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Terrorism and Political Violence
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ftpv20

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Version of record first published: 21 Dec 2007.

To cite this article: Jonathan Fox (1998): The effects of religion on domestic conflicts, Terrorism and Political Violence, 10:4, 43-63

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09546559808427481

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The Effects of Religion on Domestic Conflicts

JONATHAN FOX

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Religion has four basic functions in politics, society and conflict: To provide a value-laden worldview; to supply rules and standards of behavior based on that worldview; to organize adherents through institutions; and to legitimate actors, actions and institutions. Although these functions have remained constant for most of recorded history, the nature of religious worldviews have changed over time. The magnitude and extent of their impact on intra-state conflicts vary according to their social context.

Modern phenomena have much affected the nexus between religion and society. Ethnic issues, especially national self-determination, have become intertwined with religious issues. Democratization has provided a new environment in which religious movements must find their place. Fundamentalist demands for a return to first sources as a way of life are, to a great extent, a reaction to two modern phenomena: serious social dislocations caused by modernization and societies in which secular ideologies now fill the social functions which were once the purview of religion.

This work examines the role of religion in late twentieth century national politics and the extent of its effects on intra-state conflicts within secular, ethnic, fundamentalist and democratic environments.

Many policy makers, academics and members of the media believe that religious fundamentalism and religiously driven ethnic conflicts constitute the next threat to the West in the wake of the Cold War.[1] Upon closer examination, the validity of this belief is unclear. For example, these issues are by no means unique to the modern era. World history is full of examples of religious conflicts, holy feuds, theocracies and other forms of religious involvement in society, politics and conflict. The same principles which defined the role of the Catholic Church in Medieval Europe and the inception and spread of Islam in the seventh and eighth centuries continue to dictate the role of religious beliefs and institutions in modern states. I argue here that the basic principles behind the role of religion in domestic conflicts have remained constant throughout history. I also illustrate the fact that, despite popular belief, the majority of ethnic conflicts in the modern era are driven by factors other than religion, including political and socio-economic issues, as well as the pursuit of self-determination.

While the fundamental nature of religion has not changed in the modern era, both society and the content and direction of religious beliefs

Terrorism and Political Violence, Vol.10, No.4 (Winter 1998), pp.43–63
PUBLISHED BY FRANK CASS, LONDON

themselves have. Factors including modernization and democracy have created a new social environment in which religious movements and institutions must act. Ethnic issues, especially those concerning national self-determination, have in many cases become intertwined with religious issues. Modern secular ideologies, too, in many cases have been used to fill the social role that had been reserved for religion in the past. Religious beliefs, as well, have changed in reaction to societal developments. The modern-era version of religious fundamentalism is probably the most glaring example of such a response. Thus, while the assumption that religious fundamentalism and religiously driven ethnic conflicts constitute the next threat to the West can not be taken for granted, neither can it be ignored.

Considering that it has been a topic of study for several thousand years, it is difficult to say anything new about religion and conflict. Yet, most scholars, especially of late, who deal with this issue tend to focus on only one aspect of religiously motivated conflict. These areas of focus include, but are not limited to, fundamentalism, messianism, terrorism, religious institutions, comparative theology and ideology, legitimacy, religion in different political settings, and case studies of specific conflicts. The major purpose here is not to say anything about religion that has not been said before; it is rather to combine all of these diverse approaches to the study of religion and conflict in order to assess the actual threat religiously motivated political action and violence pose to the West.

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The Role of Religion in Society, Politics and Conflict

Religion fulfills four basic social functions which define its role in politics, society and conflict: it provides a meaningful framework for understanding the world; it provides rules and standards of behavior that link individual actions and goals to this meaningful framework; it organizes its adherents through its institutions; and it legitimates all related actors, actions and institutions. These functions engage society in many ways, on many levels, and usually peacefully so. However, I will dwell on the more conflictive aspects of such interaction.

Religion as a Value-laden Framework for a Meaningful Worldview

Humans need a basis for understanding reality. Without a conceptual framework they could not comprehend the real world or function in it. Belief systems are a major source for such frameworks. Religious beliefs in particular impact the psyche of their adherents by referring them to a higher spiritual authority. Accordingly, anything that a religious believer perceives to be a challenge to the religious framework underlying his behavior

constitutes an existential threat for the whole constituency. Unsurprisingly, such challenges are very likely to provoke drastic, often even deadly, responses.

This argument is presented eloquently by Wentz,[2] who refers to this phenomenon as the 'walls' of religion: People build psychological walls of religion around themselves and their religious communities in order to confront reality. The 'walls' provide 'security' for absolutes, for communal identities and for social solidarity. Many will do anything to defend those walls, without which they would lose their acquired sense of reality, which is why violence is often justified to defend the communal borders against intruders.[3] Some examples of this dynamic are discussed later in the section on fundamentalism and violence.

Rules and Standards of Behavior that Link Individual Actions and Goals to a Religious Framework

Religious frameworks generally prescribe specific rules for their believers to follow and general standards of behavior for them to adhere to, as well. These rules and standards of behavior often leave room for interpretation by their followers in ways sometimes requiring directly or indirectly confrontational, preemptive or reactive responses. A classic example of religious beliefs directly conducive to violent behavior is the concept of holy war, of its civil-revolutionary and/or international-missionary varieties.

