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Introduction

This study asks a seemingly simple set of questions. What is the extent of government involvement in religion (GIR) between 1990 and 2002 across the globe? Has the extent or nature of this involvement changed during this period? What social and political factors can explain the variation over place and time in GIR? How is GIR otherwise related to important social and political phenomena?

The answers to these questions are not so simple. The intersection between religion, state, and society is complex and not fully understood. This is reflected in the current state of the scholarship on the topic. The first element of the basic problem in this field of scholarship can be illustrated by the legend of the Oracle at Delphi, who was once asked who was the smartest person in the world. The answer she gave was Socrates. When he heard about this, Socrates was at first confused because he felt that he knew nothing. Upon reflection, Socrates reasoned that the Oracle had declared him the smartest person in the world because although he knew nothing, at least he knew that he knew nothing. The rest of the people in the world believed that they knew something but their supposed knowledge was incorrect or inaccurate. Thus, while Socrates' knowledge could be said to be zero, everyone else's knowledge was less than nothing.

I am not suggesting that the current scholarship on the intersection between religion, politics, and society is worth less than nothing. Nothing could be further from the truth. Yet this field is colored to a great extent by what we do not know. All studies on the topic, including this one, are subject to several limitations. First, none of them are able to look at the entire religious economy for the entire world. The term religious economy is defined here as all of the religious activity that occurs within a given society.

It is possible to study the entire religious economy of a single state or small number of states and there exist excellent global surveys of various aspects of the religious economy. However, no study to my knowledge has encompassed the entire global religious economy nor is it likely that any study will do so in the near future – even simply to present the nature of the global religious

economy for a single point in time, much less to track its evolution over time. There is too much we do not know. Thus, at least at our present level of knowledge, social science studies of religion will be somehow limited in their scope.

Second, even when limiting the scope of a study to something manageable, there are aspects of religion that are easier to study than others. As social scientists, we study human behavior either by individuals or groups. Behavior can be measured. For instance, if we want to know how often someone attends religious services or if that person believes in God, we can ask that person. Many studies of religiosity are based on survey data using exactly these types of questions.

These types of questions can elicit how people behave, but do not touch on why people behave in this way. Why does one attend religious services? Why does one believe in God? The issue of motivation is essential to understanding religion's impact on society. We can elicit some information on motivations through studies that examine the correlation of other variables, such as upbringing or economic status, with attendance at religious services or belief in God. Yet these studies rarely provide complete statistical explanations and in any case are based on the assumption that correlation implies causation. We can also ask the individuals surveyed but this assumes that these individuals fully understand their own motivations and are willing and able to communicate them.

Measuring the intersection between religion and government raises similar issues. For instance, it is easy to measure whether a government has arrested religious leaders belonging to a minority religion. However, the motivation for those arrests might be unclear. It can be part of a campaign motivated by purely political concerns to repress a minority. The arrests may be due to suspicion of illegal activities, such as supporting terrorism. They may be part of a government effort to restrict the growth of a minority religion in the state. There can be any number of other motivations. The context of the arrests and, if available, government declarations of why this action was taken can shed some light on the government's motivations but more often than not the true motivation for the arrests will remain at least partially obfuscated. For example, even in a blatant case of religious leaders supporting terrorism, those leaders and their advocates rarely fail to claim they are innocent and that their arrest is purely religious or political discrimination. Conversely, governments that arrest religious leaders for political reasons will often accuse these leaders of crimes such as supporting terrorism as a pretext. In most cases, the government's motivations are not clear and different rational individuals can, and do, come to significantly different conclusions regarding the motivations for those arrests. Furthermore, many government activities in the realm of religion have a potential set of motivations that are arguably far more complex and difficult to discern than the motivations discussed in this example.

In short, measuring actions is easier than measuring motivations. An essential element of collecting events-based data – the type of data that is the focus of

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this study – is inter-coder reliability. This means that two individuals looking at the same information would code the same variable in the same way. While inter-coder reliability is rarely 100 percent for actions taken by governments, it is nearly impossible to achieve a level of acceptable agreement with regard to issues of motivations.

