

Public Opinion on the Role of Religion in Political Leadership: A Multi-level Analysis of Sixty-three Countries

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Abstract

Are there significant variations across major religious faiths about the proper political roles of religion? Using recent *World Values/European Values* data from 63 countries we study the attitudes of mass publics on two separate aspects of this question. First, should religious beliefs be used as a criterion for selecting political leaders (dimension I)? Second, should religious leaders use their position for political influence (dimension II)? For dimension I we find that Muslims are somewhat more likely than followers of other faiths and denominations to say that religious beliefs are important in selecting leaders. The remaining results of our investigation somewhat weaken or modify this result. On dimension II we find that Muslims do not stand out as comparatively favorable towards the view that religious leaders shall use their position for political influence. Finally, we find a negative, albeit weak and somewhat irregular effect of education on attitudes towards a close link between religion and political leadership (dimension I). However, this effect holds up equally well for Muslims as for other denominations, suggesting that Muslims are not immune to the effects of secularization.

Should religion be an important factor in selecting political leaders and making decisions in government? What do the mass publics think about this question, and are the public's views different or similar across the main religious denominations of

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the world? Does Islam, for example, have a different understanding of the relationship between religion and politics than Christianity? The answers to these research questions are important for assessing the role played by religion in contemporary global society.

Religion has become a fashionable topic in contemporary social and political science (Haynes, 2005). Much attention has been directed at Samuel Huntington's thesis that a clash of civilizations is imminent and that religion plays a key role in creating violent conflict between Christian countries and the Muslim world (Huntington, 1993). As an interpretation of what might happen after the fall of communism, Huntington's thesis proved useful for those who looked for new sources of deep conflict in international relations. Moreover, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as the terrorist attacks in New York, Madrid, London, and Mumbai have seemed to increase the relevance of Huntington's claims about the political potency of religion.

Similarly, José Casanova in his influential book *Public Religions in the Modern World* argues that in the 1980s 'it was hard to find any serious conflict anywhere in the world that did not show behind it the not-so-hidden hand of religion' (Casanova, 1994: 3). Using five case studies from Spain, Poland, Brazil, and the United States, he concludes that modern religion has become deprivatized, meaning that churches and affiliated organizations took an active role in politics during this period. This argument could be interpreted as a strong critique of secularization theory, which predicts that the political power and influence of religion will steadily diminish. Secularization theory has also been questioned from the point of the new economic model of religion (Finke and Stark, 1988), which argues that strong religiosity is possible in modern society if churches and religious groups are allowed to compete in the religious market place.

Much of the recent research on the role of religion in society attempts to test hypotheses that are derived from the generalizations of these and other scholars. It is beyond the scope of this paper to review the empirical evidence for or against many of the new and controversial propositions. A fair reading of some of the major empirical critiques of secularization theories, for example, suggests that many of them either reject or at best support parts of the arguments. Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart (2004) show that an important aspect of secularization theory still holds: when personal and societal security increases as a consequence of human development and economic progress, religiosity declines.

Likewise, Loek Halman and Veerle Draulans (2004) analyze the correlates of religious beliefs in most of the European countries and find ample support for important aspects of secularization theory such as the claims that economic development and globalization weaken religiosity. The latter finding is confirmed by Ragnhild Nordås (2005) in an analysis based on *World Values* data and aggregate indicators of trade, tourism, and membership in intergovernmental organizations. Halman and Drauskas (2004) also question the market theory as they find that religious pluralism – which should increase competition – is negatively related to the strength of religious beliefs and practices. Their claim is contrary to the expectations of the market theory of religion.

The Huntington thesis has received much attention in empirical research. Mark Tessler (2002), Norris and Inglehart (2004), and Steven Hoffman (2004) have shown

that there is great variation in public opinion both within and between Muslim countries and that Muslims in general are supportive of democratic ideas and ideals. Using the *World Values/European Values Survey*, Norris and Inglehart (2004) conclude that the Muslim/non-Muslim gap is primarily a gap in gender and sexual attitudes and values. Muslims hold very traditionalist and restrictive views in these areas. Moreover, even the younger Muslim cohorts have restrictive values. Their conclusion suggests that differences in the values held by different religious traditions are unlikely to disappear in the near future.

The claim that Muslims are favorable towards the idea of a democratic society is more encouraging for the assessment of the political role of religion and civilizational conflict than the Huntington offering. A less optimistic verdict on the relationship between religion and conflict is delivered by Tanja Ellingsen (2005). She merges *World Values* data with the *Uppsala Conflict Database* and investigates how religion is linked to violent conflict. Based on the results from multivariate models that control for a large number of relevant variables, she finds that the level of religiosity in a country contributes to violent intrastate conflicts and concludes: ‘there is some evidence that during the last decades we have witnessed a resurgence of the impact of religion upon the question of identity, as well as the question of warfare. This is in line with “the religious revival/religious clashes thesis”’ (Ellingsen, 2005: 319).

Ellingsen’s conclusions can also be compared with many other studies that have uncovered a weak or nonexistent relationship for civilizational factors as causes of international conflict. Errol Henderson and Richard Tucker (2001) and Bruce Russett *et al.* (2000) both test Huntington’s claims using the *Correlates of War* data on militarized interstate disputes and a variety of other controls including Huntington’s classification of civilizations. Both studies fail to support the bulk of Huntington’s claims. In the first study, for example, the authors find that, for the pre-Cold War period (1816–1945), states of similar civilizations were more likely to fight each other than states of different civilizations, which contradicts Huntington’s assertions.¹ In the latter study, the authors examine the 1950–92 period and conclude that differences in civilization tells us little about the likelihood of *interstate* conflict; they argue the more relevant factor that unite and divide states are the common bonds of democracy and economic dependence.