Another example of beliefs that often contain rules and standards of behavior that inspire violence are messianic beliefs. David C. Rapoport defines messianism as the 'faith that there will be a day in which history or life on this earth will be transformed totally and irreversibly from the condition of perpetual strife which we have all experienced to one of perfect harmony that many dream about'.[4] He notes that holy terror is usually linked to messianism and describes six elements of messianic beliefs that can lead to violence. The first, and most important, is imminence, or the belief that the time for messianic or divine intervention in the world is nearly at hand. He argues that

> once a sense of imminence takes root, some believers must find it psychologically impossible to regard their actions as irrelevant....At the very least, they will act to secure their own salvation. And, once the initial barrier in action has been overcome, it will only be a matter of time before different kinds of action make sense too. Soon they may think they can shape the speed or timing of the process.[5]

These actions are often turned inward at co-religionists who are believed to be corrupt and contaminated and, therefore, must be eliminated in order to purify the community. Second, if a messianic believer believes he can

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somehow cause or force divine intervention, the high stakes of the actions make violence justifiable. In addition, the belief that divine intervention will in fact occur removes fears of reprisals by the victims of the violence. Third, extreme actions are often required of believers in order to demonstrate their faith. Fourth, real world events are often believed to be signs or portents of the coming of the divine event, increasing the feeling of imminence. Fifth, messianic believers often see themselves as more moral than their victims. This strengthens their justification for violence. Finally, the belief in divine participation or aid in the actions serves as a great equalizer. That is, no matter how outgunned or outnumbered the believers, if they feel that God is fighting with them, they can not be defeated.[6] However, it is important to note that messianism does not always result in violence. It often results in withdrawal from the world to wait for the messianic intervention.[7]

In addition to directly inspiring violence, religious rules can also indirectly cause violence when they demand action from even characteristically non-violent groups. Such actions taken by one group can often be perceived by another religious group as a threat to its religious framework. Thus the second social function of religion often interacts with the first to produce conflict.[8] A relatively common example of this is religious discrimination. A majority group may be inspired by its religious framework to engage in religious discrimination against a minority. A minority that experiences such discrimination will often perceive it as a challenge to its religious framework and may ultimately react to that challenge. Often, such reactions are violent.

One of today's most drastic examples of religious discrimination against a religious minority is against the Baha'i in Iran.[9] The Iranian Shi'i Muslim clergy consider the Baha'i to be heretics, viewing their very existence as a direct challenge to their Islamic beliefs. Thus, Islamic law, as interpreted by Iran's revolutionary theocratic government, has inspired an extensive conduct of religious discrimination against the country's Baha'i minority.

Since the Iranian revolution in 1979, the situation of the Baha'i has worsened dramatically. The Baha'i faith is denied recognition as a religion by Iran's constitution in a country where all civil rights and any personal status are contingent on one's religion. Since Baha'i weddings are not legally binding, a Baha'i who wishes to lawfully marry must either repudiate the faith and wed under the auspices of another religion or choose to live 'in sin' in the eyes of the government – and bear the legal consequences. In August 1983, the Iranian government officially declared membership in the Baha'i faith to be a criminal offense. The Baha'i are also subject to various other forms of repression, economic and political discrimination, and violent attacks by the Iranian populace. Baha'i responses to Iran's overt existential challenge have been limited to a muted

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complaint from the diaspora, not only because of the Baha'i's pacific code of life, but also because of the level and scope of repression exercised inside Iran.[10]

Unlike the Baha'i in Iran, many religious minorities react violently to considerably less provocation. For example, in September 1994, France forbade Muslim women from wearing the traditional headscarf in public schools. This sparked often violent protests by hundreds of Muslims.

Religious Institutions and Community Organizations

By definition, most religions are organized. They are coextensive with some form of institution and organized by their very nature. Such institutional forms may range from lay-led prayer meetings to world-wide ecclesiastical networks such as the Catholic Church. Regardless of size and complexity, all such institutions organize people by providing intra-societal gathering places as well as formal and informal networks of communication. As warranted or convenient, these institutions may also serve to organize congregants for political action.[11]

Despite their considerable means and resources for facilitating mobilization, religious institutions generally seem to prefer to support the status quo. The major determinant of a religious institution's extent of engagement in any program of mobilization is whether or not religious interests and causes are directly or indirectly, presently or potentially, affected. If the issues, their implications and longer term consequences are not religious in nature or effect, religious institutions tend to inhibit mobilization. When religious grievances mount, institutions will prefer to take the lead for many practical reasons. For example, many religious Palestinians living in Judea, Samaria and Gaza consider deeply Israel's rule of the 'West Bank' an affront to Islam. For them, on this issue, religious politics and ethnic politics are identical. Therefore, not surprisingly, many mosques in the 'territories' have served to engender and fuel the Intifada[12] and, more recently, to vehemently protest Arab-Palestinian reconciliation with the Israelis. These religiously motivated protests have been led by militant Islamic organizations, the most prominent of which is Hamas. In stark contrast, the francophone inhabitants of the Jura region of Switzerland chose not to express discontentment through Catholic institutions, opting instead for a federal format of separatism. And there is no indication that the Catholic Church is in any way actively behind this low level protest of primarily ethno-societal expression. This is not surprising considering their grievances are mostly national and linguistic.

While as a general rule religious institutions tend to support the status quo, there are many exceptions to this rule. Mainstream religious institutions have at times facilitated mobilization over non-religious issues

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of political and economic content or implication. For instance, the black churches played an important role in the American civil rights movement. Despite the extensive participation of black churches and clergy, this movement did not focus on the religious. It was, rather, directed to improve the civil rights status of African Americans.

In more repressive societies, religious institutions are often the only legal venue for constituencies to organize. As such they become the logical place to meet and to mobilize regardless of underlying motivations for such action. For instance, the Catholic Church in Poland lent its vast resources to the Solidarity movement's opposition to the Communist regime during the 1980s.

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Religion's Ability to Legitimate Actions and Institutions

Religious frameworks are capable of providing legitimacy to governments, opposition groups or, for that matter, to actions taken by almost any entity or person.[13] This aspect of religion, in its modern context, is discussed in more detail in the next section.

In all, these four social functions of religion have always defined the role which religion has played in society, politics and conflict. Religious behavior in the modern era differs from religious behavior in the past due to the altering nature of belief systems and the tension created by the multiple overlapping newer environments in which they must learn to exist.

Religion and Violence

The above discussion describes the paths religion can take toward motivating or facilitating violence but does not deal with the question of whether such violence is different from violence motivated by secular ideologies. The key to understanding the different behavior motivated by religious and secular ideologies is the nature of the ideologies themselves.

