weidmann, and Kristian Skrede Gleditsch. “Horizontal Inequalities and Ethnonationalist Civil War: A Global Comparison.” *American Political Science Review* 105, no. 03 (August 2011): 478–95. doi:10.1017/S0003055411000207.

49 Jonathan Fox. “Counting the Causes and Dynamics of Ethnoreligious Violence.” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 4, no. 3 (December 1, 2003): 119–44. doi:10.1080/14690760412331326260

50 Joel Selway, and Joshua R. Gubler. “Horizontal Equality, Crosscutting Cleavages and Civil War.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 2 (2012): 206–32. doi:10.1177/0022002711431416.

51 Frances Stewart, ed. *Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict: Understanding Group Violence in Multiethnic Societies*. Basingstoke England; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 4-5

52 Gudrun Østby. *Horizontal Inequalities, Political Environment, and Civil Conflict: Evidence from 55 Developing Countries, 1986-2003*. The World Bank. Accessed February 24, 2015. <http://bit.ly/1vvd2sb>. esp. 16-17

53 Need to add ref.

54 Luca Mancini. “Horizontal Inequality and Communal Violence: Evidence from Indonesian Districts,” 2008, 106–35.

55 Jonathan Fox. “The Effects of Religious Discrimination on Ethno-Religious Protest and Rebellion.” *Journal of Conflict Studies* 20, no. 2 (August 8, 2000). <http://journals.hil.unb.ca/index.php/JCS/article/view/4310>.

56 DNA India, ‘Rajnath Singh on Delhi Church Attack: Religious Discrimination Will not be Tolerated’, URL: <http://goo.gl/POBaPH>, published on: 05-02-2015, retrieved: 05-02-2015.

The curtailment of religious freedom through state repression is strongly linked to periods of violence, although the causality is likely to run in both directions.⁵⁷ One striking observation, however, is that 45% of all states with high government restrictions on religious freedom experience some form of violence, whereas states that do not curtail religious freedom experience little to no such conflict.⁵⁸ Here, one example is the tight religious legislation and favoritism in Thailand, where the government exercises executive control over religious practices and actively represses Muslim communities.⁵⁹ As such, discrimination of religious groups and curtailment of religious freedoms further enhance in-group cohesion and increase the salience of in-out group distinctions.⁶⁰ Many societies in which religious practices are curtailed in some way suffer from violence (compare Figure 4.2 and Figure 3.4 on p.23).

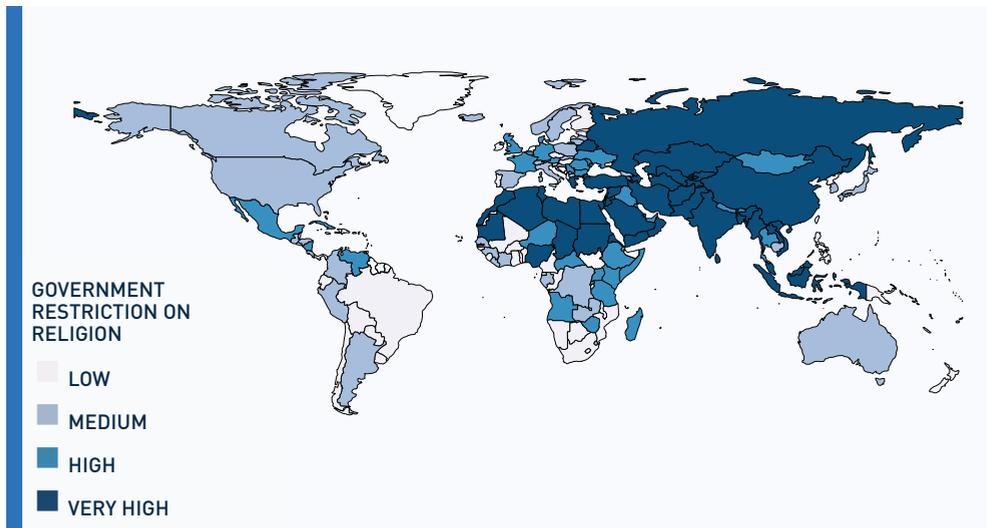


FIGURE 4.2: GOVERNMENT RESTRICTIONS ON RELIGION. SOURCE: PEW RESEARCH CENTRE

57 Roger Finke, and Robert R. Martin. "Religious Freedom and Conflict: A Review of the Evidence." Accessed February 17, 2015. <http://bit.ly/19QSDUZ>,