The attention to Huntington’s claims and the various empirical tests of them are particularly relevant to the study of religion and public opinion. According to Huntington (1996: 253), religion is not only the most important component of a civilization, but perhaps the most profound difference that can exist between people. While Huntington linked peoples’ beliefs in different religions to intercivilizational conflict, here we focus on the linkages between religion, politics, and public opinion. How citizens in different parts of the world perceive these issues is an understudied yet

¹ Henderson and Tucker’s (2001) analysis of the post-Cold War period (1989–92) also failed to uncover a strong association between civilizational membership and the likelihood of interstate conflict, contrary to Huntington’s claims. However, the lack of a strong association during the Cold War era suggested Huntington may be partially correct that the clash of civilizations was suppressed by superpower rivalry.

important aspect for understanding the contemporary role of religion in politics. In contrast to Huntington's view of a clash of civilizations, secularization theory suggests that the influence of religion is waning. By examining the global trends of public opinion, it is thus possible to consider the extent of variation in attitudes within and across the world's major religions.

A key aspect of the link between religion and politics is the role played by political and religious leaders. How do citizens within and across different countries view their respective roles? Should these two groups be kept separate – or should there be strong links between them? Using public opinion surveys for the core of our analysis, we focus on two dimensions of religion and leadership. First, should religious faith be a criterion for selecting political leaders? Second, should religious leaders influence how citizens vote at elections and should they also influence government decisions? It is often argued that Islam is distinct from Western culture in emphasizing that the legitimacy of political leadership must be derived from religion. According to Norris and Inglehart, one of the major contrasts between Muslim and Western cultures relates to attitudes towards the role of religious leaders, who rule by virtue of their spiritual authority, or secular leaders who hold power through elective office, reflecting ingrained beliefs concerning the separation of church and state (2004: 143–4). A similar argument is emphasized by Yilmaz Esmer that the separation of religion and the political system has been problematic in Islam, particularly as the Holy Quran is not limited to matters of faith but is also a legal code, constitution, and a civil law for believers (2003: 59).

There are at least two recent studies that have analyzed the link between political leadership and religion. Loek Halman and Thorleif Pettersson (2004) argue that the link between leadership and religion is a function of secularization. As the secularization process proceeds, the mass publics will increasingly adopt the view that religion should not be politicized. This hypothesis is supported through an analysis of *World Values* data from 38 countries that are predominately Christian. Since the Halman and Pettersson study is confined to Christian countries, we cannot answer questions about whether the views between religion and politics differ significantly across the world's major religious traditions. This is unfortunate as some of the most intriguing and controversial questions are at this level.

Does Islam, for example, view the relationship between religion and politics differently than Christianity? To what extent are some of Huntington's arguments about the clash of civilizations supported in the analysis of survey data? Norris and Inglehart (2004) analyze countries covering nine major religious cultures: Muslim, Orthodox, Central European, Latin American, Sinic/Confucian, Sub-Saharan African, Hindu, Japanese, and Western. In assessing differences between Islam and other cultural spheres, they estimate a comprehensive statistical model where dummy variables for cultures are included with other country- and individual-level control variables. Interestingly, they find that the Muslim culture is significantly more likely to approve of religious leadership in politics than Western culture (Norris and Inglehart, 2004: 145). This stands in contrast to measures of support for democracy, where there are no significant

differences between Western culture and Islam. It is important to note that it is not only Islam that is more likely than the West to approve of religious leadership in politics. With the exception of Sinic/Confucian culture, all cultures are more likely than the West to be positive to religion as a source for norms of political leadership, with Orthodox and Sub-Saharan African cultures showing about the same size of effects as Islam.

A weakness of the Norris and Inglehart study is that they analyze only one of the relevant dimensions of leadership – should religious beliefs be used as a criterion for selecting political leaders. A second dimension – should religious leaders influence political decisions – is left out of their analysis, although relevant data are available and analyzed by Halman and Pettersson (2004). Another critique of their study is that religious affiliation is coded at the country level so that everyone in the same country is classified under the same religious tradition. However, within a cultural region there will be variation in the composition and size of religious denominations across countries, as well as variation in the religiosity of individuals. Some of the variation by country is evident in the presentations of Norris and Inglehart (2004) in their comparison of the Muslim cultural region versus other cultural regions. But religion and religiosity must also be measured at the individual level. In contrast to Huntington (1993) and Norris and Inglehart (2004), our study focuses on the micro-level factors that shape how citizens differentiate between religion and politics.

Data and dependent variables

We use the 1999–2001 WVS/EVS studies that allow us to examine mass political attitudes in a total of 63 countries that have diverse cultural, religious, and political traditions. The countries we cover are specified in Table 1. We complement micro data such as gender and level of education with macro data on economic development, ethnic fractionalization, and assessment of the state of democracy in the respondents' country. We commence by detailing how we operationalize our measures, beginning with the dependent variables.

The dependent variables we use to tap public views on the relationship between religion and politics are based on four survey questions. Respondents were asked to agree or disagree on a 5-point scale with the following four statements: (A) politicians who do not believe in God are unfit for public office; (B) religious leaders should not influence how people vote in elections; (C) it would be better for this country if more people with strong religious beliefs held public office; and (D) religious leaders should not influence government decisions. Statements A and C refer to the extent that religiously involved people should compete or hold public office (dimension I), whereas statements B and D concern the extent that religious leaders should be involved in political decisions (dimension II). As each set of statements taps a different dimension of views regarding the relationship between religion and politics, we follow Halman and Pettersson (2004) by examining each dimension as a separate dependent variable.

We code both dependent variables so that higher scores on the 5-point scale reflect more importance accorded to the religious position. The score for each dependent

variable is the mean score for both statements if there is at least one completed response. To confirm that each of our dependent variables taps the same underlying dimension of views between religion and politics, we tested for unidimensionality. The results of the factor analysis (not displayed) suggest that each dependent variable taps different dimensions on views towards religion and politics.² Our factor analysis parallels the results of Halman and Pettersson (2004) and further concurs with the decision of Norris and Inglehart (2004) to combine the first dimension, the role of religiously involved people, into one index.

Empirical results: bivariate analysis

Table 1 presents the mean scores for each dimension of views on the relationship between religion and politics. Using a total of 63 countries where survey questions concerning religion and politics were asked, we have grouped each country and the mean scores for both dependent variables based on the classifications of civilization utilized by Huntington (1993) and Norris and Inglehart (2004).

