

11 Religion and Domestic Political Attitudes around the World

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For most of recorded history religious sentiment was inextricable from politics. Supernatural religious content infused the rules and procedures of social organization, and political leaders derived their legitimacy from religious belief systems.

Modernization has done much to change this state of affairs. According to secularization theory, religious sentiment and practice decline as societies reach higher stages of development. This may be because scientific and technological advance make religious beliefs seem implausible, secular institutions and organizations begin to fulfill formerly religious functions (such as promoting social order and regulating the distribution of resources), or security and material comfort make religious reassurance less necessary (e.g., Dobbelaere, 1985; Durkheim, 2001 [1912]; Martin, 1978; Norris & Inglehart, 2011; Weber, 2002 [1905]). Scholars fiercely debate secularization theory's validity and scope of applicability (e.g., Gill, 2001; Hadden, 1987; Stark, 1999). In defense of secularization theory, societal development is indeed negatively correlated with societal religiosity (Norris & Inglehart, 2011). But it is clear, nonetheless, that religion remains a factor in the contemporary political life of a great many nations (e.g., Esmer & Pettersson, 2007; Knutsen, 2004).

The focus of this chapter is one particular way in which religion and politics might nowadays be linked: Among ordinary people around the world, religious characteristics might display predictable relations with domestic political preferences. The domestic policy domains of present focus are the two most frequently discussed in terms of a right vs. left (or conservative vs. liberal) continuum—specifically, the “cultural” domain pertaining to issues such as abortion and homosexuality, and the “economic” domain concerning government intervention in economic life and redistributive social welfare provision. These attitude domains characterize differences between the political right and left across many societies, and they have implications for voting and other political behavior.

A focus on religious influences in these domains constitutes a departure from a primary area of concern within the political psychology of religion—specifically, the psychological elements of ethno-religious conflict, interfaith relations, and religiously based prejudice (e.g., Bartal, Halperin, & Oren, 2010; Ginges, Atran, Medin, & Shikaki, 2007; Hammack, 2010; Rowatt, Carpenter, & Haggard, Chapter 8, this volume). But the relations of religious characteristics with domestic political preferences have social importance nonetheless. For one thing, religious group differences in political attitudes might impact relations across faith traditions. It is widely speculated, for example, that differences on cultural matters pertaining to sexuality and family hinder favorable relations between Muslim and Western societies. Religious differences in cultural preferences might have consequences for democratization within some societies (e.g., Inglehart, 2003), and religious differences in economic attitudes might produce variation in economic outcomes across religious groups (e.g., Guiso, Sapienza, & Zingales, 2003).

In addition to implications for interfaith relations, the present topic also has relevance to the structure of political conflict within societies. If religiosity naturally yields affinity for conservative preferences in both the cultural and economic domains, then there exists an important psychological constraint on the sociopolitical cleavages within societies. Under such circumstances, political disagreement is likely to be widely encompassing, characterized by conflict between two “teams” with diverging views on a wide range of political matters as well as diverging religious characteristics. Indeed, this assumption of widely encompassing conflict is reflected in the practice of including religious, economic, and cultural content within measures of “conservatism” (e.g., Wilson & Patterson, 1968). The present review can provide insight into whether such an assumption is tenable.

This chapter consists of four sections. In the first, I conceptually define the religious and political characteristics examined in the studies to be reviewed. In the second, I review research on the relation between *religious affiliation* and political preference, and, in the third, I review research on the relation between *religiosity* and political preference. In both the second and third sections, I primarily review cross-national evidence within a subsection entitled “Around the World.” Then, because of the preponderance of data from American samples, and because of the unique (for a wealthy democratic nation) cultural importance of religion within the US (e.g., Norris & Inglehart, 2011), I briefly review evidence from American samples in a subsection entitled “Within the US.” I then draw conclusions about the psychological and societal implications of overlap between religion and domestic political preference.

Religion and Domestic Political Preference: Definitions

Religion

How do people differ from one another religiously? The answer that would first come to mind for many is that people differ in terms of religious affiliation. But the conceptualization of religious affiliation is complicated by myriad historical and cultural considerations. Is there a single Christian category; do we categorize Christians as Catholic, Protestant, or Eastern Orthodox; or do we further decompose the last two categories into specific traditions or denominations? Does it make sense to speak of “Muslims,” should we regard Sunni and Shiite Islam as separate religions, or should we further divide these categories into more specific ethno-religious groups?

These questions do not have single correct answers. The answers generated often reflect culturally rooted belief systems, and are subject to the preconceptions and biases associated therewith. Having offered this caveat, I review research that has operationalized religious affiliation in one of the following ways. First, religious affiliation is sometimes measured at the national level in terms of the “cultural zone” of an individual’s nation (Huntington, 1996; Norris & Inglehart, 2002; Weber, 2002 [1905]; Welzel, Inglehart, & Klingemann, 2003). Cultural zones are groupings of nations based on their historically predominant religions and other pertinent cultural, institutional, demographic, and geographic characteristics (e.g., Protestant Western Zone, Formerly Communist Eastern European Orthodox Zone, Islamic Zone, Latin American Zone). Second, religious affiliation is sometimes measured at the national level in terms of the nation’s currently predominant religion. For some nations, this differs from the historically predominant religion. Third, religious affiliation is sometimes measured at the individual level; specifically, the religious group with which the individual identifies. The categories of this type of indicator vary across studies (e.g., what are the Christian and Muslim categories?), and are sometimes linked with non-religious cultural attributes (e.g., black Protestantism and white Evangelical Protestantism in the US).