58 Roger Finke, and Robert R. Martin. "Religious Freedom and Conflict: A Review of the Evidence."

59 Ibid.

60 Matthias Basedau, Georg Strüver, Johannes Vüllers, and Tim Wegenast. *Do Religious Factors Impact Armed Conflict? Empirical Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa*, 753-756 ; Matthias Basedau, Johannes Vüllers, and Peter Körner. "What Drives Inter-Religious Violence? Lessons from Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, and Tanzania.", 861 ; Joshua R. Gubler, and Joel Sawat Selway. "Horizontal Inequality, Crosscutting Cleavages, and Civil War." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 2 (April 1, 2012): 206-32. doi:10.1177/0022002711431416., 207-213

Religious minority groups concentrated in a particular geographic location may wish to secede and create a state of their own or to acquire more autonomy from a central government. Calls for self-determination are more likely to be followed by violence in the presence of a combination of strong religious cleavages and grievances on the part of a religious minority. This often results in both one-sided attacks on civilians and state targets (e.g. *East Turkestan Islamic Movement* in China), as well as internal armed conflict between the secessionist movement and the national government.⁶¹ These grievances concern a history of marginalization and lack of access to power for the minority group,⁶² and the failure of the state to accommodate the wishes of minorities who vie for some form of self-determination.⁶³ Furthermore, calls for self-determination made by religious groups have been shown to be more resilient over time than similar demands made by other types of groups. As an example, no religious actor in India who also claimed self-determination of some kind between 1952 and 2002 fundamentally changed their mind on the issue of self-determination. In contrast, the mean numbers of years for non-religious groups to modify their calls for self-determination is roughly 12 years.⁶⁴

4.2 THE POLITICIZATION OF RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES

Tensions between groups are further fueled when religious differences are politicized by public figures such as political and/or religious leaders in public discourse. The politicization of religious conflict involves the gradual polarization of differences between groups on the basis of attributes, such as cultural practices, languages or clothing style. This provides a platform for key political or religious figures to mobilize groups along the lines of a salient and

61 Jonathan Fox (2010), "Counting the Causes and Dynamics of Ethnoreligious Violence", 125 ; Jonathan Fox. "The Saliency of Religious Issues in Ethnic Conflicts: A large-N Study." *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 3, no. 3 (September 1, 1997): 1–19. doi:10.1080/13537119708428508, 17.

62 Jamail A. Kamlian. "Ethnic and Religious Conflict in Southern Philippines: A Discourse on Self- Determination, Political Autonomy and Conflict Resolution," 2003. <http://bit.ly/1BovyUu>. ; Arie Vaserman, and Ram Ginat. "National, Territorial or Religious Conflict? The Case of Nagorno-Karabakh." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 17, no. 4 (January 1, 1994): 345–62. doi:10.1080/10576109408435961.

63 Stefan Wolff. "Complex Power-Sharing and the Centrality of Territorial Self-Governance in Contemporary Conflict Settlements." *Ethnopolitics* 8, no. 1 (March 1, 2009): 27–45. doi:10.1080/17449050902738853, 28

64 Giovanni Capoccia, Lawrence Saez, De Rooij, and Eline A. *When State Responses Fail: Religious Fundamentalism and Domestic Territorial Challenges in India 1952-2002*. SSRN Scholarly Paper. Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, 2010. <http://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=1642293>. esp. 18-24

visible religious cleavage.⁶⁵ It can then also extend to the allocation of resources among different religious groups.⁶⁶ Polarization processes are often accompanied by increasing hostilities (short of actual violence) between different religious groups on the basis of such attributes (see Figure 4.3).⁶⁷