The third element of the basic problem, as implied above, is that even when measuring something objective, such as government actions, information is often imperfect. A good illustration of this is the number of deaths in a conflict, a classical variable often measured by political scientists. Setting aside issues of whether the number includes just combatants killed, or also includes collateral civilian casualties and deaths due to the disease and famine often caused by war, this is still a difficult variable to code. For instance, the estimates for the deaths in Rwanda during the early 1990s range from a few hundred thousand to over one million. While the number of people who died is an exact number, the chaos of the situation makes it difficult to ascertain that number. Furthermore, the two sides in a conflict, as well as third parties, often have motivations to overestimate or underestimate the number of deaths. Thus, just because a fact is ascertainable in theory, does not mean that it can be ascertained in practice.

In addition, despite the fact that information on events around the world is becoming increasingly available and detailed, the coverage is never 100 percent and it is likely that some events that would influence the coding of events-based variables are not recorded anywhere. Also, when collecting such data, resource limitations restrict the amount of time that can be devoted to any one case and thereby limit the number of sources on that case that can be checked. So it is more than likely that some events that are recorded somewhere are also not uncovered and therefore are not included in the codings of the data.

All studies of events data are subject to this type of problem. The only question is the extent to which it is an issue in a particular study. The only way to deal with it is to make a good faith effort to collect the data based on the best information available and based on the assumption that if the data is not 100 percent accurate, it is sufficiently close to the reality on the ground to be the basis for a meaningful study.

Fourth, there is little agreement on how the various parts of the religious economy fit together. This is true of both the relationship between these parts and their relative importance. For example, one theory has it that, for a number of reasons (discussed in more detail in Chapters 2 and 11), religious monopolies cause people to become less religious. This theory is controversial and the empirical tests of the theory produce mixed results. This debate is just one among many regarding the interaction between religion's various facets.

An interrelated issue is the question of which part of the religious economy is most important. Returning to the example of the link between religiosity and religious monopolies, is government policy the driving force behind this particular relationship or is the driving force the religiosity of the population? It is unlikely that this relationship is unidirectional so the answer is likely both. Even so, this leaves open the question of which influences the other more. This

question gets even more complicated when one adds to the equation additional elements of the religious economy such as religious institutions, religious lobby groups, religious political parties, the religious beliefs of policy makers, and of those who influence these policy makers.

Based on all of this, if I were to describe our current state of knowledge on the intersection between religion, politics, and society as a puzzle, I would do so as follows. It is a puzzle with many of the pieces missing. Many of the existing pieces are discolored from an imperfect printing process and misshapen from an imperfect cutting process. Furthermore, the pieces overlap so their shape is of little use. Our ability to place them correctly into the larger picture is limited to our use of the pictures on the pieces. To make matters worse, some of the pieces are made on a scale that is too large or too small for the true scale of the puzzle. Finally, we do not have the box so we have no guide for the completed picture and must rely on the pieces of the puzzle itself in order to put it together. Of course, this can be said to be true of many fields of academic endeavor, but it is particularly true of this one.

This study focuses on one piece of this puzzle in a limited time frame – the intersection between religion and state between 1990 and 2002. Thus, it can be said that the goal of this study is to take a single piece of this puzzle, clarify its shape and picture, and hopefully place it better within our imperfect and incomplete puzzle. This goal is both a limited and ambitious one. On one hand, this study cannot provide a final picture of the entire religious economy. On the other hand, the information included in the Religion and State (RAS) dataset is more complete and comprehensive than previous studies with regard to its portion of the puzzle. This includes how much information is collected for an individual country and how many countries are included in the dataset. As is discussed in detail in Chapter 3, some previous studies do match the scope of countries included in the RAS dataset, but no large-n quantitative study on this topic contains as much information on GIR.

Nevertheless, while this study arguably brings more clarity to this piece of the puzzle, it cannot be considered the final word for two reasons. First, while the amount and detail of information included in the RAS dataset is superior to that of previous studies, future studies will no doubt improve upon this one. Second, this study is subject to all four of the limitations on this type of study that I have just discussed. Thus, to return to the legend of Socrates and the Oracle at Delphi, we likely know more than nothing but we must question everything that we know as our knowledge is certainly imperfect and incomplete.