In addition to their religious affiliations, people also differ from one another in their levels of religiosity. This refers to individual-level variation in degree of behavioral and experiential commitment to one’s religion. Indicators such as religious attendance, religious identity, and subjective importance of religion in one’s life tend to converge on a superordinate “religiosity” construct (Layman & Green, 2005; Malka, Lelkes, Srivastava, Cohen, & Miller, 2012; Norris and Inglehart, 2011), although some research examines the unique effects of distinct religiosity indicators (e.g., Ginges, Hansen, & Norenzayan, 2009; Guiso et al., 2003; Hayward & Kimmelmeier, 2011). Other work distinguishes

religiosity from “spirituality,” which involves a subjective mystical feeling of self-transcendence (e.g., Hill & Pargament, 2003; Spilka, Hood, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 2003). Indeed, religiosity and spirituality may differentially impact some political attitudes (Hirsh, Walberg, & Peterson, 2013). More generally, a complex and multifaceted concept like religious devotion can be parsed in a great variety of ways. The present focus is on a “bare bones” formulation of religiosity, involving a sense of personal religious importance and conduct of religious behaviors. The World Values Survey (1981–2008), a large cross-national survey that has been fielded since the early 1980s, includes religiosity items along these lines; indicators that have relevance to a wide range of religious cultures. Many of the studies reviewed here use WVS data and, in general, this review summarizes research employing these types of religiosity indicator.

Political Attitudes

Elite political competition around the world is frequently conceptualized in terms of ideological differences between the political right (who espouse “conservatism”) and the political left (who espouse “liberalism”).¹ Because of the political importance of this dimension, and due to space limitations, I limit the present focus to domestic political attitudes that are widely viewed as relevant to this dimension. The two most common preference domains of this sort are cultural preferences—concerning traditional patterns of behavior as most often exemplified in the areas of sexuality, reproduction, and family—and economic preferences—regarding redistributive social welfare spending, public vs. private enterprise, and scope of government involvement in the economy (e.g., Shafer & Claggett, 1995).² These preference domains reflect two aspects of social organization in which societies face fundamental tradeoffs. Furthermore, an influential line of reasoning within political psychology posits that similar underlying psychological needs are served by religiosity, cultural conservatism, and economic conservatism (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; Jost, 2007; Rokeach, 1960; Wilson, 1973). In particular, needs for certainty, order, and security are said to drive people toward religious adherence and a broad-based conservative ideology, encompassing cultural *and* economic matters. Thus measures of “conservatism” often include overtly religious content, based on the *ex ante* assumption that religious adherence is an implicit part of a broad unidimensional conservative ideology. Consequently, in this review, I seek to critically evaluate this assumption. If religiosity relates to conservative positions in both the cultural and economic domains, then conceptualizing religiosity as part of a broad “conservative syndrome” may be justified. If religiosity does not relate

to both forms of conservatism, then such a conceptualization provides a misleading portrait of the interplay among these constructs.

Religious Affiliation and Domestic Political Attitudes

When considering why religious groups might differ in political attitudes it is important to mind the distinction between the founding texts and prophetic messages of a religion, on the one hand, and what Weber (1963 [1922]) described as the “practical religion,” on the other. The latter reflects the actual habits and patterns of behavior of religious adherents, which emerge from “the interaction between the original doctrine and the social, political, and economic conditions of the time” (Laitin, 1978, p. 571).

Today’s major world religions contain ancient founding texts that prescribe conservative positions on cultural matters in the domain of sex and family (e.g., Norris & Inglehart, 2011). However, these founding texts send mixed messages about economic matters, in terms of personal vs. societal responsibility for gainful employment, redistributive provision for the needy, and private property (Guiso et al., 2003; Smith, 1971; Uppal, 1986). But sacred texts and prophetic messages cannot, by themselves, explain the impact of religion on domestic political attitudes. Rather, the attitudes of religious adherents are the product of the traditional teachings interacting with local political and institutional realities, at particular historical junctures. Because of this, explanations of contemporary religious group differences in terms of scriptural foundations may be risky (cf. Cohen & Rozin, 2001). Thus, I presently adopt the more descriptive goal of documenting findings in this domain; providing a summary of data that I hope will be useful for efforts to explain how scripture and social conditions interactively impact religious groups’ political attitudes.

Around the World

Cultural Attitudes

Do religious groups around the world differ in their domestic political preferences? This question has frequently been addressed in the context of cultural attitudes concerning sex and family. The focus on cultural attitudes is understandable: Traditional religious doctrines have almost always offered prescriptions for these domains of life, and contemporary religious conservative movements tend to focus primarily on these types of issue.

One common assertion is that Catholics, because of the culturally traditional posture of their religious elite, are particularly culturally conservative. But a consistent lesson of public opinion research is that

one should not infer opinions of ordinary people based on information about elite opinions (e.g., Converse, 1964; Fiorina, Abrams, & Pope, 2005). This consideration, coupled with attention to the distinction between theological discourse and “practical religion,” should give pause to those who would extrapolate from elite findings to rank-and-file Catholics.