For the first dimension, if religion is an important criterion for the recruitment of political leaders, the Islamic and Sub-Saharan Africa civilizations demonstrate the highest mean score of a 3.8, followed by Latin America (3.1), Orthodox (3.0), India (3.0), Confucian (2.7), Central Europe (2.6), Catholic (2.5), Japan (2.4), and the Protestant civilizations (2.3). An examination of the mean scores within each civilization reveals a wide range of variation across individual countries. In Protestant countries, for example, the United States has the highest mean score of 3.3 compared to the lowest score of 1.6 in Denmark. Among the Islamic countries, Egypt and Indonesia have the largest scores of 4.4 compared to the lowest score of 3.2 in Albania. For dimension I, Table 1 usefully captures intracivilizational as well as intercivilizational sources of variation.

Unlike the first dimension, Table 1 reveals less variation across the civilizations for dimension II. The highest score belongs to Sub-Saharan Africa (2.4) and Latin America (2.4), followed by Islamic (2.3), Confucian (2.3), Protestant (2.2), India (2.2), Catholic (2.0), Orthodox (2.0), Japan (2.0), and Central Europe (2.0). If we examine the scores within each civilization, the range of values appears rather narrow. Among the nine countries in Central Europe, for example, the scores range from 1.8 to 2.1. While both dimensions tap views towards religion and politics, the tide of global opinion appears to be considerably less willing to allow religious leaders to influence the vote as well as government decisions.

Why is there less global support for the second dimension? On one hand, the mass publics may be genuinely less willing to commit to a position that would allow religious

² Using varimax rotated principal component analysis, the coefficients fell into one consistent dimension across the set of countries for each of the dependent variables. The results are roughly the same using either individual or aggregated data for each country. Halman and Pettersson (2004) differ from our approach by including a third dependent variable that combines all four items, which they justify on theoretical grounds.

Table 1. Mean scores by country and civilization for two dimensions¹ of the relationship between religion and politics²

Protestant			Catholic			Orthodox		
	I	II		I	II		I	II
Canada	2.6	2.2	Austria	2.4	1.8	Belarus	2.8	1.9
Denmark	1.6	1.7	Belgium	1.9	1.8	Bosnia	2.6	2.0
Finland	2.3	2.3	France	1.8	1.6	Bulgaria	2.8	1.9
Germany	2.3	2.1	Ireland	2.5	2.2	Greece	3.1	2.1
Great Britain	2.3	2.3	Italy	2.5	2.1	Macedonia	2.8	1.9
Iceland	2.2	2.2	Luxembourg	2.3	1.9	Moldova	3.4	2.4
Netherlands	1.9	2.4	Malta	3.3	2.0	Montenegro	2.7	1.9
Sweden	1.9	2.4	Northern Ireland	2.4	2.2	Romania	3.6	2.0
United States	3.3	2.5	Philippines	3.9	2.1	Russia	3.0	2.2
<i>Average</i>	2.3	2.2	Portugal	2.5	2.0	Serbia	2.8	1.8
			Spain	2.4	2.1	Ukraine	3.3	2.1
			<i>Average</i>	2.5	2.0	<i>Average</i>	3.0	2.0
Central Europe			Islamic			Sub-Saharan Africa		
	I	II		I	II		I	II
Croatia	2.9	1.9	Albania	3.2	2.1	Nigeria	4.3	2.1
Czech Republic	2.1	2.1	Algeria	3.7	2.9	South Africa	3.7	2.5
Estonia	2.6	2.0	Bangladesh	3.3	2.3	Tanzania	3.8	2.1
Hungary	2.3	2.0	Egypt	4.4	2.5	Uganda	3.6	2.5
Latvia	2.9	2.1	Indonesia	4.4	2.5	Zimbabwe	3.4	2.7
Lithuania	2.8	1.9	Jordan	4.0	2.1	<i>Average</i>	3.8	2.4
Poland	2.6	1.8	Morocco	4.2	2.1			
Slovakia	2.8	2.0	Pakistan	3.8	2.1			
Slovenia	2.1	2.1	Turkey	3.5	2.2			
<i>Average</i>	2.6	2.0	<i>Average</i>	3.8	2.3			
Latin America			Confucian			Japanese and Hindu		
	I	II		I	II		I	II
Argentina	2.9	2.3	South Korea	2.6	2.3	India	3.0	2.2
Chile	2.7	2.3	Vietnam	2.7	2.3	Japan	2.4	2.0
Mexico	2.9	2.4	<i>Average</i>	2.7	2.3			
Puerto Rico	3.5	2.3						
Venezuela	3.5	2.5						
<i>Average</i>	3.1	2.4						

Notes: ¹Data are from the 1999/2001 wave of the *WVS/EVS Survey*. Dimension I is the mean score to the questions: (1) politicians who do not believe in God are unfit for public office; and (2) it would be better if more people with strong religious beliefs hold public office. Dimension II is the mean score to questions: (3) religious leaders should influence how people vote in elections; and (4) religious leaders should influence government decisions. Higher scores on the 5-point scale indicate more support for the religious position.

²This is based on the classification of Huntington (1998) and Inglehart and Norris (2003). Average scores for each civilization are calculated by taking the mean score for each country divided by the total number of countries in each civilization.

leaders to be actively involved in the political process. The contents of the questions may simply have been less agreeable to many of the respondents. Alternatively, the lower scores could reflect the nature of the survey questions. Unlike dimension I, both questions that comprise dimension II were phrased to respondents in negative terms (e.g. religious leaders should not influence how people vote in elections). It may have been easier for respondents to agree with the contents of dimension I over dimension II.

This examination of the mean scores suggests that the first dimension contains the most variation between individual countries as well as between civilizations. The mean averages for each civilization are all higher on the first dimension than on the second dimension, suggesting that more respondents are more inclined to favorably agree with having religiously involved people in politics rather than having religious leaders involved in political decisions. It is possible that the lower values on the second dimension could be related to the phrasing of the survey questions. However, the effects and strength of these scores also appear to be highly influenced by the character of individual countries.