THE RELIGION AND STATE DATASET, GIR, AND SEPARATION OF RELIGION AND STATE

This study is based primarily on an analysis of the Religion and State (RAS) dataset, which includes 62 variables each of which measures a particular way a government can become entangled in religion. Each of these variables can be

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placed into one of five broader categories of GIR and is coded yearly for 175 governments for the 1990 to 2002 period. These variables are discussed in Chapter 3 and the countries included in the study, as well as their codings on these variables, are listed in Chapters 5 through 10.

Before discussing the details of the RAS dataset it is important to address two central and interrelated concepts, which are the basis upon which the RAS data was developed: GIR, and separation of religion and state (SRAS). There is no real agreement in the academic literature as to what constitutes SRAS either in theory or in practice. Yet, as this study is based on an analysis of data on the extent of GIR and SRAS for 175 governments, it is essential to create a working definition of GIR and SRAS.

This study defines SRAS as the absence of any government support for religion as well as the absence of any government restrictions on religion or regulation of religion. Any government support for religion, restrictions on religion, or regulation of religion is considered GIR. This operational definition of SRAS is stricter than the definition most academics would use, as is discussed in more detail in Chapters 3 and 4. Other definitions of SRAS allow some GIR without a violation of SRAS. In order to differentiate the concept of SRAS used to develop the data from other concepts of SRAS, I designate it as absolute-SRAS.

Basing variables on this definition of GIR and absolute-SRAS has a number of advantages. It allows for the measurement of GIR without any philosophical or theoretical bias. A government either takes an action, such as declaring an official religion or legislating some aspect of religious law, or it does not. This sets aside questions of whether the particular action taken combined with the government's other actions with regard to religion are of a sufficient magnitude and nature to violate some theoretical or philosophical concept of SRAS. The information is simply collected and coded systematically. The resulting variables are sufficiently versatile to then use them to operationalize multiple standards of SRAS and examine how many states meet those standards. This analysis is provided in Chapter 4.

The RAS dataset provides measures of this nature that look at five aspects of GIR. *Official GIR* measures the official relationship between religion and state. This includes whether the state has an official religion and, if not, the exact nature of the government's relationship with the various religions that exist within its borders. *Official restrictions* measures whether the government treats different religions differently. *Religious discrimination* is defined as restrictions on the religious practices of religious minorities. It does not include other forms of political, social, or economic discrimination against religious minorities. Of course such nonreligious discrimination against religious minorities is deplorable, but it does not strictly constitute government support, restrictions, or regulation of religion. This variable consists of 16 types of religious discrimination, which are measured individually. *Religious regulation* measures the extent of government regulation of the majority religion or all religions. This is measured separately from the previous variable because the

motivations and implications of regulating all religions or the majority religion are potentially very different from the motivations for restricting the practice of a minority religion. This variable consists of 11 types of regulation, each of which is measured individually. *Religious legislation* measures the extent to which the government legislates various aspects of religious law. It includes 33 types of legislation, each of which is coded individually.

These variables are described in detail in Chapter 3, which includes a full listing of the component variables of the *religious discrimination*, *religious regulation*, and *religious legislation* variables as well as the reasoning and intellectual history behind the development of these variables.

SOME LIMITATIONS AND QUALIFICATIONS

These variables, despite covering a broad range of government laws, policies, and actions in the realm of religion, are also limited in certain ways, as just described. It is important, however, to emphasize that one of the primary limitations is that the RAS data examines the objective laws, policies, and actions of a government or its representatives but not the motivation behind those actions. In a sense this constitutes measuring what we can measure in the hope of using that to obtain insights on what we would actually like to study. In the end, religion resides to a great extent in individual and collective psyches and consciousnesses, a realm that is notoriously difficult to measure.

Yet it also exists in actions taken by individuals, groups, institutions, and governments. These actions in and of themselves are worthy of study. This is not just in order to better understand motivations, though this is an important goal. The act of accurately and systematically describing the ways in which governments become involved in religion and under what circumstances they do so is a difficult and important task. Furthermore, this must be done in a way that allows the actions of one government easily to be compared to those of another, and, as well, allows the collective actions of groups of governments to be correlated with other social, economic, and political variables. In the best of all worlds the RAS data would include detailed variables on motivations. However, accurately coding government actions, laws, and policies in such a way that these codings are not significantly subject to dispute strains the limits of the current level of knowledge, methodology, and available resources.