It is easy to argue that secular ideologies can perform the same social functions as religious ones.[14] Given this, it is not hard to argue that secular ideologies can similarly contribute to conflict. However, the specifics of these contributions may differ from the model developed here because secular ideologies are qualitatively different from religions. Religious frameworks are based on the belief in a divine or supernatural authority which has communicated rules and standards of behavior that are generally not open to question by mortal man. Secular ideologies are based on the belief in a set of principles that are mostly human in origin. It is difficult to argue with divine edicts, assuming that one believes in the validity of the source of those edicts; but human ideas are, on average, more open to question. This is not to say that there have not been those who believed in a secular ideology as strongly as the most zealous of the religious zealots or

that religious doctrines have never been questioned. Rather, it is argued here that religious frameworks tend to inspire stronger, deeper and more intractable belief than secular ideologies. Furthermore, this religious belief can constitute a 'higher law' that supercedes any other basis of moral and ethical behavior. Accordingly, the four social functions of religions and secular ideologies probably, on average, contribute less to conflict with respect to secular ideologies than with respect to religions. This is especially the case with messianic beliefs which Rapoport argues are usually found among holy terrorists.[15]

Bruce Hoffman[16] makes a similar argument in his discussion of the different motivations of secular and religious terrorists. He argues that religious terrorists, because of the nature of their beliefs and motivations, are less constrained in their actions and, accordingly, more violent. This lack of constraint can be attributed to several causes. First,

> For the religious terrorist, violence first and foremost is a sacramental act or divine duty executed in direct response to some theological demand or imperative. Terrorism assumes a transcendental dimension, and its perpetrators are thereby unconstrained by the political, moral, or practical constraints that seem to affect other terrorists...Thus, religion serves as a legitimizing force – conveyed by sacred text or imparted via clerical authorities claiming to speak for the divine.[17]

That is, the imperatives of a religious framework can overcome many, if not all, moral and ethical constraints on indiscriminate violence. Second, while secular terrorists appeal to actual and potential sympathizers, religious terrorists 'execute their acts of terror for no audience but themselves'. Thus, they are not constrained by factors such as the opinion of the community from which they come or the 'world community' in general. Third, while secular terrorists see themselves as part of a system they must change, religious terrorists see themselves as outside of a system they must replace. This alienation from the system enables 'far more destructive and deadly' operations by religious terrorists. Finally, secular terrorists' goals are utilitarian – seeking the greatest benefit for the greatest number. Accordingly, secular terrorists will only use violence when it is necessary to achieve their goals and will try to limit the harm as much as possible. Religious terrorists, however, seek greatest benefit only for themselves and their coreligionists. These goals can include the total elimination of the perceived enemy. Thus, unlimited violence against that enemy is justified to the point where violence can become an end in itself.

Rapoport[18] argues similarly that secular terrorism, having started in the 1880s, has no precedents on which it can draw. In fact, 'before the 19th

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century, religion provided the only acceptable justification for terror'.[19] Accordingly, any means which enhance the effectiveness of a secular terrorist group are employed. Holy or sacred terrorism, however, is generally justified by a rationale and precedents taken from the past. These precedents and rationale not only justify holy terrorism, but also limit it by determining the acceptable ends, targets and means of the terrorism. Thus, while unlimited violence may sometimes be acceptable, this is so only if the ends, targets and means are also acceptable.

Martin Kramer describes this dynamic in the context of the Hizballah movement in Lebanon. He describes how submission to Islamic law frees Hizballah members of all other moral constraints. However, this submission to Islamic law requires that the violence be kept within the constraints of what that law considers permissible. In the Lebanese context this means that the violence must remain focused on the goal of fighting the 'foreign' threats to Islam and not deteriorate into just a part of the sectarian civil war in the country. Also, the violence should not harm innocents where it is avoidable. For this reason there was a debate within the Shi'i clergy whether the kidnaping of innocent foreigners could be justified as a necessary evil. Contrary to popular belief, there was some controversy within the Shi'i clergy whether suicide bombings should be permissible, considering that Islam prohibits suicide. In any case Shi'i clerics have rarely, if ever, defended indiscriminate bombing.[20]

Rapoport argues on a more basic level that very few things surpass religions's ability to inspire commitment and emotions. While this does not always lead to violence, the intensity of feelings involved make it harder to reconcile religious conflicts, thus inviting violent solutions and intensifying already violent conflicts. These feelings can also be manipulated by unscrupulous political entrepreneurs.[21] In fact, some argue that the content of religions themselves are often violent and the origin of religion was to control violence, thus justifying a more organized religious violence as a form of social control.[22]

While it is clear that religion can often provide stronger motivations than most secular ideologies, nationalism may constitute the one possible exception to this rule. Nationalism is basically the combination of ethnic or national identity with the belief that the nation should have some form of self-determination, usually realized through statehood or autonomy within a state.[23] Thus, nationalism is an ideological framework that defines the world as one made up of many nations, each of which should have their own state. It has been used by political elites to justify rebellion, war and 'ethnic cleansing'. For these reasons, and others, many believe that nationalism and the concept of self-determination are major dangers in today's international politics.[24]

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Current events in the former Soviet bloc are strong evidence that nationalism is capable of contributing to conflict on a par with religious beliefs. What these two forms of ideological framework seem to have in common is that both are often an integral part of many individuals' and groups' core identities. That this is true of religion needs no further demonstration. That this is true of nationalism is implicit in what constitutes a nationality. While common traits like ethnicity, shared historical experience, myths and symbols, religious beliefs, region of residence and language contribute to defining a nationality, they are not its essence. The essence of nationality is the shared perception that whatever traits define the group set them apart as a unique national entity.[25] Thus, the strength of nationalism is dependent upon the extent to which membership in a national group is a core element of the identity of the national group members.