The study by Norris and Inglehart (2004) reports results by civilization as measured by the dominant culture in the country. In contrast to cultural civilization, religious denomination is a more direct measure of religious forces that influence the attitudes and values of the individual. The classification by denomination allows us to compare the effects of the major world religions and also to compare citizens with a denomination with those who report no affiliation with organized religion.

When the *World Values Survey* asked respondents their religious denomination, there were approximately 86 response categories ranging from ancestral worship in Vietnam to the Independent African Church in South Africa and Zimbabwe. To reduce the large number of denominations, we have recoded the answers using the nine response categories used in the portion of the *European Values Survey*: Catholic, Protestant, Free Church, Jew, Muslim, Hindu, Orthodox, and Other. In the analysis that follows, we focus on five denominations: Muslim, Orthodox, Protestant, Catholic, and Other.

In particular, we are interested in examining differences between Muslim and other religious denominations, given much of the debate is on whether there are divergent opinions on such matters as politics and religion. In their examination of Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' argument, Norris and Inglehart compare levels of support for the role of religious leaders between Muslim countries and countries by other religions and conclude that '*Muslim publics did display greater support for a strong societal role by religious authorities than do Western publics*' (2004: 146–7, italics in the original). However, their conclusions are based on a more narrow analysis of only two of the four survey questions about the relationship between politics and religion. Moreover, their analysis does not examine differences in the levels of support within specific civilizations.

To move beyond the overly broad category of civilization and to broaden the analysis to include both dimensions of the leadership issue, we report the mean scores

Table 2. Mean scores at the individual level for two dimensions of the relationship between religion and politics

Denomination	Dimension I ¹	Dimension II ²	n
Islam	3.90	2.26	14,403
Orthodox	3.15	2.10	8,534
Protestant	2.95	2.26	10,570
Roman Catholic	2.84	2.13	22,867
Other ³	3.10	2.32	8,260
No religious affiliation	2.23	1.95	16,131

Notes: Data are from the 1999/2001 wave of the *WVS/EVS Survey* in 63 countries.

¹Dimension I is the mean score to the questions: (1) politicians who do not believe in God are unfit for public office; and (2) it would be better if more people with strong religious beliefs hold public office.

²Dimension II is the mean score to questions: (3) religious leaders should influence how people vote in elections; and (4) religious leaders should influence government decisions. Higher scores on the 5-point scale indicate more support for the religious position. The individual level scores are calculated for all individuals in each religious group across the 63 countries.

³The other category includes Buddhist, Jewish, Hindu, and Evangelical respondents.

for each religious denomination in Table 2. The figure reported for Islam, for example, is the average value for all Muslim respondents in the survey. For dimension I, Muslim Islam has high score of 3.90 followed by Other (3.10), Orthodox (3.15), Protestant (2.95), Roman Catholic (2.84) and no religious affiliation (2.23). In dimension II, the largest mean score belongs to Other (2.32) followed by Islam (2.26), Protestant (2.26), Roman Catholic (2.13), and Orthodox (2.10).

These results are partly in line with the empirical results reported in Table 1, and show clearly that Islam stands out on the recruitment dimensions. Muslims are much more likely than either Protestants or Catholics to say that political leaders should be recruited from believers. In the second dimension, the mean scores confirm that there is very little variation across denominations. For both dimensions persons without a religious affiliation are the least likely to agree that religion should be a factor in political recruitment and influence.

Empirical results: multivariate analysis

We have demonstrated that attitudes about how religion and politics should be linked are related to religious denominations. Moreover, the analysis showed that the majority of denominations felt more strongly for the view that leaders should hold religious beliefs in contrast to the position that religious leaders should be actively involved in influencing and persuading voters and government decisions. But the empirical evidence in Tables 1 and 2 is based on simple bivariate analysis. To arrive at a

firmer conclusion, we need to estimate the effect of religious denomination in a model that controls for other relevant factors.

One of the most important factors we expect will explain variation at the individual level is religious intensity. Respondents with stronger religious beliefs and practices are more likely to express favorable assessments for the role of religion in politics. The first question we use taps the strength of religious adherence by asking respondents: 'Apart from weddings, funerals and christenings, about how often do you attend religious services these days?' Answers to the question compose a 7-point scale ranging from 'more than once a week' at the lowest value to 'never' at the highest value. We have reversed the original coding for the purpose of this analysis, whereas higher values correspond to greater strength of religious adherence. The second question we use taps the intensity of religious beliefs by asking respondents to rank the importance of God in their life on a scale where '10' means very important and '1' means not important at all.³ We expect that higher values on how respondents rank the importance of God should translate into a more positive assessment for the role of religion in politics.

In contrast to the variables that tap religious intensity, we expect that higher levels of education will be negatively correlated with a favorable perception of religion in politics. To measure the impact of education at the individual level, we use a question where respondents were asked to specify the highest educational level they have attained. We use a recoded measure of this variable that places respondents into one of three education levels: lower, middle, and upper. As higher scores correspond to higher levels of education, we posit a negative effect between this measure and our dependent variables.

In addition to the measures that tap religious intensity and education, we include several control variables measured at the micro and macro levels. First, we include two measures that tap whether respondents are interested in politics and whether they are satisfied with how democracy is developing in their country. It is not straightforward to formulate an expectation for these variables. If we see political interest as an indicator of the general political involvement of individuals that follows the logic of political modernization, we might hypothesize that persons with a strong interest in politics will be less likely to accord a favorable view towards religion in politics. Alternatively, it is possible to think that respondents who express an active interest in politics would like to see religion play a greater role in public affairs. The second measure taps the degree that respondents are satisfied with the way democracy is developing in their country.⁴ Following the modernization argument, we posit that respondents with higher levels of satisfaction are likely to be more critical of an active role of religion in politics. We recode the original 4-point scale, where higher values indicate greater levels of democratic satisfaction.

³ The correlation between both variables is 0.45.