Indeed, cross-national evidence does not support the view that Catholics are an especially culturally conservative religious group. Adamczyk and Pitt (2009) analyzed data from a cross-national sample of 40 societies. On average, Catholics were less disapproving of homosexuality than were Muslims, Protestants, Hindus, Buddhists, and Orthodox Christians. Norris and Inglehart (2002) found that Western Christian societies were the most approving of homosexuality, and that Latin American and Central European societies (the other two cultural zones with substantial Catholic populations) were positioned in the middle of the nations analyzed. Western Christian, Central European and Latin American nations (cultural zones with substantial Catholic populations) were more approving of homosexuality than were nations in the Christian Orthodox, Sinic/Confucian, Sub-Saharan African, Hindu, and Islamic zones. As for abortion attitude, Western Christian and Central European nations were the most tolerant, whereas Latin American nations were among the least tolerant.

Using a cross-national sample of 15 (mostly Western) nations, Scheepers, Grotenhuis, and Van Der Slik (2002) did find that Catholics were more culturally conservative than non-Catholics on a composite of homosexuality, abortion, premarital sex, and extramarital sex. This effect was accounted for by the higher level of parental religious attendance among the Catholics. Similar findings using a nation-level measure of religion were obtained by Scott (1998a), who also found that, within most of the nations studied, being Catholic was unrelated to disapproval of homosexuality. Scott (1998b) found that in Britain and among German women, being Catholic was associated with opposition to abortion, but in the US, Ireland, Sweden, and Poland it was not. Yuchtman-Yaar and Alkalay (2007) found, within a sample of 36 nations, that Catholic nations were positioned between Protestant nations (most culturally liberal) and Muslim nations (most culturally conservative) on a composite of homosexuality tolerance, abortion tolerance, and respect for authority. Similarly, Norris and Inglehart (2011) found that Catholic nations were between Muslim nations and Protestant nations on disapproval of abortion. Thus the balance of evidence suggests that Catholics are not especially culturally conservative, although they may be somewhat less tolerant of abortion than are other Christian groups.

Are there particular religions whose adherents are especially culturally conservative? Yes, Islam and to a lesser extent prominent Eastern religions. The major social difference between contemporary Muslims

and contemporary Westerners does not have to do with attitudes toward democracy (Diamond, 2008; cf. Huntington, 1996), but rather has to do with views of sexual liberalization. Norris and Inglehart (2002) found that Islamic and Hindu nations were consistently among the most conservative across the issues of gender equality, homosexuality, abortion, and divorce (see also Inglehart & Norris, 2011). Nations of the Sub-Saharan African Zone—which contains great numbers of Christians, Muslims, and adherents of traditional African religions—also tended to be culturally conservative across these issues, as did nations of the Sinic/Confucian zone, which contains great numbers of Buddhists, Confucianists, and Taoists. But Inglehart and Norris (2002) found that much of the cultural conservatism of Hindu and Sub-Saharan African nations was accounted for by low levels of human and political development. This was not the case for Muslim nations; they were more culturally conservative than their national levels of development would predict. Similarly, Yuchtman-Yaar and Alkalay (2007) found that Islamic Zone nations were the least culturally liberal on an attitude composite consisting of homosexuality, abortion, and authority attitudes. Gallup polls conducted between 2006 and 2007 revealed that Muslim inhabitants of London, Paris, and Berlin were substantially more conservative than their non-Muslim counterparts on the matters of homosexuality and abortion (Nyiri, 2007).

Individuals with no religious affiliation tend to be the most culturally liberal, consistent with the finding (to be presented in the next section) that individuals low in religiosity tend to be culturally liberal. For example, using samples from seven European nations and the US, Hayes (1995) found that individuals with no religious affiliation were generally more tolerant of working women and abortion than were Protestants and Catholics. Adamczyk and Pitt (2009) found that individuals with no religious affiliation were more tolerant of homosexuals than were affiliates of each of the religions studied, with the exception of Jews.

Thus, regarding cultural matters, Muslims—and, to a lesser extent, Hindus and adherents of other Eastern religions—tend to be the most conservative, individuals with no religious affiliation tend to be the most liberal, and other religious groups, including the Christian groups, tend to be in between. However, Catholics show a conservative inclination on the abortion issue, Orthodox Christians are relatively opposed to homosexuality, and Christians from Sub-Saharan Africa might be quite culturally conservative.

Economic Attitudes

In comparison to cultural issues, economic issues are less frequently framed in religious terms. Perhaps for this reason there is less available evidence documenting religious group differences in economic

attitudes. The most widely noted thesis concerning religious affiliation and economic preference is Weber's (2002 [1905]) classic and controversial view that Protestantism bears an inherent link with the norms and institutions of capitalism, some of which constitute conservative economic attitudes. The evidence concerning Protestants' economic conservatism is mixed.

Guiso et al. (2003) and Hayward and Kimmelmeier (2011) conducted large-scale cross-national analyses of religion and a broad set of capitalism-related attitudes, using WVS data. It is crucial to note that only some of the capitalism-related attitudes they studied may be conceptualized as economically conservative vs. liberal, in terms of directly pertaining to preferences regarding government economic involvement and redistributive social welfare provision. Other attitudes—such as valuing hard work, generally believing that competition brings out the best in people, supporting equal rights in work and education for women, trusting in institutions, and believing that the world contains a great deal of wealth—are not explicitly concerned with what the government should do in terms of economic intervention, although they may be empirically related to such attitudes.