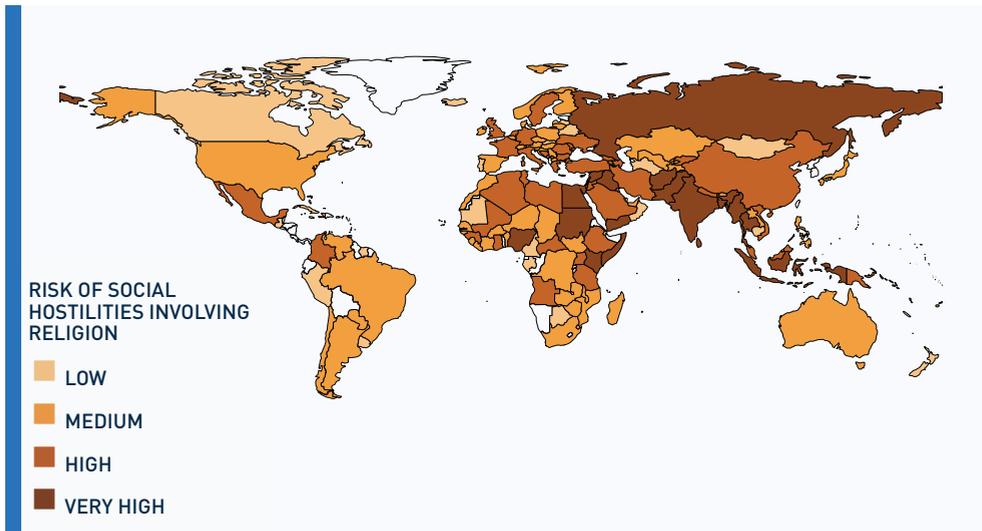


FIGURE 4.3: RISK OF SOCIAL HOSTILITIES INVOLVING RELIGION, 2010.

Social hostilities involving religion tend to overlap with the occurrences of religious violence (compare Figure 4.3 with Figure 3.4 on p.13). Although the causal arrow here points both ways with hostilities leading violence and violence leading leaving behind hostilities, we can discern that Asia, the Middle East and Northern Africa in particular are at risk from escalating social hostilities; areas with a notoriously high number of ‘fragile states’.⁶⁸ The gradual polarization of

65 Evan S. Lieberman, and Perna Singh. “The Institutional Origins of Ethnic Violence.” *Comparative Politics* 45, no. 1 (October 1, 2012): 1–24. doi:10.5129/001041512802822860, 3

66 Evan S. Lieberman and Perna Singh. ‘The Institutional Origins of Ethnic Violence’, p.2-5 ; Yasemin Akbaba, and Zeynep Taydas. “Does Religious Discrimination Promote Dissent? A Quantitative Analysis.” *Ethnopolitics* 10, no. 3–4 (November 1, 2011): 271–95. doi:10.1080/17449057.2011.561988.

67 The social hostilities index measures social hostilities involving religion at the end of 2012. It includes measures such as the use of violence or the threat of violence against religious minorities, and divides countries up in one of four categories. For further reading, see: Alan Cooperman, Brian J. Grim, and Erin O’Connell. *Religious Hostilities Reach Six-Year High*. Pew Research Center, January 14, 2014. <http://pewrsr.ch/17Syc0N>.

68 Monty G. Marshall and Monty G. Marshall Benjamin R. Cole Cole, *Global Report 2014 - Conflict, Governance, and State Fragility*, 14

religious groups – and the accumulation of hostilities over time – may occur through the gradual diffusion of ideas and practices over time,⁶⁹ but also through deliberate policies of the governing elites.⁷⁰ In the latter case, religion provides a convenient mobilization tool for elites who feel marginalized and who attempt to alter the domestic balance of power.⁷¹

The support of locals towards specific religious views is heavily influenced by authoritative figures, such as religious and political leaders. When such figures frame conflicts as being ‘religious’, they provide a platform for the population to support the conflict.⁷² These dynamics can also occur within religious groups themselves,⁷³ as different fractions start competing against one another for access to resources, influence and political power.⁷⁴ Ultimately, the causal order can be reversed and political organizations may adopt religious rhetoric *after* engaging in violence as a means to retain legitimacy and to regain the support from those alienated by violence.⁷⁵

4.3 ENTER THE EXTREMISTS

The presence, emergence or sudden entrance of fundamentalist or extremist groups is a crucial factor in politicising religious differences and igniting conflict between religious communities. Prominent examples include actors which are home-grown (e.g., *Boko Haram* in Nigeria and young generation of extremists in Western Europe), which have relocated to an area with latent religious