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Religion, Secular Ideologies, Modernization and Fundamentalism

Although it is argued here that modernization is a major contributing factor to the phenomenon known as religious fundamentalism, there are many who argue the exact opposite. This argument, known as modernization or secularization theory, had its heyday in the 1950s and 1960s and posits that modernization should reduce the political significance of ethnicity and religion. Factors inherent in modernization, including economic development, urbanization, growing rates of literacy and education, as well as advancements in science and technology, should inevitably cause the demise of the role of ethnicity and religion in politics.[26]

Current events have led to a re-evaluation of this theory. The watershed event which seems to have caused this re-evaluation was the Iranian revolution of 1979. Since then, religious movements worldwide have provided further proof that the modernization theory is flawed. Most critics of the modernization theory argue that religion never ceased being relevant.[27] Many contend, moreover, that the imperatives of modernization and their outcomes have led to an extensive revitalization of religion in the modern era, including religious fundamentalism. While these arguments tend to focus on the third world, they are also applicable to more developed countries.

The basic argument is that modernization has failed and religious fundamentalism is a reaction to that failure. Inconclusive modernization efforts and the failure of much of the non-western world to end its dependence on the West have added to the grievances of religious movements. Furthermore, there have been many unsettling social and intellectual consequences of modernization, including the breakdown of community values, lifestyles and traditions. This has led to widespread

feelings of dislocation, alienation and disorientation. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby,[28] in their landmark study on the nature of religious fundamentalism, make a similar argument and contend that religious fundamentalism is concerned with defining, restoring and reinforcing the basis of personal and communal identity that is being shaken or destroyed by these modern crises. Also, modern communications and technology have increased the ability of fundamentalist movements to organize, coordinate and share ideas on a global scale.[29]

Western secular ideologies are another integral part of modernization that have contributed to the growth of religious fundamentalism. These ideologies which include liberalism, communism and socialism have, in the modern era, begun to fulfill many of the social functions that had previously been the exclusive domain of religion. For this reason alone there has been friction between the 'modern' secular elements of society and the more 'traditional' religious elements. Fundamentalism is as much a reaction to this friction as it is to modernization.

In addition, the failures of modernization have been blamed on these ideologies, causing considerable damage to their legitimacy, especially in the third world. This has been exacerbated by the perception in the non-western world of these ideologies as foreign and by their association with the issues of colonialism and cultural colonialism. In addition, these ideologies have been blamed for the breakdown of traditional culture and religious values. This has resulted in the resurgence of religion, often in its fundamentalist form, as an authentic local alternative to western secular ideologies.[30] Thus, modernization and secular ideologies have contributed, both individually and in combination, to the rise of religious fundamentalism.

In all, religious fundamentalism is a particular form of conceptual framework expressing, in many ways, not only a way of life but also a defense against the prospects of modernization. Fundamentalist frameworks and the rules and standards of behavior that go along with them are, in part, an attempt to recapture what is believed to be a simpler time when these menaces did not exist. This view is clearly reflected in Marty and Appleby's[31] definition of fundamentalism as

> a tendency, a habit of mind, found within religious communities and paradigmatically embodied in certain representative individuals and movements, which manifests itself as a strategy, or a set of strategies, by which beleaguered believers attempt to preserve their distinctive identity as a people or group. Feeling this identity to be at risk in the contemporary era, they fortify it by a selective retrieval of doctrines, beliefs, and practices from a sacred past. These retrieved

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> 'fundamentals' are refined, modified, and sanctioned in a spirit of shrewd pragmatism: they are to serve as a bulwark against the encroachment of outsiders who threaten to draw the believers into a syncretistic, areligious, or irreligious cultural milieu. Moreover, these fundamentals are accompanied in the new religious portfolio by unprecedented claims and doctrinal innovations. By the strength of these innovations and the new supporting doctrines, the retrieved and updated fundamentals are meant to regain the same charismatic intensity today by which they originally forged the communal identity from the revelatory religious experiences long ago.

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Rabbi Haym Soloveitchik,[32] in a discussion on why he thinks Orthodox Judaism has taken a 'swing to the right' during his lifetime, expresses ideas consistent with this view of modernity and fundamentalism. While his comments are limited to Orthodox Judaism, they provide insight into how and why many religions have re-emerged in a fundamentalist form, as a frontal reaction to modernity.

According to Soloveitchik the basic change that has occurred is the 'new and controlling role that texts now play in [Jewish] religious life'.[33] Originally *halakhah* (Jewish law) was transferred inter-generationally mostly through the example of parents, tradition and practices in the community as well as through scholarly institutions. Soloveitchik believes that this dual tradition of law as taught and as practiced began to fall apart at the end of the nineteenth century. This breakdown in traditional society resulted in the increased emphasis on textual religious law as the sole legitimate source for determining the correct interpretation of Jewish law.[34]

Soloveitchik argues that this rise of a text culture among Orthodox Jews came only after sustained exposure to modernity. This exposure eroded the 'otherness' of Jews and brought them out of their insulated communities into the open world of modern culture. Simple ethnicity was no longer enough to sustain this 'otherness'. The new climate of inclusiveness, especially in the United States, reduced the costs of distinctiveness. What Soloveitchik calls the 'embourgeoisement' of religious community ended the traditional ascetic ideal that had been an integral part of Judaism for over a thousand years. As a result of this, the traditional community as it had existed for over a thousand years ceased to exist, thereby weakening, if not destroying, the role that communal-oral tradition played in transmitting Jewish law from one generation to the next. This made the written word the primary interpretive source of Jewish law.[35] As a result,

> a traditional society has been transformed into an orthodox one, and religious conduct is less the product of social custom than of conscious reflexive behavior....Behavior once governed by habit is

> now governed by rule. If accuracy is now sought, indeed deemed critical, it can be found only in texts....[This has resulted in] a tireless quest for absolute accuracy, for 'perfect fit' – faultless congruence between conception and performance – the hallmark of contemporary religiosity. The search is dedicated and unremitting; yet it invariably falls short of success.[36]

The school has replaced the home as the primary locus for the transmission of values. This has occurred because the Jewishness once taken for granted now has to be instilled. This shift to institutions, to transmit Judaism from one generation to the next, has increased the influence of the educators. As a result, political and social issues which had once been outside of the rabbinical sphere of influence are now determined, at least in part, by Torah scholars. This came about because tradition and community are no longer a source of religious identity and legitimacy, thus causing Jewish lay leaders to lose their base of religious legitimacy. In all, Soloveitchik describes how Orthodox Judaism has become more fundamentalist in order to preserve itself in wake of the disruptions caused by modernity and exposure to secular society.[37]

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Fundamentalism and Violence

Though religious fundamentalism, as we know it today, is unique to the modern world, the ways it becomes involved in violence is not. Fundamentalist ideologies take the same paths to violence as all other types of religions, past or present. What is unique about the fundamentalist framework is not that fundamentalists defend the walls of their religion, to use Wentz's analogy, but the nature of the walls that they are defending. Fundamentalism is both a reinterpretation and a defense of a traditional lifestyle. Thus the challenge to a fundamentalist framework that is most likely to provoke violence is anything that is perceived as a threat to this lifestyle.