⁴ For a discussion of problems related to the study of the correlates and operationalizations of various measures of political trust, see Fuchs *et al.* (1995) and Listhaug and Wiberg (1995), among others.

We also control for three other individual-level variables: gender, income, and age. Proponents of modernization theory argue that there are differences in the attitudes between men and women as one consequence of structural changes in the socioeconomic positions of men and women in society (Inglehart and Norris, 2003: 89–91). Moreover, proponents of the related secularization approach anticipate that females, as well as older respondents, will be more in favor of a closer involvement of religion in politics (Halman and Pettersson, 2004: 335). The gender variable takes the value ‘1’ for female respondents and ‘0’ for males.

The variable for income indirectly taps the general economic position of respondents by asking them to specify their total household income. We have recoded this variable on a 3-point interval of lower, middle, and upper income levels. The general expectation is that respondents in higher income brackets should be less favorable for a strong role of religion in public affairs. Likewise, the age variable is simply the age in actual years reported by each respondent.

At the macro level, we incorporate three control variables in our model: the level of economic development as measured by GDP per capita⁵ in US dollars; a measure of countries’ social structures, a score for ethnic fractionalization;⁶ and a variable measuring the state of democracy⁷ in the country. Modernization theories as well as secularization approaches often anticipate that opinions towards a strong role for religion in society will decline as the level of economic development proceeds. This leads us to expect a negative effect of GDP per capita on support for a strong religious position in public affairs.

In countries with greater ethnic fractionalization, one might expect a more diverse range of opinions and a higher level of support for a stronger role of religion in public affairs. Moreover, many of the countries that are ethnically diverse are still modernizing. Indeed, there is a negative correlation of 0.41 between the logged values of GDP per capita and the ethnic fractionalization scores. We anticipate that higher levels of ethnic fractionalization are related to a stronger role for religion in politics, while the measure for GDP will have the opposite effect.

Finally, our measure for the state of democracy in a country uses a combined score of political rights and civil liberties established by Freedom House, which we have reversed for the purposes of our analysis. The average score across our set of countries was a 2.8 on a scale of 1 to 7, where a ‘7’ indicates the worst rating for political rights and civil liberties. In our sample of countries, approximately 13 scored

⁵ The figures are from the United Nations’ *Monthly Bulletin of Statistics* for year 1998. We use the logged value.

⁶ This score is taken from Alesina *et al.* (2003)’s *Ethnic Fractionalization Index* and is a scale from 0 to 1, where 0 indicates the least fractionalization. The variable reflects the probability that two randomly selected individuals from a population belong to different groups. Alesina *et al.* code this variable from multiple sources including the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and *CIA World Factbook*.

⁷ We use a merged score of political rights and civil liberties from the Freedom House <<http://www.freedomhouse.org/ratings/index.htm>>.

had the highest score of a '1', which includes: Austria, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, United States, and Northern Ireland. On the opposite side of the spectrum, Vietnam is the only country to score a '7', followed by a '6' in four countries: Serbia, Montenegro, Egypt, and Belarus. We expect that the more advanced democracies will have mass publics who are negative to a situation where religion plays an important role in politics.

Multilevel analysis

Because our research design has hierarchically nested data – individuals situated within countries – we use a statistical method called multilevel analysis.⁸ This analysis allows us to assume the variation in our dependent variables is a function of both lower-level and higher-level factors. From an econometric standpoint, the regression coefficients in the micro-level models are allowed to vary across these factors rather than being fixed (Jones and Steenbergen, 1997).⁹ This particular modeling approach will allow us to consider the effects of particular religious denominations, while controlling for both micro- and macro-factors, which have not been studied in either the previous analysis of Norris and Inglehart (2004), who focus on civilizations, or by Halman and Pettersson (2004), who limit their study to 38 predominantly Christian countries.

The results of the multilevel analysis are reported in Table 3. Model I reports the results for the first dependent variable, which taps the extent that people support the position that it is important to recruit religiously involved people in public affairs. Model II details the results for the second dependent variable, whether religious leaders should influence political decisions. In both models, higher scores represent a more positive evaluation of the role of religion. The micro- or individual-level effects are listed first followed by the macro- or country-level effects.

In Model I, the first five micro-level variables represent the religious denominations of the respondents. Here we are able to compare the effects for each denomination against Protestant respondents, which is the excluded reference category. The results show that Muslims average 0.5 points more than Protestants, while Catholics and religious independents are at least 0.1 point lower. There is no statistical difference between Protestants, Orthodox, and respondents grouped in the other denomination category. The results for the religious denominations also account for religious intensity. Respondents who report higher religious service attendance and accord a greater

⁸ To accomplish this task, we use Mlwin software, version 2.00 (Rasbash *et al.*, 2004); see Goldstein (1987) for an overview of this approach.

⁹ Without including any of the independent variables, the variation among the countries constitutes around 21 per cent of the variance for the first dependent variable and about 23 per cent for the second dependent variable. Both of these figures are large enough to show that there is significant variation at both the individual and country-level. We thus proceed with the multilevel analysis.

Table 3. Regression of micro and macro-level variables on the two dimensions of the relationship between religion and politics in 63 countries

	Model I ¹		Model II ²	
	b	se	b	se
Micro-level variables				
Constant	2.891***	(0.452)	1.834***	(0.333)
Muslim respondent	0.054**	(0.021)	-0.003	(0.022)
Orthodox respondent	-0.012	(0.022)	-0.056**	(0.024)
Catholic respondent	-0.109***	(0.016)	-0.011	(0.017)
Other denomination	-0.017	(0.016)	0.016	(0.017)
No denomination	-0.151***	(0.015)	-0.062***	(0.016)
Attend religious services	0.059***	(0.002)	0.036***	(0.002)
Importance of God	0.113***	(0.002)	0.036***	(0.002)
Education	-0.085***	(0.006)	-0.028***	(0.006)
Satisfaction with democracy	0.008	(0.005)	-0.002	(0.005)
Interest in politics	-0.028***	(0.004)	-0.002	(0.005)
Gender (1 = female)	0.024***	(0.007)	0.017**	(0.008)
Age (in years)	0.003***	(0.000)	-0.001***	(0.000)
Income	-0.044***	(0.005)	-0.001***	(0.005)
Macro-level variables				
GDP per capita (logged)	-0.299***	(0.097)	0.004	(0.071)
Freedom House score (reversed)	0.033	(0.036)	0.007	(0.026)
Ethnic fractionalization	0.419*	(0.202)	-0.112	(0.144)
Variance components				
Country-level	0.100***	(0.019)	0.050***	(0.010)
Individual-level	0.785***	(0.005)	0.910***	(0.005)
N	59,894		59,550	
-2 log likelihood	155778.200		163626.300	

Notes: Data are from the 1999/2001 wave of the *WVS/EVS Survey* in 63 countries. b: regression coefficients, se: standard error of b; *:p < 0.05; **:p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001. Protestant is the reference category for religious faith.