69 Lieberman and Singh (2012), ‘The Institutional Origins of Ethnic Violence’, p.3

70 Political leaders may choose to do so for reasons of self-interest. For example, Lieberman and Singh argue that ‘Political elites act strategically to advance their interests, but depending upon competing ideas of cultural difference, prevailing norms of institutionalization, geographic dispersion of traits, and other contingent factors, they make choices to advance their interests’. There is a rich literature that exemplifies such political motivations in the case of ethnic violence. For example, Daniel Posner shows how institutional design in the form of electoral systems influences the incentives of political elites in politicizing ethnic identities. For further reading, see Daniel N. Posner. “The Political Salience of Cultural Difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas Are Allies in Zambia and Adversaries in Malawi.” *American Political Science Review* null, no. 04 (November 2004): 529–45. doi:10.1017/S0003055404041334.

71 Basedau et al, ‘Do Religious Factors Impact Armed Conflict? Empirical Evidence From Sub-Saharan Africa’, 756

72 Basedau et al. . “What Drives Inter-Religious Violence? Lessons from Nigeria, Côte d’Ivoire, and Tanzania.”

73 Joel Sawat Selway. “The Measurement of Cross-Cutting Cleavages and Other Multidimensional Cleavage Structures.” *Political Analysis* 19, no. 1 (December 21, 2011): 48–65.

74 Alexander De Juan. “The Role of Intra-Religious Conflicts in Intrastate Wars.” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 0, no. 0 (May 28, 2014): 1–19. doi:10.1080/09546553.2013.856781.

75 Matthew Isaacs. *Does Religion Cause Violence? An Examination of Ethnic Mobilization, 1960-2012*. SSRN Scholarly Paper. Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, 2014. <http://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=2454214>, 27-29.

conflict (*Taleban* in Pakistan⁷⁶), or which have returned from conflict zones to their home countries (e.g., all over the world). Individuals typically have fewer inhibitions to engage in extreme acts of violence when they are member of fundamentalist groups with institutionalized cultures of violence.⁷⁷

Individuals who have embraced extremist beliefs tend to *re-act* to the rise of secularism and modernity, as well as to other interpretations of faith, which they perceive to be threatening. They are likely to choose violence over raising their voice if other venues for change are closed, if they feel betrayed by political elites or if they feel their identity is being threatened.⁷⁸ But there is no specific, one-size-fits-all description of which individuals are more likely to radicalize and turn into violent religious extremists. Various in depth studies published a decade ago have analyzed profiles of religiously inspired terrorists involved in attacks or plans for attacks on US and European targets. These studies identify a wide range of personal and situational characteristics, with as many similarities as differences among the subjects they scrutinise. They make clear that even within this pool of extremists, it is impossible to draw up one profile.⁷⁹ If anything, they find that social affiliation played a role in the mobilization and further radicalization of these actors – but that is almost a tautology. It is also likely that pathways to religious violence are likely to be contingent upon the cultural and social context in which they live. In the past few years, the most recent wave of religious extremists in Western European countries often stemmed from poorer socio-economic backgrounds and of second or third generation immigrant descent. But amongst their circles there are also

76 Syeda Haider, 'The Specter Of Intolerance: Understanding Religious Violence in Pakistan'; I.T. Sampson. 'Religious violence in Nigeria: Causal diagnoses and strategic recommendations to the state and religious communities', 113-120.

77 Michael D. Mumford, Katrina E. Bedell-Avers, Samuel T. Hunter, Jazmine Espejo, Dawn Eubanks, and Mary Shane Connelly. "Violence in Ideological and Non-Ideological Groups: A Quantitative Analysis of Qualitative Data." *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 38, no. 6 (June 1, 2008): 1521–61. doi:10.1111/j.1559-1816.2008.00358.x., 1550-1552

78 Heather Selma Gregg. "Three Theories of Religious Activism and Violence: Social Movements, Fundamentalists, and Apocalyptic Warriors." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 0, no. 0 (August 8, 2014): 1–23. doi:10.1080/09546553.2014.918879, 5-13 ; Mark Juergensmeyer. *Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges to the Secular State, from Christian Militias to Al Qaeda*. Rev Upd Ex edition. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009.