Viewed in this context, all fundamentalist violence, no matter how aggressive it appears, can be considered defensive in nature. Rapoport[38] makes this argument in general and Ehud Sprinzak[39] does as well in the specific case of Jewish fundamentalists in Israel. Sprinzak notes that 'the main sources of haredi [Jewish ultra-orthodox] militancy are animosity, fear and suspicion of Zionism in particular and modern secular culture in general' and discusses two types of violence prevalent in the haredi community. The first is enforcement violence within the *haredi* community. He compares the *haredi* lifestyle to a totalitarian system in which there is little freedom for individuals to decide their own lifestyle. Members of the

community who are even rumored to violate its norms can be subject to brutal retaliation. Enforcement violence is the most prevalent form of violence within the Israeli *haredi* community for two reasons. First because it is believed within the *haredi* community that there is little hope of positively affecting the powers that be in Israel at this point in history. Second, the external threat to the *haredi* community requires strict uniformity within the community as a defense.

The rarer occurrences of *haredi* violence against those outside the community are usually based on one of two motivations which can also be described as defensive. First, there is violence directed at the perceived sources of threat to the *haredi* lifestyle: Christian groups in Israel who attempt to convert Jews to their faith, thereby representing the historical threat Christianity has presented to Judaism, and Israel's aggressive Jewish secularists. Second, any change for the worse, from the *haredi* perspective, in the status-quo relationship between the secular and the religious in Israel can provoke often violent protest.

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Religion and Ethnicity

Ethnicity is not unique to the modern era. Ethnic issues have been relevant to politics and conflict for as long as history has been recorded. In modern times, as in the past, religion and ethnicity are both separate issues, yet at the same time hopelessly intertwined. That is, while both ethnic and religious issues are often salient in the same conflict, there are many religious conflicts that do not involve ethnicity and many ethnic conflicts that do not involve religion. While this relationship has remained constant, the role of ethnicity in society, politics and conflict has changed in the modern era. Thus, ethnicity's effect on the role of religion in the modern era has also changed.

Religious conflicts that have nothing to do with ethnicity are usually conflicts between secular and religious elements of the same ethnic group. Examples of such conflicts include militant Islamic challenges to many relatively secular governments in the Middle East and North Africa, including those of Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia and Saudi Arabia.

When it is integral to the definition of ethnicity, religion may find itself drafted into an active role in ethnic conflicts. Ted Gurr suggests that

> ...in essence, communal [ethnic] groups are psychological communities: groups whose core members share a distinctive and enduring collective identity based on cultural traits and lifeways that matter to them and to others with whom they interact.
>
> People have many possible bases for communal identity: shared

> historical experiences or myths, religious beliefs, language, ethnicity, region of residence, and, in castelike systems, customary occupations. Communal groups – which are also referred to as ethnic groups, minorities and peoples – usually are distinguished by several reenforcing traits. The key to identifying communal groups is not the presence of a particular trait or combination of traits, but rather the shared perception that the defining traits, whatever they are, set the group apart.[40]

Also, as 'the salience of communal identifications varies over time', the concurrence between ethnicity and religion can become all the more complex.

Among the 268 ethnic minorities worldwide considered by Gurr to be politically active or potentially active in the 1990s, only 105 were religiously distinct. In 28 out of these 105 cases, religion was found to be unrelated to the conflict. In another 65 cases, religion was a secondary issue, less important than other issues. Only in 12 cases out of 105 was religion an issue that was at least as important as other issues in the conflict.[41] This does not even take into account the many ethnic minorities which are not included in the study. Thus, while religious issues can be of central importance to ethnic conflicts, this occurs only in a minority of cases.

The Basques and Corsicans, two of France's ethnic minorities, are not religiously distinct from France's Catholic majority and fall squarely into the major category of currently active ethnic conflicts. Among the religiously distinct ethnic minorities are the Christian Russian minorities in Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, all situated in states with Islamic majorities. Yet, the issues salient in both of these examples are political, economic and social. Many Russians do not speak the local language and have lost the privileged economic and superior political status which they enjoyed before the breakup of the USSR. For instance, ethnic Russians in Kyrgyzstan justifiably complain that they are prevented from obtaining upper level civil service positions. Their dissatisfaction over their diminished status and opportunities is indicated by their continuing emigration from Kyrgyzstan despite the government's efforts to stem that tide.

The Muslims in India's Kashmir province fall into the category of religiously distinct minorities engaged in conflicts where religious issues are of marginal import or of lesser relative importance. This often violent conflict is fueled by the wish of many Muslims in that province for some form of autonomy, often in the form of secession from India either as a separate state or in order to unite with the Islamic state of Pakistan. There is practically no religious discrimination against the Kashmiris and they

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express practically no religious grievances. The only exception is the restriction of access to certain mosques imposed by the Indian government due to the overt use of such places of worship for Kashmiri rebel causes. This issue exploded on 11 May 1995, when Indian security forces destroyed the Charar-e-Sharief Shrine after a pitched battle with holed-up separatist guerillas, thereby sparking weeks of protests before a return to the status quo.