Guiso et al. (2003) focused on the relation of *religiosity* indicators and capitalism-relevant attitudes. Although they reported how the relations of religiosity and such attitudes differ in magnitude and direction between those with no religious affiliation and those affiliating with each of the major world religions (p. 256), they did not report main effects of religious affiliation. Hayward and Kimmelmeier (2011), however, did, focusing on comparisons of Protestants with adherents of other religious traditions. They found that, with respect to opposing government promotion of economic equality, Protestants were not significantly more conservative than were members of other religious groups, with the exception of Jews. However, Protestants were significantly more conservative with respect to opposing government responsibility for social welfare than were the other religious groups (except Buddhists), and Protestants were more inclined to favor private rather than government business ownership than were the other religious groups (except Buddhists and Jews). This suggests that it is important to distinguish different forms of economic conservatism when evaluating how religious affiliation relates to this attitude domain. Consistent with this point, Norris and Inglehart (2011) found that the rank order of religious affiliations on economic attitudes differed substantially across the particular economic attitudes assessed. With respect to favoring economic incentives over economic equality, Muslims and Orthodox Christians were the most conservative. For the last, this might reflect a reaction to Communist rule. These groups were followed by Protestants, adherents of Eastern religions, and Catholics (with the last three being quite close together). However, with regard to favoring private ownership, Protestants were the most

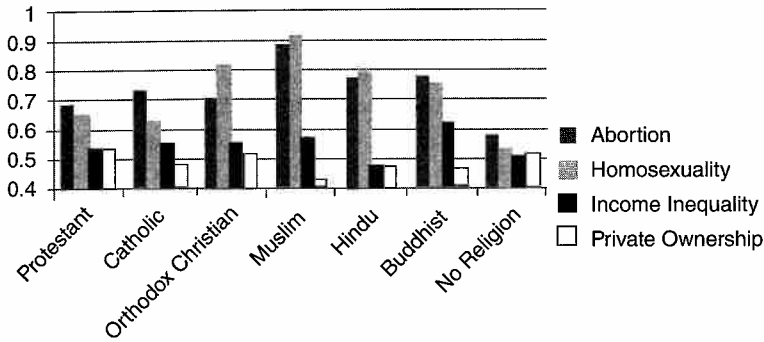


Figure 11.1 Differences across religious affiliations in conservative (vs. liberal) cultural and economic preferences.

Note. World Values Survey wave 5 (2005–2008) data. Political preferences coded to range from 0 to 1 with higher scores signifying the conservative position. Respondents rated their views about whether or not abortion is justified and whether or not homosexuality is justified on a 1 (“Never justifiable”) to 10 (“Always justifiable”) scale. For income inequality, respondents rated their position on a 10-point scale ranging from “Incomes should be made more equal” to “We need larger income differences as incentives for individual effort”. For private ownership, respondents rated their positions on a 10-point scale ranging from “Government ownership of business and industry should be increased” to “Private ownership of business and industry should be increased.”

conservative, followed by Catholics. Orthodox Christians, Muslims, and adherents of Eastern religions were all quite close together, being less favorable to private ownership than both Protestants and Catholics. Thus Protestants are especially inclined to display some, but not other, forms of economic conservatism.

New Evidence and Summary

To further illustrate the empirical patterns reviewed earlier, I report the results of new analyses with the 5th wave of the WVS. In this wave, interviews were conducted with national samples from 57 nations between the years 2005 and 2008. Large numbers of Protestants, Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and individuals with no religious affiliation were interviewed. Figure 11.1 displays mean levels of abortion, homosexuality, income inequality, and private ownership attitudes among each of these seven religious affiliation groups. The political preferences are coded from 0 to 1, with higher scores representing more conservative positions (see, further, Figure 11.2).

Muslims are the most conservative on cultural matters of abortion and homosexuality, and individuals with no religious affiliation are the least culturally conservative. Catholics do not seem to be especially

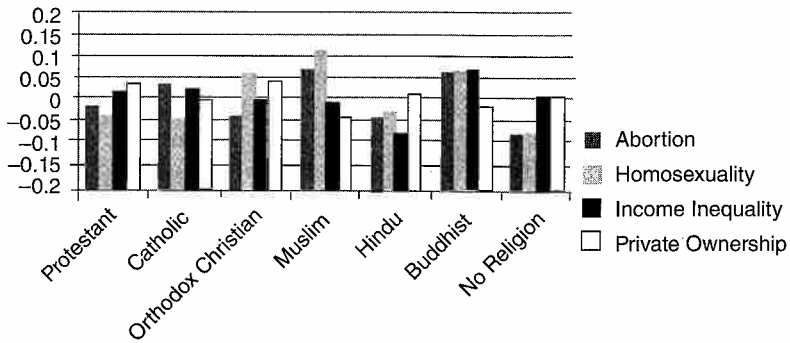


Figure 11.2 Differences across religious affiliations in conservative (vs. liberal) cultural and economic political preferences corrected for national and household wealth.

Note. World Values Survey wave 5 (2005–2008) data. Political preferences were first coded to range from 0 to 1 with higher scores signifying the conservative position and then regressed on the natural log of the respondent's nation's GDP per capita at purchasing power parity and the respondent's household income decile within his/her nation. The figure displays the residual scores from this analysis, representing the degree to which a religious group's political preference is higher vs. lower than predicted based on national and household wealth. For wording of political preference items, see the note at Figure 11.1.

culturally conservative, with slightly more conservative views on abortion and more liberal views on homosexuality in comparison to the other Christian groups. Hindus and Buddhists are more culturally conservative than the Christians (with the exception of Orthodox Christians on homosexuality), but they are less culturally conservative than Muslims. That Orthodox Christians are, on average, opposed to homosexuality might reflect lower levels of modernization within the societies in which they predominate (Štulhofer & Rimac, 2009).