Despite all of this, motivations color every aspect of this study. For instance, the findings provided later in this study show that there has been a rise in GIR, especially government support for religion. But what does this mean in the larger context? Are governments supporting religion in order to help preserve it in the face of declining individual religiosity? Are they supporting it because their populations are becoming more religious? If the latter is the case, is this in order to better reflect the population's wants and needs or is it a cynical attempt to maintain power by co-opting the political power of religion? Similar questions come up when trying to explain a rise in religious discrimination against minorities. Is this because of a desire to support the national religion by

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repressing minority religions? Or perhaps it is due to increasing religious militancy among some religious minorities, which the government sees as a threat.

This documented rise in GIR is certainly part of a more complicated set of trends in the religious economy. GIR may be increasing, but this is at least in part due to decreases in the importance of religion in other aspects of the religious economy. For instance, as is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, modernity places many pressures on religion causing its influence in many aspects of society to decrease. Many have argued that these modern processes will result in religion's decline or even demise as a significant social and political force.

Yet, as the findings of this study show, religion is, among other things, a resilient social phenomenon, capable of adjusting and evolving in an ever-changing environment. A fuller picture of the world's religious economy would show secularization – the reduction of religion's influence in society – occurring in some parts of the religious economy, and sacralization¹ – the increase of religion's influence in society – occurring in other parts.

A second important limitation on the RAS data is that it covers only the 13-year timespan of 1990 to 2002. This limited timespan is not sufficient to answer some of the seminal questions asked in the social science study of religion including, but not limited to, whether or not religion is in a state of decline. However, the RAS data can provide information on whether one aspect of religion has declined for this limited time segment. Of course, any rise or fall in GIR does not imply that there has been a rise or fall in the entire religious economy but it can provide some insight into this larger question. It can also measure the extent to which GIR exists in recent times, which also has implications for some important debates in the field. Yet, as noted, the same action taken by a government can have different implications for the rise or fall of religion depending on the context and motivation for that action. Thus, even if the timespan covered by the RAS dataset was one of centuries rather than years, it would be insufficient to come to any final conclusions regarding the rise and fall of religion in the larger religious economy, though it would likely improve our ability to reach such conclusions.

While this is more of a definitional issue than a limitation of the variables, it is important to note that GIR is only one aspect of the intersection between religion and government. GIR covers government actions that influence religion. There are also a number of ways in which religion can influence the government. For instance, the religious beliefs of policy makers can influence their decisions. The religious beliefs of populations can also influence the decisions of policy makers. Many states have official and unofficial religious lobbies and some have religious political parties.

Be that as it may, I argue in Chapter 12 that this rise in GIR between 1990 and 2002, while only part of the larger picture for a limited time segment, is sufficient to show that some aspect of religion remains important. That is, there

¹ This term is borrowed from Demerath (2001), who makes an argument similar to the one made here.

is no reasonable interpretation of these findings that does not result in the conclusion that religion, in some form, remains a potent and influential part of modern society and politics.

RELIGIOUS ECONOMIES AND SUBECONOMIES

It cannot be emphasized often enough that GIR measures only one aspect of a complex, multifaceted, and interrelated religious economy. Yet even a single religious subeconomy such as the one measured by GIR has a considerable level of complexity that exists along two dimensions.

The first dimension is levels of analysis. The most basic unit of analysis of the RAS dataset is that of the 175 governments included in the dataset. Each of these governments has a unique system of GIR that is at least a little bit different and often more than a little bit different from that of the most similar state. Thus, no generalization about GIR can be fully accurate as there are usually exceptions to every rule. Even if there are few exceptions, the specific manifestations of most generalizations will play out differently from state to state. For instance, one finding of this study is an increase in the extent of religious legislation between 1990 and 2002. However, this is not true of all states and while there are certain types of religious legislation that increased more than others, the exact types of new religious laws passed during this period varied from state to state. Thus, underneath a common trend found at the global level of analysis there is a rich and complex diversity at the state level of analysis.

To make matters more complex, a number of factors – religious tradition, world region, economic development, regime type – all influence the extent of GIR in a given state. While groupings of states based on these intermediate-level variables are more homogeneous than the larger population of states, there is still considerable diversity within them. Also, controlling for all of these factors, as well as others, does not provide anything close to a complete explanation for the level of GIR in a particular state. Thus, either there is some critical variable not included in the study or local and state-level explanations explain at least as much of the variance as this set of variables.