In contrast, the Christians and Animists living in southern Sudan, an Islamic state, fall into the category of religiously distinct minorities engaged in conflicts that are primarily religious in nature. Like the Kashmiri problem in India, the issue here is separatism, but the major driving force behind it is the quest for religious freedom. The current round of this violent rebellion started with the annulment in 1972 of the Addis Ababa Accord which had guaranteed substantial regional autonomy, settling a separatist struggle first launched in 1956. The worst was yet to come. In 1983, the government imposed *shari'a* (Islamic) law on the entire country.

All of these examples illustrate the fact that only a minority of ethnic conflicts revolve around religion. Nowadays, even where religious motives are important, they are usually complicated by political, economic, social or autonomy issues. Of these, autonomy, or self-determination, is the issue that has most animated ethnic conflict in the twentieth century. The majority of ethnic conflicts in the *Minorities at Risk* study, for instance, especially those involving religiously distinct minorities, involve issues of autonomy.[42] The southerners in Sudan and the Kashmiris in India provide examples for the different positive manifestations of this reality.

Communal demands for autonomy, especially secession, are one of the most explosive issues of the twentieth century. These demands 'are highly threatening because they challenge the nationalist ideologies held by most dominant groups and imply the breakup of the state. Usually they are resisted by force.'[43] Thus, while political, economic and social issues can complicate an ethno-religious conflict, demands for any form of autonomy have the potential to create unparalleled complications.

In contrast, religious conflicts that do not involve ethnic issues are considerably less complicated, if not always less violent. Such cases generally involve religious opposition to secular regimes. These disputes do not usually involve political, economic, social or even religious discrimination, because the opposition is generally distinct from the rest of the country only by the strength of their religious beliefs. This makes them difficult to single out. Any selective repression is generally a result of oppositional activities rather than a cause for them.

The dispute in such cases is usually over the role that religion should play in society. While some regimes are officially secular and discourage all

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religious observances, the prime example of this being the former Soviet bloc, most such regimes tend not to prevent their citizens from privately practicing their religions. Thus, in such cases, the government's espousal of secular values, or at least values that are not considered sufficiently religious, motivates demands for a more religious society. The religiously-motivated opposition in such states do not seek autonomy from the government as do many ethno-religious minorities; they, rather, seek to change the government's stance on religious issues or to replace the government. For example, the mainstream of the 'religious right' in the United States does not seek to secede from the country; it, rather, seeks to change public policy on issues like abortion and prayer in public schools.

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Religion in a Democratic Setting

Democracy and the struggle for democracy has been one of the defining political phenomena of the modern era. The success of democracy has created a new social environment in which religious frameworks and institutions function. Democracies generally permit freedom of religion, creating an environment in which minority religions are comparatively free from restrictions. This environment also allows, and often encourages, religious movements to pursue their social agenda in a peaceful manner.

In more democratic and less repressive societies most groups, including religious ones, with political agendas take advantage of this environment and use protest and other peaceful forms of political expression to pursue their agenda. However, rebellion or other non-peaceful forms of political expression do occur in democratic settings when peaceful methods have failed to achieve the group's goals or where it is believed that such methods would be useless. Thus the general rule in democratic settings is when peaceful methods are believed to have a chance of succeeding, they are usually used, and violence only occurs when these methods are unsuccessful. However, in autocratic and repressive societies, these forms of peaceful political activity are generally not possible and rebellion is the only avenue for pursuing a political agenda. Thus, when a group engages in rebellion or political violence it is usually because peaceful political expression is not possible or has been unsuccessful in attaining that group's goals.[44] This general rule does not apply to cases where violence is for some reason ideologically required by a religion regardless of the political setting, for example messianic movements, as discussed earlier, or the Thugs in ancient India.[45]

An excellent example of this dynamic is the pro-life movement in the United States. At first, the movement focused on legal protest activity in order to stop abortions. Only when it became clear that this strategy was not

working did the radical elements of the movement begin to engage in illegal and more violent techniques.[46] Another example of this dynamic is the Islamic rebellion in Algeria. At first, Algeria's religious elements were content to work within the system in order to pursue their political agenda. The Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) used electoral means to achieve its goal of a more Islamic society until that and other peaceful avenues were closed off by a military coup. Since then, some of the religious elements in Algerian society have been engaging in a bloody rebellion against the government. This is not to say that the ultimate goals of the FIS were democratic. Nor is it to say that Algeria was or is particularly democratic. Had the FIS won the elections, they probably would have made very undemocratic changes in Algerian society. The point is that there were nonviolent options available for the FIS to push its agenda. Whatever the FIS's true motives, as long as these nonviolent options remained available to Algeria's religious elements, they were the main form of political expression. When these options were closed, violence became the 'only' remaining option.

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Conclusions

Does religion, in its various forms, pose a threat to modern society? I argue here that the answer is yes, but not to the extent nor in the manner that many assume. Ethno-religious conflicts do not threaten western regimes. Only in 12 of the 105 ongoing ethno-religious conflicts in Gurr's study were religious issues shown to be at least as important as non-religious issues. Moreover, none of these 12 cases was found to occur in western democracies[47] which rarely engage in religious discrimination. Ethno-religious conflict can nonetheless create problems for the West in the international arena. The West has an interest in a stable international system, and intra-state ethnic conflicts can spill over to destabilize an entire region. Thus, in those cases where religious issues exacerbate an ethnic conflict, such risks can adversely affect regional and international stability, thereby indirectly harming international relations in an evolving global economy.

Religious fundamentalism poses a more direct threat to western interests. The fundamentalist goal of transforming society into a simpler one based on religious ideals is difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile with some of the basic ideals of western democracies, including religious freedom and individual liberty. While the concept of separation of church and state promises each member of society the right to decide what role religion will play in his life, fundamentalists often seek to unilaterally make this decision for society as a whole. That most western societies have within them religious fundamentalist movements in pursuit of such goals shows

that while fundamentalism poses an internal threat to such societies, democracies by their very nature accommodate such initiatives without necessarily succumbing to them.