As for economic preferences, the differences across the religious affiliations are far less pronounced and appear to bear no correspondence with religious differences in cultural attitudes. One finding of note is that Protestants do not stand out as especially economically conservative. Another finding of note is that while Muslims and Buddhists are the most tolerant of income inequality (although not by much), they are the least tolerant of private ownership (although, again, not by much). Hindus are the most consistently economically liberal. But, again, these religious differences are not large.

It is well known that wealth, both at the national level and at the household level, predicts liberal cultural attitudes, and that household wealth predicts conservative economic attitudes (e.g., Erikson & Tedin, 2010; Yuchtman-Yaar & Alkalay, 2007). Thus associations of religious affiliation with nation-level wealth and household wealth may account

for some of the findings examined earlier. To examine this possibility I computed residual scores for each political attitude by regressing the political attitude on nation-level wealth (natural log of GDP per capita (purchasing power parity) in 2005) and individual-level income (decile within one's nation). Each respondent's score represents the degree to which his/her political attitude is more conservative (positive residual) vs. less conservative (negative residual) than would be predicted based on his/her nation's wealth and his/her relative level of annual household income. As expected, both national wealth and individual wealth had negative effects on conservative cultural attitudes, individual wealth had positive effects on conservative economic attitudes, and national wealth had small and inconsistent effects on conservative economic attitudes.

Muslims and Buddhists, especially the former, were more culturally conservative on both abortion and homosexuality than their national and household wealth would predict. Those with no religious affiliation were more culturally liberal than their national and household wealth would predict. As for Christians, Orthodox Christians were more disapproving of homosexuality and Catholics were more approving of homosexuality and slightly less approving of abortion than national and household wealth would predict. As for economic preferences, the two strongest divergences from predicted values were for Hindus, who were less approving of income inequality than would be predicted, and for Buddhists, who were more approving of income inequality than would be predicted. These findings are difficult to explain. One might speculate that Hindu approval of redistributive intervention is somehow connected to contemporary concerns about the caste system. For example, a majority of Indians in a 2006 BBC poll reported belief that the caste system is an impediment to social harmony (GlobeScan Incorporated, 2006). As for Buddhism, one might speculate that a theological emphasis against material desire produces an aversion to government based redistribution. But these are ad hoc conjectures. Their validity, and the validity of alternative explanations, should be subjected to careful empirical scrutiny. In addition, Orthodox Christians were more favorable to private ownership (perhaps because of their Communist history) and Muslims were slightly more economically liberal than the wealth variables would predict.

Taken together, prior findings and the present analyses suggest that contemporary Muslims and Buddhists are the most culturally conservative religious affiliations and those with no religious affiliation are the most culturally liberal. Hindus are also quite culturally conservative but this might be fully accounted for by their low national and household wealth. Other religious affiliations, including the major Christian groups, tend to be in between, although Orthodox Christians are quite conservative with respect to homosexuality, and Catholics display a

conservative inclination on abortion. Finally, religious affiliation differences in economic preferences are small and inconsistent.

Within the US

Historically, religion has played a major role in American social and political organization (Layman, 2001). Many early English colonists were Calvinist Protestant separatists, and in the early years of the United States most of the non-slave citizens were Protestants whose lives were characterized by liturgical literalism, the experience of self-conversion, and in some cases beliefs that the United States' mission was to bring about the second coming of Christ. African Americans, mostly enslaved, developed their own Protestant traditions that were evangelical in nature but that focused on promoting justice and freedom.

From the mid-19th century until the 1920s the religious landscape changed (see Hunter, 1991; Layman, 2001; Putnam & Campbell, 2010). Large numbers of Catholics and Jews emigrated from Europe, and the forces of modernization brought about a theological split between “evangelical” and “mainline” Protestant denominations. Mainline Protestants came to support a less literal interpretation of scripture, less of a focus on orthodox religious beliefs, more interfaith tolerance, and greater engagement with the modern world (e.g., the “social gospel”). Evangelical Protestants continued to uphold the orthodox Protestant views that had historically characterized American religion. Similar traditional vs. progressive divisions developed within Catholicism and Judaism.

How do these religious groups differ on domestic political preferences? Not surprisingly, Evangelical Protestants tend nowadays to be the most culturally conservative on matters such as abortion and homosexuality (Guth, Kellstedt, Smidt, & Green, 2006; Layman, 1997; Layman & Green, 2005; Malka et al., 2012). This religious group has been the most strongly represented in the religious conservatism movement that took shape in the 1970s and 1980s. Their strong Democratic allegiance notwithstanding, black Protestants are not liberal on cultural attitudes but do not appear to be as culturally conservative as are white Evangelical Protestants (Guth et al., 2006; Malka et al., 2012). Catholics are not particularly culturally conservative (Newport, 2009), and neither are Mainline Protestants (Guth et al., 2006; Malka et al., 2012). Both groups are a good deal less culturally conservative than Evangelical Protestants but more culturally conservative than those with no religious affiliation and Jews. Latter-day Saints, the largest “non-traditional” Protestant denomination, are very culturally conservative (Guth et al., 2006). As for economic attitudes, Evangelical Protestants and Latter-day Saints tend to be conservative, black Protestants and Jews tend to be liberal, and those with no religious affiliation, mainline Protestants and Catholics tend to be in the middle (Guth et al., 2006; Malka et al., 2012).

Religiosity and Domestic Political Preference

Around the World

Within every major religious group, people vary in the degree to which they are committed to religious belief and practice. This is referred to as religiosity, and it is an individual difference variable that is often studied in the context of political attitudes. At the individual and the national level, subjective religious importance and religious attendance are strongly correlated (e.g., Layman & Green, 2005; Malka et al., 2012; Norris & Inglehart, 2011), justifying the formation of composite religiosity measures.