¹Dependent variable for Model I is the mean score to the questions: (1) politicians who do not believe in God are unfit for public office; and (2) it would be better if more people with strong religious beliefs hold public office.

²Model II is the mean score to questions: (3) religious leaders should influence how people vote in elections; and (4) religious leaders should influence government decisions. For each model, higher scores indicate more support for the religious position.

importance for God in their lives averaged higher scores for the role of religiously involved people in public affairs.¹⁰

¹⁰ We also examined whether there is an interaction effect between 'attend religious services' and 'importance of God' for each of the dependent variables. In both cases, the results were insignificant.

The level of respondents' education was noted to be an important indicator for modernization theories and secularization approaches, with one claim asserting that increased education should lead to less emphasis on religious matters. In Model I, the impact of education is negatively associated with greater support for religiously involved people, which suggests some support for this claim. In addition, women score about 0.02 points higher than men, while age is positively related to a stronger religious position. In contrast, higher household income is negatively related to support for a stronger role of religion in public affairs. Finally, the measure for satisfaction for democracy has no statistically significant effect in Model I. However, respondents' interest in politics is negatively related to the view that accords religion a more prominent position in public affairs.¹¹

For the macro-level variables, only the coefficient for GDP per capita is statistically significant. The effect of this variable is negatively associated (-0.299) with support for religiously involved people in public affairs, which suggests that attitudes become more critical of the role of religion with higher levels of economic development. Both the measures for the level of democracy and the ethnic fractionalization scores appear to exert no effects on views towards religion and politics.

Model II of Table 3 reports the results of the same model for our second dependent variable: a score indicating the views of respondents towards the role of religious leaders in political decisions. First, the effects of the variables for religious denomination diverge from the results of Model I. When compared to Protestants, the coefficient for Muslim respondents has no discernible effect. However, Orthodox respondents average 0.56 points below Protestants, while the coefficient for Catholic is no longer statistically significant. One of the only consistencies between the two models is the lower score of religious independents. The effects for the measures for religious intensity, however, have consistent positive effects in both models. Furthermore, the measure for respondents' level of education shows a negative effect.

For the remaining micro-level variables, the measures for gender and household income are both statistically significant and negatively signed. The variable for interest in politics has lost statistical significance, whereas the coefficient of age is now negatively associated with the second dependent variable. At the macro-level, none of the variables is statistically significant. The results of the multilevel analysis capture mixed results for the effects of micro- and macro-level factors on the dependent variables that tap two dimensions of the relationship between religion and politics.

Micro-level analysis with religious groups as unit of analysis

In the next section, we take the analysis one step further and shift the level of analysis to an investigation of major religious groups within the same country. Specifically, we

¹¹ One might also expect an interaction effect between 'interest in politics' and 'satisfaction with democracy'. Our inclusion of an interaction term proved statistically insignificant for both dependent variables.

are interested in examining a subset of the countries where there is more than one major religious denomination. The advantage of this approach is that we are able to examine variation within countries rather than focusing on religious denominations across the entire set of countries. By analyzing data in this way, we will get a purer measure of the effect of religious denomination. A difficulty of this analysis is the small sample sizes for religious groups within countries, which could make it challenging to derive statistically significant results.

In addition to a comparison of attitudes across religious groups within countries, we investigate whether the forces that strengthen or weaken attitudes are the same across religious groups within countries. In Table 3, we found that our measures for religious intensity were positively associated with attitudes that supported the recruitment of political leaders with strong religious beliefs. Is the strength of this relationship the same for different religious groups in a country, or is it stronger for some groups? If religious leaders actively politicize their faith, followers exhibiting intense beliefs as measured by participation in religious services and the ranking of God's importance in life will be likely to support the use of religion as criterion for recruitment of political leaders. In a low-politicized faith, an intense religious involvement will be much less likely to be translated into support for the political use of religion.

The second research question that we ask in this section is whether education has the same negative effect on politicized religion for all religious groups. The Norris and Inglehart (2004) claim that even younger Muslim cohorts exhibit very traditional gender norms and sexual attitudes might suggest that Muslims are relatively immune to the effects of secularization. We ask a parallel question for education. If the Muslim faith is more resistant of secularization efforts than other major faiths, we will expect that the negative effect of education on support for politicized religion will be weaker among Muslims than among followers of other faiths.

Using the same set of 63 countries from the prior analysis, we have selected countries where there is more than one major religious denomination (Muslim, Protestant, Orthodox, or Catholic). We also limit the analysis to religious groups with a sample size of at least 150 respondents. Following these guidelines, we are able to analyze 11 countries that have two religious groups with the exception of Tanzania with three. The sample sizes range from 158 respondents for Catholics in South Korea to 1,285 Protestants in Nigeria. In Table 4, we list the names of the countries and religious groups, the sample sizes and the mean score for each of our dependent variables.

We proceed by examining the mean scores for both of our dependent variables in Table 4. For the first dependent variable that taps views towards religiously involved people in public affairs (dimension I), Nigeria Muslims and Protestants exhibited the highest average at 4.48 and 4.28 respectively, followed by Muslims (3.82) and Protestants (3.73) in Tanzania. When we examine the amount of variation in support levels between groups in the same country, the largest difference we uncover is between Muslims and Orthodox respondents in Macedonia (1.00), followed by Protestants and Catholics in South Korea (0.29) and Protestants and Catholics in the United States (0.27).