Fundamentalist challenges to non-western states do, however, pose an indirect threat to the West. Like ethnic conflicts, religious conflicts have the potential to destabilize entire regions. Regional networks of Islamic resistance movements in the Middle East and North Africa come to mind. Their international web extends around the world. They raise funds in western states. Some are even blamed for terrorist activities, such as the ongoing bombing campaign in France by Algerian militants and the bombing of the World Trade Center in the US. Should these movements, or others like them, succeed, Iran-like anti-modern regimes may arise to challenge the West in the international arena.

In the long term, the best way to deal with fundamentalism is probably to mitigate the socio-economic dislocations and political-cultural disruptions caused by modernization. This should lessen the urge to return to a time when these problems are believed not to have existed. Eliminating the challenge posed to religious belief systems by secular ideologies is not a democratic option. To engage in such eliminating practices would amount to destroying much of what is most worth protecting in the West, freedom of expression. Religious belief systems are likely to continue performing their time-honored social functions. These functions do not pose a threat to free societies as long as they do not interfere with the right of individual citizens to choose their own spirituality and worldviews, be they religious or secular.

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NOTES

1. Examples from policy making and media circles include 'U.S. Official Calls Muslim Militants a Threat to Africa', *New York Times*, 1 Jan. 1992, p.3; 'Mahatma vs. Rama', *Time*, 24 June 1991, p.35; Benjamin J. Barber, 'Jihad vs. McWorld', *The Atlantic* 269/3 (1992) pp.53–5, 58–62, 64–5; 'Ethnic Strife Succeeds Cold War's Ideological Conflict', *Washington Post*, 18 Dec. 1994, p.36. Examples from academic circles include Jeff Haynes, *Religion in Third World Politics* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner 1994), Mark Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War?* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1993), Samuel P. Huntington, 'The Clash of Civilizations?', *Foreign Affairs* 72/3 (1993) and Samuel P. Huntington, 'The West: Unique, Not Universal', *Foreign Affairs* 75/6 (1996).
2. Richard Wentz, *Why People Do Bad Things in the Name of Religion* (Macon, GA: Mercer 1987).
3. Like Wentz, Andrew M. Greely, *Religion: A Secular Theory* (New York: Free Press 1982) pp.52–6, 84–98; and Melford E. Spiro, 'Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation', in Michael Banton (ed.), *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion* (London: Tavistock Publications 1966) pp.94–101, argue that religious frameworks are essential psychological tools for interpreting the world. Clifford Geertz, 'Religion as a Cultural System', in Banton, pp.3, 12–14; and *The Interpretation of Culture* (New York: Basic Books 1973) pp.108, 123–5, makes this argument and adds that any challenge to this psychological

tool causes 'the gravest sort of anxiety'. David Little, *Ukraine: The Legacy of Intolerance* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press 1991) pp.xxi describes how other groups can pose such a challenge.

4. David C. Rapoport, 'Messianic Sanctions for Terror', *Comparative Politics* 20/2 (1988) p.196.
5. Ibid., p.201.
6. Ibid., pp.198–209.
7. Ibid., 202–3
8. For more detailed arguments see R. Scott Appleby, *Religious Fundamentalisms and Global Conflict* (New York: Foreign Policy Association Headline Series #301 1994) pp.16–18, Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (eds), *Fundamentalisms and the State: Remaking Politics, Economies and Militance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1991) pp.3–4; and Little (note 3) p.xxi.
9. While the Baha'i are clearly a religious minority in Iran, being a millenarian offshoot of Islam, many also consider them to be an ethnic minority within the Iranian context. For example, Ted R. Gurr, *Minorities At Risk* (United States Institute of Peace 1993), includes the Baha'i in Iran in his study of ethnic conflict.
10. For a more detailed description of the status of the Baha'i see the *Minorities at Risk* Report on the Baha'is in Iran at http://www.bsos.umd.edu/cidcm/mar.
11. Appleby (note 8) pp.23–4 makes this argument on a general level and Hank Johnston and Jozef Figa, 'The Church and Political Opposition: Comparative Perspectives on Mobilization Against Authoritarian Regimes', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 27/1 (1988); Emile Sahliyeh (ed.), *Religious Resurgence and Politics in the Contemporary World*, (New York: State University of New York Press 1990) pp.11–14; and Kenneth Westhus, 'The Church in Opposition', *Sociological Analysis* 37/4 (1976) address this from a resource mobilization perspective.
12. This term, literally meaning uprising, is the name given to the wave of Arab-Palestinian protest launched in 1987.
13. Clifford Geertz, 'Centers, Kings and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power', in J. Ben-David and C. Nichols Clark (eds), *Culture and its Creators* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1977) pp.267–8; Nikos Kokosalakis, 'Legitimation, Power and Religion in Modern Society', *Sociological Analysis* 46/4 (1985) p.371; Little (note 3) p.xx; and Brian S. Turner, *Religion and Social Theory* (London: Sage 2nd ed., 1991) pp.178–98, among others, make this argument.
14. Juergensmeyer (note 1) makes the argument that in third world countries, western ideologies based on the notion of the nation-state, which he calls secular nationalism, have taken the place of religion in many societies. Smart argues that secular nationalism has many of the characteristics of a religion including doctrine, myth, ethics, ritual, experience and social organization; Ninan Smart, 'Religion, Myth, and Nationalism', in Peter H. Merkl and Ninan Smart (eds), *Religion and Politics in the Modern World* (New York: New York University Press 1983) p.27.
15. Rapoport, 'Messianic Sanctions for Terror' (note 4) p.195.
16. Bruce Hoffman, '"Holy Terror": The Implications of Terrorism Motivated by a Religious Imperative', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 18 (1995).
17. Ibid., p.272.
18. David C. Rapoport, 'Sacred Terror: A Contemporary Example from Islam', in Walter Reich (ed.) *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind* (Cambridge: CUP 1990) pp.106–15, and David C. Rapoport, 'Fear and Trembling: Terrorism in Three Religious Traditions', *APSR* 78 (1984) p.674.
19. Rapoport, 'Fear and Trembling' (note 18) p.659.
20. Martin Kramer,'Hizbullah: The Calculus of Jihad', in Marty and Appleby (note 8) pp.549–51.
21. David C. Rapoport, 'Some General Observations on Religion and Violence', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 3/3 (Autumn 1991) pp.119–22.
22. Ibid., pp.122–6, and René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press 1977).