Cultural Preference

I first review evidence of the relation between religiosity and cultural political preferences. These characteristics would seem to bear an inherent organic relation; traditional religions almost invariably offer prescriptions for traditional behavior in the domains of family and sex. Indeed the evidence is strong and unequivocal that more religious people are more culturally conservative than are less religious people. Using cross-national data from 15 (mostly Western) samples, Scheepers et al. (2002) found that individuals holding religious worldviews were more conservative than their non-religious counterparts on a composite of abortion, homosexuality, premarital sex, and extra-marital sex. This same pattern replicated for parental religiosity (see also Scott, 1998a, 1998b). The effect of personal religiosity on cultural conservatism was stronger in more religious countries than in less religious countries. This may be because religious considerations are compartmentalized in less religious countries, and thus do not influence as strongly evaluations in all domains of life (Stark, 1999). Napier and Jost (2008) found, in a cross-national sample of 19 democracies, that subjective religious importance predicted a composite of opposition to divorce and opposition to homosexuality. Adamczyk and Pitt (2009) analyzed cross-national data from 40 nations and found that religiosity predicted disapproval of homosexuality both with and without controlling for religious affiliation dummy variables. Interestingly, they found that in countries characterized by an overwhelming concern with survival, disapproval of homosexuality was uniformly high and unrelated to religiosity, but in countries more concerned with self-expression than survival, religiosity robustly predicted opposition to homosexuality. This is consistent with the view that when post-materialist concerns are salient within a culture there is more room for individual-level variation in religious preference to impact political views (Inglehart, 1990; Layman & Carmines, 1997).

Cultural conservatism is sometimes construed as a form of moral intolerance, and it may be tempting to conclude that because religious people tend to be culturally conservative they also tend to be intolerant of, and supportive of violence against, members of outgroups. But the evidence on this front is not perfectly clear. Canetti, Hobfoll, Pedahzur, and Zaidise (2010) found that more religious Israeli Jews and Muslims were more inclined to support violence against the outgroup, and that this effect was completely accounted for by socioeconomic level and perceived discrimination. Ginges et al. (2009) found that religious attendance, but not religious devotion, predicted support of suicide attacks against the outgroup. But Tessler (2003) found that level of religiosity was uncorrelated with support of violence within Muslim societies. Similarly, Gallup polls from 130 countries conducted in 2008 and 2009 show that support of military and individual attacks on civilians do not differ between more and less religious people (Mogahed & Younis, 2011). Evidence from American samples suggests that religiosity actually relates to opposition to the death penalty and torture, despite being associated with a conservative self-identification (Malka & Soto, 2011; Malka et al., 2012; see also Blogowska & Saroglou, 2011). However, religiosity is often found to be correlated with intolerance on the basis of factors such as ethnicity or perceived deviance from norms (Guiso et al., 2003; Katnik, 2002; Napier and Jost, 2008; but see Arzheimer & Carter, 2009). And in Europe, extreme right-wing parties that promote ethnic and cultural intolerance often appeal to religion as a component of national identity, even though their current supporters are not particularly religious (Camus, 2007).

Economic Attitudes

What about economic preferences? Unlike cultural conservatism, there does not exist consistent evidence that religiosity predicts economic conservatism. Using WVS data from 66 countries from the early 1980s to the mid-1990s, Guiso et al. (2003) regressed capitalism-related attitude items on models containing nation-level fixed effects, demographic controls and the following binary religiosity indicators: atheism, attend religious services weekly vs. not, attend religious services at least once a year vs. not, and whether or not one was brought up religiously at home. As discussed earlier, some, but not all, of the capitalism-relevant items can be construed as economically conservative vs. liberal preferences. On these preferences, the authors found small and inconsistent effects. For example, having been raised religiously had small effects on *liberal* inequality and private vs. public ownership attitudes. However, attending weekly (as opposed to the comparison category of never attending) and being an atheist were associated slightly with conservative equality and private ownership preferences. However, these effects are somewhat

difficult to interpret because multiple inter-correlated binary religiosity variables were entered together as predictors.

Hayward and Kimmelmeier (2011) used the most complete version of the WVS data to date, and simultaneously entered subjective religious importance and religious attendance as predictors of capitalism-related attitudes, controlling for several individual and nation-level variables. Three of these capitalism-relevant attitudes corresponded with economic conservatism vs. liberalism. Neither religiosity variable significantly predicted conservative position on private business ownership or government responsibility for social welfare provision. Religious importance, but not religious *attendance*, predicted conservative position on income inequality. Reporting findings separately for religious traditions, Protestants, Catholics, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Orthodox Christians and even those with no religious affiliation displayed a relation between personal religious importance and conservative position on economic inequality. But not a single religious group displayed a significant relation between religious attendance and economic inequality attitude; in fact, religious attendance significantly predicted liberal position on economic inequality among Catholics and Orthodox Christians. Meanwhile, personal religiosity predicted liberal position on business ownership among Buddhists, Jews, Muslims, Orthodox Christians, and people of smaller religious groups. In general, there was a mix of positive and negative effects of religiosity variables on economic conservatism within religious groups.

Napier and Jost (2008) used a single religiosity indicator to predict political attitudes in samples from 19 nations, and the results of their analysis are thus relatively straightforward to interpret. As described already, religiosity predicted cultural conservatism and intolerance. Religiosity, however, was uncorrelated with economic conservatism. Overall, then, religiosity does not display reliable relations with economic conservatism in cross-national survey data.