79 Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Edwin Bakker, *Jihadi Terrorists in Europe: Their Characteristics and the Circumstances in Which They Joined the Jihad* ; an Exploratory Study (Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 2006); Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill* (HarperCollins, 2004).

individuals that have grown up in more prosperous conditions in families, which in the Netherlands are described as ‘autochthonous’.⁸⁰ In short, there is no single root cause.⁸¹

Regardless of their background, fundamentalist religious actors are increasingly effective in mobilizing people around their cause. They rely on a combination of ‘old’ dissemination outlets (religious gatherings) and newer ones (e.g. social media) to spread their message. These forms of dissemination are instrumental in the transnationalization of local grievances and the spread of fundamentalist ideas. The transnationalization of such local grievances is one of the driving factors behind the globalization of Jihad. Where this was originally fueled by the rise of *wahhabi* Islam and by a ‘pan-Islamic’ discourse about Muslim solidarity, it gained renewed momentum in the 1980s Afghanistan war when the conflict was framed in light of external ‘threats’ to Islam.⁸² This process continued in the 1990s with the indignation over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the presence of US forces on Saudi Arabian territory that was host to the two holiest Islamic sites, and US support for autocratic and corrupt regimes throughout the Middle East.⁸³ Over the last decade the US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq and its failure to keep the peace after the war was won, has created a vacuum in which a new generation of religious extremists thrive. The growing allure of Jihad as a ‘thrilling cause and call to action that promises glory and esteem in the eyes of friends’ and an ‘egalitarian, equal-opportunity employer: fraternal, fast-breaking, glorious and cool’, has contributed to the surge in internationalized internal armed violence we are currently witnessing.⁸⁴

80 Algemene Inlichtingen - en veiligheidsdienst. Transformatie van het jihadisme in Nederland: Zwermdynamiek en nieuwe slagkracht. Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2014. <http://bit.ly/1A6UE4n>.

81 As poignantly argued by a senior US State Department Official in a series of tweets “No Single Root Cause, No Silver Bullet (with Images, Tweets) · AthertonKD,” *Storify*, accessed February 22, 2015, <https://storify.com/AthertonKD/stop-looking-for-root-causes>.

82 Thomas Hegghammer. “The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters: Islam and the Globalization of Jihad.” *International Security* 35, no. 3 (2010): 53–94. doi:10.1162/ISEC_a_00023.

83 Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2006), esp.154–161.

84 Atran, S. ‘Jihad’s Fatal Attraction’, URL: <http://goo.gl/OwYRRU>, published: 04-09-2014, retrieved: 06-09-2015.

5 HOW DOES RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE END?

Conflicts that feature religious elements typically last longer due to the intractability and inflexibility of religious demands.⁸⁵ The initial drivers of these conflicts are not necessarily dissimilar from those commonly associated with conflict. Once issues become attached with ‘sacred affect’, however, actors are willing to make greater sacrifices to attain their goals and may even be willing to die on their behalf. It is this religious dimension that makes religious violence so special and sets religious conflict apart from regular conflict. Religious violence does not continue eternally, however. An analysis of 37 armed conflicts with religious dimensions in Asia since 1946 found that 30 of them ‘have ended at least in the short term’, eight of which since 1989.⁸⁶ History does offer some insights about how the flames that stoked various forms of religious violence can either be attenuated or even gradually extinguish. We will address these two issues consecutively.

The historical record of religious flare-ups suggests a number of ways in which such conflicts can simmer down or even come to a temporary end. First, religious violence may stop when extremist groups are defeated militarily, even though it may be a rare occurrence and the long-term sustainability may be questionable. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam were defeated militarily by the Sri Lankan National Army in 2009. The *Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan* (IMU) and its successor, the *Islamic Jihad Union* (JIG), did not engage in peace negotiations with the national government and were ultimately defeated by security forces.⁸⁷ But pursuing a strategy aimed at total military defeat and submission of a religious extremist group typically causes immense collateral damage and may produce lingering resentment that can explode again at any moment in time. This increases rather than undermines the power of extremist

85 Svensson, I. (2007), ‘Fighting with Faith: Religion and Conflict Resolution in Civil Wars’; Pearce, S. (2006)

86 Svensson and Harding, 2011, 133-134

87 Svensson, I. & Harding, E. (2011), pp. 146-148 Although JIG is reportedly living on in Afghanistan.

groups to mobilize grievances around a common religious cause. Examples of when such a strategy backfired both in nationalized and internationalized contexts abound include, but are not limited to, the Philippines, Myanmar and Afghanistan. It is questionable but likely that Sri Lanka and Uzbekistan religious strategies backfired as well.