Table 4. Mean scores for views of religion and politics for religious groups within countries

Country	Group	Dimension I	Dimension II
Bosnia	Muslim	2.78	1.98
Bosnia	Orthodox	2.60	1.97
Canada	Protestant	2.98	2.39
Canada	Catholic	2.63	2.14
Germany	Catholic	2.79	2.24
Germany	Protestant	2.53	2.28
Latvia	Catholic	3.16	2.09
Latvia	Protestant	3.10	2.29
Macedonia	Muslim	3.55	1.82
Macedonia	Orthodox	2.55	2.30
Montenegro	Orthodox	2.76	1.93
Montenegro	Muslim	2.69	1.92
Nigeria	Muslim	4.48	2.05
Nigeria	Protestant	4.28	2.16
South Korea	Protestant	3.14	2.51
South Korea	Catholic	2.85	2.48
Tanzania	Muslim	3.82	2.02
Tanzania	Protestant	3.73	2.11
Tanzania	Catholic	3.68	2.25
Uganda	Catholic	3.68	2.50
Uganda	Protestant	3.53	2.44
United States	Protestant	3.49	2.77
United States	Catholic	3.23	2.61

Notes: Data are from the 1999/2001 wave of the WVS/EVS Survey. We include main religious groups within countries with sample sizes over 150 respondents.

¹Dimension I is the mean score to the questions: (1) politicians who do not believe in God are unfit for public office; and (2) it would be better if more people with strong religious beliefs hold public office.

²Dimension II is the mean score to questions: (3) religious leaders should influence how people vote in elections; and (4) religious leaders should influence government decisions. Higher scores on the 5-point scale indicate more support for the religious position.

In terms of the second dependent variable (dimension II), the average values are considerably lower. The highest score belongs to the Protestants in the United States (2.77) followed by the Protestants in South Korea (2.48) and Catholics in Uganda (2.59). Within each country, there is much less variation on these scores between the religious groups. The largest gaps are between the Muslims and Orthodox in Macedonia (0.48), Protestants and Catholics in Canada (0.25), and Muslims and Catholics in Tanzania.

Table 5 presents the results of ordinary least squares regressions on a total of 23 religious groups in 11 countries. We report only the results for the first dimension of views on religion and politics. In the model, we include control variables for age, gender,

Table 5. Regression of micro-level variables on views between religion and politics¹ for religious groups within countries², ordinary least squares regression

Country	Group	Religious	Importance	Education	Adj. R ²	N
		service	of God			
		b	b	b		
Bosnia	Muslim	0.085***	0.136***	-0.111***	0.207	466
Bosnia	Orthodox	0.195***	0.064**	0.027	0.193	188
Canada	Protestant	0.067***	0.139***	-0.191***	0.226	351
Canada	Catholic	0.051***	0.118***	-0.014	0.164	696
Germany	Catholic	0.073***	0.206***	-0.048	0.420	316
Germany	Protestant	0.076***	0.128***	-0.018	0.293	529
Latvia	Catholic	-0.031	0.156***	0.044	0.207	163
Latvia	Protestant	0.121***	0.112***	0.147	0.206	154
Macedonia	Muslim	0.086**	0.024	-0.132	0.030	217
Macedonia	Orthodox	0.054*	0.174***	-0.105***	0.246	594
Montenegro	Orthodox	0.192***	0.133***	-0.021	0.404	526
Montenegro	Muslim	0.091**	0.111***	-0.413***	0.351	167
Nigeria	Muslim	-0.014	-0.007	0.012	0.021	611
Nigeria	Protestant	0.066***	0.016	0.007	0.006	1285
South Korea	Protestant	0.098***	0.143***	-0.099	0.232	280
South Korea	Catholic	0.173***	0.020***	0.069	0.229	158
Tanzania	Muslim	0.053*	0.002	-0.010	0.010	399
Tanzania	Protestant	-0.006	-0.015	-0.271**	0.004	205
Tanzania	Catholic	-0.044	-0.010	0.084	0.003	287
Uganda	Catholic	0.255***	0.008	0.119	0.120	191
Uganda	Protestant	0.145***	0.002	0.170	0.060	233
United States	Protestant	0.143***	0.099***	-0.185**	0.147	301
United States	Catholic	0.087**	0.122***	-0.102	0.111	253

Notes: Data are from the 1999/2001 wave of the WVS/EVS Survey in 63 countries. Figures are unstandardized regression coefficients. The models control for other individual-level variables, including age, gender, income, and satisfaction with democracy (results not shown). *: $p < 0.05$; **: $p < 0.01$; ***: $p < 0.001$.

¹We report the results for only the first dimension. The dependent variable is the mean score to the questions: (1) politicians who do not believe in God are unfit for public office; and (2) it would be better if more people with strong religious beliefs hold public office.

²We include countries where there are plural religious groups and limit our selection to sample sizes above 150 respondents.

income, and satisfaction with democracy but report only the coefficients for the three variables of most theoretical interest: the two variables tapping religious intensity and the measure for education.

The first variable that taps religious intensity, religious service attendance, is statistically significant and positively signed for all groups except four. The largest

coefficients for the religious service variable are uncovered for Uganda Catholics (0.255), Bosnia Orthodox (0.195) and Montenegro Orthodox (0.054). Among the Muslim groups, the largest coefficient is found in Montenegro. However, there are four Protestant groups where the coefficient size is larger (Uganda, United States, Latvia, and South Korea), suggesting that the effects of the variable are not particular to any one group.

The second variable that reflects religious intensity, the importance of God, is statistically significant and positively signed in all but eight of the 23 groups. The size of the coefficient is largest for German Catholics (0.206) followed by Macedonia Orthodox (0.174) and South Korea Protestants (0.143). The largest coefficient for Muslims is for Bosnia (0.136) while the largest for Protestants is South Korea (0.143). Both the measures related to religious intensity appear to generate the hypothesized effect for a greater involvement of religion in politics for both of the dimensions. Moreover, the effects of religious intensity are consistent for Muslims as well as for other groups.