If religiosity is associated with cultural conservatism, and cultural conservatism is correlated with economic conservatism, then why is it the case that religiosity does not correlate reliably with economic conservatism? The answer to this question may have to do with competing influences of religiosity on economic conservatism. On the one hand, some religious people may be driven by political discourse to adopt conservative economic positions in order to act consistently with their culturally based conservative identities. But, on the other hand, religiosity's link with prosocial values (e.g., Saroglou, Pichon, Tompette, Verschuere, & Dernelle, 2005; Shariff & Norenzayan, 2007; Smith & Stark, 2009; cf. Galen, 2012a; 2012b; Preston, Salomon, & Ritter, Chapter 7, this volume) may underlie a tendency of some religious people to move their economic preferences to the left. As discussed later, some evidence from American samples supports this competing pathways hypothesis.

Within the US

That ordinary Americans are involved in a bitter religiously based culture war has become conventional wisdom in some circles. This view is a sensationalized exaggeration of a real finding. There is indeed a “god gap” nowadays in American politics such that the more religious are more inclined to identify as conservative and to vote Republican than are the less religious (e.g., Putnam & Campbell, 2010). But this religious difference in political behavior is relatively new and is limited to particular issue domains.

How new is it? Prior to the religious conservatism movement that originated in the 1970s, level of religious commitment had not been much of a factor in American political life since the Prohibition era (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2005). But the rise of partisan division in cultural attitudes during the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s somewhat restructured the mass partisan coalitions. Layman (1997) found that between 1980 and 1994, an effect of doctrinal orthodoxy on Republican self-identification and vote emerged, and the effect of religious commitment on Republican vote strengthened. Culture war rhetoric intensified in the early 1990s, and it appears that this was followed by an increase in the relation of religious attendance with both partisanship (Putnam & Campbell, 2010) and conservative self-identification (Malka et al., 2012). This was not entirely the result of Americans adjusting their politics to match their religion. Patrikios (2008) demonstrated that during the religiously divisive periods in the early 1990s and 2000s, Americans tended to adjust their religiosity levels to match their partisan and ideological self-identifications. Thus when culture war discourse intensified, the convergence of religious and political characteristics reflected bidirectional influence.

Does religiosity relate to both cultural and economic preferences? As in much of the world, religiosity predicts cultural conservatism in the United States. The more religious are more conservative on matters such as abortion and homosexuality, and religiosity is a relatively strong predictor of these preferences (e.g., Legee & Kellstedt, 1993; Wilcox & Larsen, 2006; Wuthnow, 1988). Moreover, these effects are found consistently across all major religious denominations (Guth et al., 2006; Layman & Green, 2005; Malka et al., 2012).

The same is not true for economic preferences. First of all, Americans consider economic issues to be less religiously relevant than cultural issues (Guth et al., 2006; Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2005). Within the US, religiosity’s effects on economic attitudes tend to be small and inconsistent (e.g., Davis & Robinson, 1996; Jelen, 1990; Olson & Carroll, 1992; Tamney, Burton, & Johnson, 1989; Will & Cochran, 1995). This inconsistency may be the net outcome of competing effects across different segments of the population. For example,

religiosity appears to have a relatively strong impact on economic conservatism among white Evangelical Protestants, effects that are weaker to non-existent among white mainline Protestants and white Catholics, and an effect on liberal economic preferences among black Protestants (Layman & Green, 2005; Malka et al., 2012). Also, the effect of religiosity on economic conservatism may be subject to competing influences via distinct psychological pathways. Malka, Soto, Cohen, and Miller (2011) found reliable support for a model in which religiosity triggers a pathway toward economic conservatism via culturally based conservative identity and a pathway toward economic liberalism via prosocial value orientation. Thus discursive messages may compel the religious to be economically conservative while a desire to help those in need may compel them to be economically liberal. That political discourse is a force linking religiosity and economic conservatism is consistent with findings that religiosity relates to economic conservatism among politically engaged Americans but that it does not among those who are relatively low in political engagement (Malka et al., 2012). And recent evidence suggests that any conflict regarding economic issues that religious conservatives might experience is sometimes dealt with by projecting their own political attitudes onto Jesus Christ (Ross, Lelkes, & Russell, 2012).

Psychological and Social Implications

The evidence reviewed in this chapter has both psychological and societal implications. One psychological implication has to do with the reasons for “constraint” across economic and cultural preferences. Constraint refers to the tendency to adopt an ideologically consistent configuration of attitudes (Converse, 1964). This tendency is not overwhelmingly strong within general publics, but it is substantially stronger among people who are highly politically engaged (e.g., Zaller, 1992). The findings reported here suggest that to whatever extent constraint does exist, religiosity does not appear to drive it. While religion is reliably linked with cultural conservatism, it is not so with economic conservatism. This should be kept in mind when evaluating claims and insinuations that unidimensional political ideology has a natural coherence with religious characteristics. It also casts skepticism on the practice of including religious content in broad measures of “conservatism.”

However, evidence from American samples reveals that religiosity may relate to conservative economic and cultural preferences among people who are highly engaged with political discourse, but only to cultural preferences among those low in political engagement (Malka et al., 2012). This suggests the possibility of a discursively driven coherence between religiosity and conservative economic preferences among certain segments of the population. Religiosity may lead some people

to economic liberalism via a desire to help others (e.g., Saroglou et al., 2005), but lead others to economic conservatism via a discursively driven pathway involving culturally based conservative identity (Malka et al., 2011). Regarding the latter pathway, some religious people may form ideological/partisan identities as a result of their cultural conservatism, and these identities may make them responsive to discursive cues in the economic domain (e.g., Cohen, 2003; Levendusky, 2009; Malka & Lelkes, 2010). Future research should explore the applicability of this process outside the US.