Second, religious violence has withered when the capabilities of religious groups were degraded to such an extent that they were no longer able to commit violent attacks. Although it is difficult to measure success in such situations, some observers point towards the US campaign against Al Qaeda as a successful example, arguing that repeated strikes at the senior leadership of the groups over the course of a decade degraded its ability to strike at overseas targets.⁸⁸ Other cases identified include the Indian government in its conflict with the Sikhs fighting for an independent Kalistan based on the Sikh religious identity in the 1980s and early 1990s.⁸⁹

Third, religious violence decreases when the main culprits responsible for the religious violence are physically separated and relocated to different territories (provinces, cities, neighborhoods) – whether by default or by design. Often the groups are separated by physical barriers – a wall or a fence – too. The fences in Belfast separating Protestants from Catholics and the walls dividing Shi-ite from Sunni neighborhoods have one thing in common: they have made it harder – if not impossible – for religious groups to target each other and have led to a decline in religious violence.⁹⁰

Fourth, religious violence ends when religious groups abandon the path of armed struggle thereby ending the cycle of religious violence. Reasons for why they do so vary. Key leaders outgrow the struggle whilst the rise of the younger generation introduces value dilution, or a ‘generational demise’ of values.⁹¹ This

88 http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/as-us-takes-on-the-islamic-state-al-qaeda-remains-degraded-but-not-defeated/2014/09/25/1f15c2c0-3eba-11e4-b0ea-8141703bbf6f_story.html

89 Svensson, I. & Harding, E. (2011), pp. 142

90 for an overview of walls, see: Élisabeth Vallet, and Charles-Philippe David. “Mirror, Mirror on the Wall—Why Is There a Wall after All? The Return of the Wall in IR,” 2009. <http://goo.gl/Q9OhKj>. And Rick Noack. “These 14 Walls Continue to Separate the World.” *The Washington Post*, November 11, 2014. <http://goo.gl/Worvvi>.

91 Ali Khan. *A Theory of International Terrorism*. SSRN Scholarly Paper. Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, October 8, 2006. <http://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=935347>.

shifts priorities and strategies of the group and can make them less successful in rallying people to their cause, less committed to the cause, less effective as a group, and more amenable to compromise, as research about the demise of non-religious terrorist groups suggests. Group leaders can also tire of the violence and abandon the extremist course, as some of the senior leadership of the *Irish Provisional Army* (IRA) did.⁹² At the level of individuals, there are many examples of hard-core members of religious extremist groups who went through a process of ‘de-radicalization’ and forswore violence. Many governments have now set up de-radicalization programs to that purpose, but it is too early to judge the return on investment that such programs will yield.⁹³ At the group level, there are examples of groups that have surrendered their arms in exchange for power sharing arrangements that acknowledge and respect their religious rights. Even societies torn apart by decades old religious strife occasionally manage to reach peace settlements, which typically include respect for the religious rights of minorities and greater autonomy for the religious group. Successful examples are the cases in Aceh in Indonesia and Mindanao in the Philippines. Often such settlements involve a trade-off between religious and secular demands in which religious groups make few religious concessions in exchange for giving up some of their secular claims.⁹⁴ Such settlements are often accompanied by reconciliation initiatives between groups help in moving past cleavages that lied at the heart of such conflicts.⁹⁵

Beyond some of these more incidental cessations of violence, some parts of the (developed) world appear to have found more structural ways to inoculate themselves against the most virulent manifestations of religious violence. We saw in Figure 3.1 how in various parts of the world – including Australia/New Zealand, Latin America, most of North America (with the exception of the US – mostly included because of 9/11) and Europe, large-scale religious conflict, has essentially disappeared. Europe, for instance, has historically been the scene of extremely bloody and vicious wars between Christians such as the French wars of religion or the Thirty Years’ War. Even in the past century, remnants of this

92 Seth G. Jones & Martin C. Libicki, “How Terrorist Groups End: Lessons for Countering Al-Qaeda”

93 Kate Barrelle. “Disengagement from Violent Extremism,” 2013. <http://goo.gl/qoPhtT>.

94 Svensson, I. & Harding, E. (2011), ‘How Holy Wars End: Exploring the Termination Patterns of Conflicts with Religious Dimensions in Asia’, pp. 144-145