The final measure we include in the model reflects the respondents' level of education and is only statistically significant and correctly signed for seven of the religious groups. The amount of variance explained by the models (as indicated by the adjusted R^2) ranges from 0.420 for German Catholics to 0.006 for Nigeria Protestants. In particular, the explained variance is low for Uganda Protestants (0.06), Macedonia Muslims (0.03), Nigeria Muslims (0.021), Tanzania Muslims (0.01), Nigeria Protestants (0.006), Tanzania Protestants (0.004), and Tanzania Catholics (0.003). In contrast to the measures tapping religious intensity, the effects of education are less discernible when the level of analysis is focused on religious groups within countries.

We also have estimated the same model for the second dependent variable: support for religious leaders. The results of this analysis (not displayed) confirm a considerably weaker effect for the three variables used in the previous model. For the measures related to religious intensity, the effects of the variables were statistically significant and positively signed in only ten of the 23 groups. For the measure of education, the effects only proved to be significant and negatively signed for only five of the groups.¹² The analysis conducted on the second dimension confirmed substantially weaker effects for all three variables.

In sum, the results of the analysis in this section do not add substantial support to the hypothesis of variations between denominations in the same country. The only large difference is in Macedonia where Muslims are much more likely than Orthodox Christians to emphasize religious beliefs as a criterion for selecting political leaders. We know that at the time of interviewing Macedonia was experiencing a tense political situation where the Albanian Muslim minority was involved in an intense political struggle with the Orthodox majority, nearly leading to civil war in the country (Ringdal *et al.*, 2005). This could account for the strong politicization of religion among the

¹² The five groups include: Macedonia Orthodox (−0.136), Nigeria Muslims (−0.148), South Korea Protestants (−0.181), Montenegro Muslims (−0.253), and Uganda Catholics (−0.244).

Muslim minority. However, for dimension II, Muslims are, if anything, less likely than the Orthodox to argue that religious leaders should use their position for political influence. Furthermore, other empirical results in this section show that the impact of the intensity of religious beliefs on attitudes is about the same across all religious groups, Muslim included. The impact of education is negative, although weak and inconsistent, and is equally valid for Muslims as for the other religious groups.

Conclusion

Are there significant variations across major religious faiths about the proper political roles of religion? Using recent *World Values/European Values* data from 63 countries, we study the attitudes of mass publics on two separate aspects of this question. First, should religious beliefs be used as a criterion for selecting political leaders (dimension I)? Second, should religious leaders use their position for political influence (dimension II)? We analyze both dimensions of leadership, operationalize religion at the denominational and country levels, and we perform an extensive comparison of religious groups within countries.

For dimension I, we find that Muslims are somewhat more likely than followers of other faiths and denominations to say that religious beliefs are important in selecting leaders. The remaining results of our investigation somewhat weaken or modify this result. On dimension II, Muslims do not stand out as comparatively favorable towards the view that religious leaders shall use their position for political influence. In the analysis of religious groups within countries, we show that the effects of religious intensity are basically the same across all religious groups, Muslims included. Finally, we find a negative, albeit weak and somewhat irregular effect of education on attitudes towards a close link between religion and political leadership (dimension I). However, this effect holds up equally well for Muslims as for other denominations, suggesting that Muslims are not immune to the effects of secularization.

The results of our analysis do not support several of the controversial claims in the literature. Although we do not offer a direct test on the empirical relationship between religion and conflict potential, our analysis on mass public attitudes musters little support in favor of Samuel Huntington's interpretation that religion exerts a pivotal role in creating violent conflict between Christian countries and the Muslim world. On both theoretical and methodological grounds, we are critical of arguments that employ the abstract and wieldy concept of civilization as well as the cultural and religious regions used by Norris and Inglehart (2004). In terms of substantive results, our analysis finds that Muslim respondents are not particularly extreme on either dimension of leadership, a result that holds across different levels of analysis.

The concept of civilization can be problematic in the literature as it can obscure important variation within civilizations and specific countries. In addition, the use of cultural and religious regions in some analyses treats all respondents in a country as belonging to the same religious tradition. To move beyond these simplifications, this study sought to examine the variation in mass attitudes across religious denominations

and within specific countries. Our analysis based on 63 countries subsequently reveals divergent opinions on the nature of the relationship between religion and politics. This is particularly evident in the belief that religious beliefs should be used as a criterion for selecting political leaders. There is much less global support for the position that religious leaders should go as far as influencing the vote and government decisions. On the one hand, the markedly less support for the second position suggests limits on citizens' tolerance to what extent religion can encroach on the political process.

An alternative explanation for the lower levels of support on the second dimension could be related to the wording of the survey questions. It is possible that the phrasing of the questions in negative rather than in positive terms may have contributed to the narrow range of mass support on this particular dimension. To explore additional dimensions tapping the relationship between religion and politics, future research is necessary to evaluate how mass attitudes may change depending on the types of questions asked of respondents.

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Appendix A. Descriptive statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Religious people should be involved in politics	2.97	1.21	1	5
Religious leaders should influence political decisions	2.15	0.99	1	5
Catholic respondent	0.28	0.45	0	1
Muslim respondent	0.18	0.39	0	1
Protestant respondent	0.13	0.34	0	1
Orthodox respondent	0.11	0.31	0	1
Other denomination	0.11	0.31	0	1
No religious affiliation	0.20	0.40	0	1
Religious service attendance	4.56	2.58	1	8
Importance of God	7.38	3.16	3.16	10
Education	1.81	0.74	1	3
Satisfaction with democracy	2.42	0.84	1	4
Interest in politics	2.37	0.94	1	4
Gender	0.52	0.50	0	1
Age	41.93	16.49	15	98
Income	1.98	0.81	1	3
GDP logged	3.63	0.67	2.40	5.30
Freedom House score	2.83	1.69	1	7
Ethnic fractionalization	0.36	0.24	0.00	0.90