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23. There is little agreement among scholars as to the definition of nationalism. An example of this is John L. Comaroff and Paul C. Stern (eds), *Perspectives on Nationalism and War* (Luxembourg: Gordon & Breach 1995), a multi-disciplinary work whose contributors differ considerably in how they define nationalism as well as in their explanations of its causes.
24. For example, see E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1789: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: CUP 1990) and Charles Tilly, 'National Self-Determination as a Problem for All of Us', *Deadalus* 122 (1993) pp.29–36.
25. Gurr (note 9) p.3 makes this point with respect to communal groups arguing that 'the key to identifying communal groups is not the presence of a particular trait or combination of traits, but rather a shared perception that the defining traits, whatever they are, set the group apart'. Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1985) p.39 argues that 'it is, in the end, ascriptive affinity and disparity, and not some particular inventory of cultural attributes, that found the group'. Also see Montville Joseph (ed.), *Conflict and Peacemaking in Multiethnic Societies* (Lexington: Lexington Books 1990) and Hurst Hannum, *Autonomy, Sovereignty, and Self-Determination: The Accommodation of Conflicting Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1990).
26. While modernization and secularization theory are similar in their content, I distinguish between them because they differ in their focus. The modernization literature, based mostly in political science writings, focuses on ethnicity in general. Its predictions are applied specifically to religion as a side point. For examples of this literature see Gabriel Almond, 'Introduction: A Functional Approach to Comparative Politics', in Gabriel Almond and James C. Coleman (eds), *The Politics of the Developing Areas* (Princeton: PUP 1960), David Apter, *The Politics of Modernization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1965) and Karl Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication* (Cambridge: MIT Press 1953). Secularization theory, found mostly within sociological writings, focuses specifically on religion. Westhus (note 11) p.314 shows that since World War II, sociologists have subscribed to the secularization theory. Appleby (note 8) pp.7–8, Turner (note 13) pp.40–51, 71–80, 134–5, and 187–93, and Anson Shupe, 'The Stubborn Persistence of Religion in the Global Arena', in Sahliyeh (note 11) p.18 argue that this body of theory dates back to eighteenth and nineteenth century social thinkers including Voltaire, Comte, Durkheim, Toennies, Weber, Marx and Nietzsche.
27. See for example Joe Barnhart, 'The Incurably Religious Anima', in Sahliyeh (note 11) p.28, Kent Greenwalt, *Religious Convictions and Political Choice* (Oxford: OUP 1988) and William H. McNeil, 'Epilogue: Fundamentalism and the World of the 1990s', in Marty and Appleby (eds), *Fundamentalisms and Society: Reclaiming the Sciences, the Family, and Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1993) pp.561–6.
28. Marty and Appleby, *Fundamentalisms and the State* (note 8).
29. For more detailed arguments see Haynes (note 1), Sahliyeh (note 11) pp.8–9 and Shupe (note 26) pp.20–24.
30. For a detailed discussion of the relationship between religion and secular ideologies see Juergensmeyer (note 1).
31. Marty and Appleby, *Fundamentalisms and the State* (note 8) p.3.
32. Haym Soloveitchik, 'Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy', *Tradition* 28/4 (1994). Rabbi Haym Soloveitchik is among the most prominent and respected Talmudic scholars living today. His observations do not constitute a systematic study of the topic but, rather, reflect his opinions based upon anecdotal evidence and personal observations as well as his knowledge of the evolution of *halakhah*, the body of orthodox Jewish religious law.
33. Ibid., p.65.
34. Ibid., pp.65–8.
35. Ibid., pp.71–80.
36. Ibid., 71–3.
37. Ibid., 87–102.
38. David C. Rapoport, 'Comparing Militant Fundamentalist Movements and Groups', in Marty and Appleby (eds), *Fundamentalisms and the State* (note 8) pp.429–30. And Rapoport, 'Some General Observations' (note 21) pp.127–32.

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39. Ehud Sprinzak, 'Three Models of Religious Violence: The Case of Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel', in Marty and Appleby (eds), *Fundamentalisms and the State* (note 8).
40. Gurr (note 9) p.3.
41. The cases described here are from Gurr's Minorities at Risk Phase 3 dataset. While there is little information collected by Gurr on religion, additional data on religion was collected separately and is described in Jonathan Fox, 'The Salience of Religious Issues in Ethnic Conflicts: A Large-N Study', *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 3/3 (Autumn 1997) from which the numbers described above are taken. The relevance of religion to the conflict is determined by the strength of religious discrimination against a minority group and religious grievances expressed by it as compared to political, social and economic discrimination and grievances as well as grievances over autonomy. Religion was at least as important as other issues in the following cases: the Hindus in Bangladesh, the Hui Muslims in China, the Muslims in India, the Arab Muslims in Myanmar, the Ahmadis and the Hindus in Pakistan, the Coptic Christians in Egypt, the Baha'i and the Christians in Iran, the Shi'i in Iraq and in Saudi Arabia, and the Animist and Christian Southerners in Sudan.
42. Fifty-eight per cent of the 268 minority groups included in the study expressed at least some grievances over issues related to autonomy or independence. Seventy-three per cent of these 268 minority groups had some form of autonomy in the past. For the 105 religiously distinct minorities, these percentages are 64 per cent and 78 per cent, respectively.
43. Gurr (note 9) p.294.
44. See, for example, Gurr, *Minorities at Risk* (note 9) and Ted R. Gurr, 'Why Minorities Rebel', *IPSR* 14/2 (1993) for an analysis of this argument with regard to general ethnic conflict.
45. For more details on the Thugs in India see Rapoport, 'Fear and Trembling' (note 18).
46. For details see Faye Ginsburg, 'Saving America's Souls: Operation Rescue's Crusade Against Abortion', in Marty and Appleby, *Fundamentalisms and the State* (note 8) esp. pp.561–3.
47. For a list of these groups see note 41.

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