95 Knox, Colin, Padraic Quirk, and Robert O. Matthews. "Peacebuilding in Northern Ireland, Israel & South Africa: Transition, Transformation & Reconciliation." *International Journal* 56.4 (2001): 718.

fierce animosity between Catholics and Protestants were still palpable. In small parts of Europe – as in Northern Ireland – this tension then still expressed itself in lethal forms, but in most of Europe it morphed into milder forms such as in the political altercations between political parties with different religious origins or in political debates about funding for different types of confessional schools. In recent years, these seem to have mostly withered away in Europe, as the sway of religious institutions on people’s identities weakened and as non-religious ‘post’-material values seemed to take over, even as material prosperity reached unknown heights.⁹⁶ The influx of more radical or fundamentalist forms of religion (such as Salafist Islam) and the attendant radicalization this caused in part of the Muslim communities throughout Europe is clearly posing new religion-tinged challenges to Europe’s societal stability. However, the very same educational, political, economic, societal ‘melting pot’ mechanisms that led to the de-dramatization of religious cleavages may arguably still be effective in dealing with these challenges.

96 See for instance L. Street et al., “Wealth and Attitudes Toward Morality,” *Pew Research Center’s Global Attitudes Project*, accessed March 11, 2015, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2014/03/13/worldwide-many-see-belief-in-god-as-essential-to-morality/pg-belief-in-god-03-13-2014-02/>. Even the United States, which had been somewhat of an outlier in the correlation between secularism and wealth/education, has experienced a significant rise in secularism in the past few years.

6 IMPLICATIONS FOR DEFENSE AND SECURITY ORGANIZATIONS

The surge and proliferation of religious violence poses an enormous challenge to societies worldwide. Strategies focused at the defeat and eradication of religious extremism have not proven to be particularly successful. In the words of Secretary General Ban Ki Moon: ‘Missiles may kill terrorists. But good governance kills terrorism.’⁹⁷ So even if aerial bombardments – like those carried out in Yemen, Somalia and Pakistan – *can* be effective measures in containing the capabilities of particular groups,⁹⁸ they are also likely to antagonize local communities and damage the feeble social fabric that exists in these societies,⁹⁹ and they certainly do not destroy the allure that lies at the core of the recruitment ability of extremist groups. In simpler terms, aerial bombardments may help you win the battle, but you will end up losing the war if they constitute the principal tool in your toolbox. Even if this is almost a truism, then it is a truism that is awfully often forgotten.¹⁰⁰

As it is 2015 it is widely acknowledged that effectively dealing with religious violence requires a whole-of-society approach. Such an approach includes a mixture of repressive and preventative elements and leverages traditional state

97 United Nations. “Secretary-General’s Remarks to Security Council High-Level Summit on Foreign Terrorist Fighters,” September 24, 2014. <http://www.un.org/sg/STATEMENTS/index.asp?nid=8040>.

98 Council on Foreign Relations (2013), ‘*Targeted Killings*’, URL: <http://www.cfr.org/counterterrorism/targeted-killings/p9627>, accessed: 11-12-2015

99 IHRCRC, and GJC. Living Under Drones: Death, Injury and Trauma to Civilians from US Drone Practices in Pakistan. Stanford International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic and Global Justice Clinic, September 2012. <http://goo.gl/cayBmi>.

100 Iraq is now nearing its first centennial of being bombed from the air by Western forces (commenced by the Royal British Air Force in the early 1920s when it was called aerial policing). When US President Obama launched the campaign against IS – which includes aerial bombardment – in the summer of 2014, he became the fourth consecutive US president to order his forces to bomb Iraq territory.

instruments (e.g., classic law and order enforcement) as well as sources of societal resilience (e.g., social capital and civil community). US president Obama stressed in his closing remarks to the February 2015 White House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism the need to discredit extremist ideologies and to address the social and political grievances that drive religious actors whilst shifting the focus to the communities in which these religious actors move.¹⁰¹ It is certainly beyond the scope of this paper to outline a comprehensive policy agenda for how to address religious violence. This approach will never be primarily military in nature. But it does require a ‘security custodian’ to safeguard the coherence of the broader approach from a security point of view. We therefore highlight a number of contributions which Western defense and security organizations can make within this multi-pronged approach in dealing with religious violence, with a specific emphasis on the religious violence along Europe’s immediate borders:

- **Understand the Phenomenon:** Speak the language, grasp the culture, comprehend the power dynamics, understand the strategy. Understanding is a means to an end, yet it is a critical pillar underlying strategic success. Lifting the fog off religious conflict requires an appreciation of the key actors, their strategy, their incentives and objectives, and the social context in which these conflicts are embedded.¹⁰² Despite ample lip service to its importance, making sense of this phenomenon requires far greater levels of attention, funding and human intelligence (in all meanings of this word) than it has received thus far.
- **Monitor and Deny:** Given the pernicious potential of religious violence, any effective strategy for dealing with it will require a more fine-tuned sensing mechanism coupled with effective means to intervene preventively whenever certain observable thresholds are crossed. Special attention should be paid to those situations where religious cleavages overlap with other potential grievances. Funding more (or smarter) crosscutting cleavages may

101 Office of the Press Secretary. “Remarks by the President in Closing of the Summit on Countering Violent Extremism.” The White House. Accessed February 27, 2015. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/node/322556>.

102 as Maj. Gen. Michael K. Nagata, commander of American Special Operations forces in the Middle East, observed in comments related to IS, reported in late December 2014, “We do not understand the movement, and until we do, we are not going to defeat it.” [...] “We have not defeated the idea. We do not even understand the idea. See: Eric Schmitt. “In Battle to Defang ISIS, U.S. Targets Its Psychology.” The New York Times, December 28, 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/29/us/politics/in-battle-to-defang-isis-us-targets-its-psychology-.html>.

represent wise security investments. The same applies to religious and historical education in primary and secondary schools, which is instrumental in spreading fundamentalist ideas (with the role of Saudi-sponsored madrassas in Pakistan as a well-documented case in point). Also in our homelands, the (ab)use of history and religion in education is an area of particular concern.

- **Mobilize Moderation:** As religious fanaticism starts spiralling into violence, boosting the resilience of the more moderate middle ground in those religious communities may yield a higher return on our security investment than combatting the extremists. When ‘outsiders’ start hitting these extremists, this often further erodes the foundations of those communities’ resilience to extremism and violence.
- **Degrade, Deny and Disrupt:** Some religious groups possess substantial (conventional) military capabilities. Wherever the threat of those capabilities being used increases, their degrading, denying and disrupting should be a vital part of a broader strategy that addresses political and social grievances. The key objective is to deny their ability to operate conventionally (find-fix-strike), to disrupt their supply lines and to close off their exit routes.
- **Discredit and Dissuade:** Puncture the narrative, expose the cruelty, respect the religion, spread the message. The power of religious extremists groups hinges on their ability to convince recruits of the sanctity of their cause, but the importance of the I in DIME (Diplomacy, Information, Military, Economic) remains underappreciated – perhaps not in the discourse but certainly in the strategic prioritization. Discrediting the message of religious groups and dissuading individuals from fighting, joining or supporting them, will strike at the heart of their ability to operate. It requires a dedicated effort with orchestrated campaigns tailored at target audiences. Not propaganda, but greater attention to strategic communications that follow and abide by principles of a liberal way of warfare.
- **Build and Train:** Building up local and regional security forces which are capable, reliable and seen as legitimate by the people they are supposed to protect, has proven to be challenging in the last decade, but continues to be a crucial precondition for stability.
- **Separate and Protect:** The physical separation of religious extremist groups is in many cases a necessary precursor to a more lasting settlement. The ability to protect buffers and barriers and to cordon off areas to preclude contact between warring groups is essential.

- **Disarm, Demobilize, Reintegrate:** Post conflict stabilization and normalization of societies torn apart by religious strife can succeed if the (tens of thousands of) fighters are disarmed, demobilized and reintegrated. Defense organizations can make a vital contribution to DDR.
- **Foster Partnerships and Build Resilience:** Both state and non-state actors are critical partners for defense and security organizations in building societal resilience against religious extremism. These actors should be persuaded rather than coerced, and collaborated with rather than controlled. The sustainability of such efforts, which are stretched out over long periods of time, should be a central element in their design.

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