Another implication of the present review pertains to the social goals of promoting stability, democracy, and peace. In this regard, it is first of all important to acknowledge that the high level of cultural conservatism among Muslims does not mean that Muslims are opposed to democracy. In fact, overt support for democracy is as high in the Muslim world as it is in most of the rest of the world (Diamond, 2008; Inglehart, 2003). Democracy may indeed reflect a universal value for freedom and self-determination that is not specific to particular religious or cultural groups. However, the cultural conservatism of Muslims may have harmful implications for efforts to develop and consolidate democratic institutions in Muslim societies at a time when many of them are undergoing upheaval and transition. Inglehart (2003) reported evidence that a liberal societal view toward homosexuality is a far stronger predictor of sustained democratic institutions than is overt support for democracy. The explanation offered is that a mass cultural value of tolerance is necessary to uphold democratic institutions (e.g., Gibson, 1998; although see Muller & Seligson, 1994). As Inglehart (2003, p. 54) put it:

Today, homosexuals constitute the most disliked group in most societies. Relatively few people express overt hostility toward other classes, races, or religions but rejection of homosexuals is widespread making attitudes toward them an effective litmus test of tolerance.

If it is true that dislike of homosexuals is the best way to gauge a society's tolerance, then a shift in cultural worldview may be necessary to bring about sustained democracy in the Muslim world.

Summary and Conclusion

There are pronounced differences in cultural political preferences across individuals of different religious affiliations and across individuals of different levels of religiosity. Muslims are more opposed to abortion and homosexuality than are members of other major religious groups and they are also more culturally conservative than one would predict on the basis of their national and individual wealth. Although Hindus and Buddhists are also relatively culturally conservative, new analyses with

WVS data suggest that, of these two, only Buddhists are more culturally conservative than what would be predicted based on their national and household wealth. Those without a religious affiliation show the opposite pattern; they are the most culturally liberal. That they are so is consistent with the reliable finding that those relatively high in religiosity are more culturally conservative than are those relatively low in religiosity. As for Christians, Catholics are somewhat conservative on abortion (but not homosexuality) whereas Orthodox Christians are conservative on homosexuality (but not abortion).

Religious affiliation differences in economic attitudes, having to do with redistributive social welfare policy and government intervention in the economy, are far less pronounced. The religious groups do not differ much in economic preferences. The new analyses do, however, suggest that Buddhists are relatively tolerant of income inequality, Hindus are economically liberal, and Muslims are relatively opposed to private ownership. Protestants seem to be more favorable to private ownership and individual responsibility for social welfare, but not more opposed to government efforts to promote economic equality. Effects of religiosity on economic preferences have been small and inconsistent. This may reflect competing influences of religious conviction on views about government's role in the economy.

The final point I make has to do with the claim that only religiously based cultural matters constitute "moral" issues whereas economic and other matters do not. This claim would be difficult to justify. Questions about the tradeoff between freedom and equality, and whether each is best promoted with or without an economically interventionist government, are most certainly moral matters. Moreover, religious conviction and moral conviction are not the same thing, and they can have independent influences on political viewpoints (Skitka, Bauman, & Lytle, 2009).

Nonetheless, the data show that issues concerning sex and family have more religious relevance to ordinary people than do economic issues. Why this is the case is not perfectly clear. It may have to do with specific traits and cognitive styles underlying both religiosity and cultural conservatism, but having little impact on economic attitudes (e.g., Crowson, 2009; Feldman & Johnston, in press). Or, it may reflect the contemporary tendency of elites to dwell on religion's cultural issue relevance while sidestepping or offering conflicting views about its economic relevance. This question is more than an intriguing theoretical matter; rather, it is one with implications for the nature and structure of social conflict.

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Notes

- 1 I do not refer here to liberalism in the classical sense, involving support of free markets and non-intervention of government in social life. Rather, I refer to liberalism as support of interventionist government in the economic domain and non-interventionist government in the social domain, the usage that currently predominates in the United States and other societies.
- 2 The cultural attitude domain, often called the “social” or “moral” domain, is often operationalized with indicators of sexual morality preferences, such as positions on abortion, homosexuality, and divorce (e.g., Baldassari & Gelman, 2008; Gerber, Huber, Doherty, Dowling, & Ha, 2010; Malka, Soto, Cohen, & Miller, 2011; Napier & Jost, 2008). In other studies, however, a broader cultural domain is assessed, that also includes positions on issues such as immigration and treatment of criminals and deviants (e.g., Treier & Hillygus, 2009). I focus on preferences concerning sexual morality because such attitudes have been widely studied in cross-national research on religion and political attitudes, tend to receive a strong emphasis in contemporary religious conservative movements, and may characterize a politically consequential fault line between societies (Norris & Inglehart, 2002). Readers interested in the effects of religion on other types of cultural attitude, particularly the complex effects of religion on prejudice, immigration attitudes, and crime attitudes are referred to Knoll, 2009; Malka & Soto, 2011; McDaniel, Nooruddin, & Shortle, 2010; Rowatt, Carpenter, & Haggard, Chapter 8, this volume; and Scheepers, Gijsberts, & Hello, 2002.

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