Yet a global analysis that uses these variables is the only practical way to systematically analyze the commonalities and differences in GIR across the world. Using the comparative approach to look at 175 governments is extremely difficult at best. It is also subject to Karl Deutsch's classic criticism of such studies:

Introspection, intuition [and] insight [are] processes that are not verifiable among different observers. . . . But even though we can understand introspectively many facts and relations which exist, it is also true that we can understand in our fertile imagination very many relations that do not exist at all. What is more, there are things in the world that we can not understand readily with our imagination as it is now constituted, even though we may be able to understand them . . . in the future, after we have become accustomed to the presuppositions of such understanding. We can, therefore, do nothing

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more than accept provisionally these guesses or potential insights. . . . If we want to take them seriously, we must test them. We can do this by selecting . . . data, verifying them [and] forming explicit hypotheses as to what we expect to find. . . . And we then finally test these explicit hypotheses by confrontation with the data. . . . In the light of these tests we revise our criteria of relevance, we get new and revised data and we set up new methods of testing.²

This is especially true of large-*n* studies, such as this one, which include particularly large amounts of cases and information. Human minds, or at least most human minds, are not capable of objectively assimilating this amount of information in a systematic and reproducible manner. Thus, despite its many flaws, the large-*n* quantitative approach is better able to handle this scope of information than the unaided human mind.

That being said, the results from this type of approach cannot be considered complete unless they are then applied to more specific contexts using the comparative approach. It is the comparative approach that is the source of the theories tested using the quantitative method and the end goal of the quantitative method is to provide us with a better understanding of what is occurring in individual states. The goal is that the interplay between the large-*n* quantitative approach and the comparative approach will produce results superior to those that could be gleaned from either approach alone.

The second dimension of complexity in the GIR subeconomy of religion is the scope of the types of GIR that exist. The RAS data measures five distinct aspects of GIR. Yet each of these distinct forms of GIR are interrelated. While it is not possible or desirable to discuss all of these interrelationships at this point, a basic example of this is that states with official religions are more likely to treat some religions differently from others, discriminate against religious minorities, regulate the majority, and legislate religion. This becomes even more complex when one adds to the mix that the individual parts of this subeconomy interact collectively and individually with the larger religious economy and with other aspects of politics, economics, and society.

The question of how the religious economy, the subeconomy defined by absolute-SRAS and GIR, and the individual parts of that subeconomy fit into the larger picture is a central focus of this study. As this varies based on intermediate- and state-level factors, this is not a simple question to answer.

TAKING IT ALL INTO ACCOUNT

This study tries to provide an improved and more accurate picture of GIR in the world between 1990 and 2002 and to place that picture within the larger religious economy. Chapter 2 examines the existing literature and theories on the changing role of religion in modern times. It also develops the basic argument

² Deutsch (1963: 53).

that modernity is causing a decline in some parts of the religious economy, as has been predicted by many in the social sciences, but that other parts of the religious economy are reacting to compensate. These include both religious fundamentalism and GIR. Chapter 2 also examines theories regarding specific aspects of the religious economy and their potential influences on GIR. This includes religiosity, regime type, and specific religious traditions.

Chapter 3 provides a discussion of previous attempts to measure GIR as well as other parts of the religious economy. It also describes the RAS variables in detail, how those variables were influenced by previous attempts to measure religion, and how the RAS variables differ from previous variables.

Chapter 4 provides the global analysis of the RAS data. This includes an analysis of the absolute levels of the various RAS variables and the extent to which they changed between 1990 and 2002, controlling for religious traditions. It addresses the question of how many states have SRAS based on multiple definitions of the concept. It also provides a multivariate analysis of the impact of such factors as religious tradition, economic development, regime, and demographics on GIR. All of this is intended, among other things, to test the prediction described in Chapter 2 that modernity will lead to the decline or even the demise of religion as a significant political and social force.

Chapters 5 through 10 examine the state level of analysis. Each chapter focuses on a specific world region: Western democracies, the former Soviet bloc, Asia, the Middle East–North Africa region, sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America. These chapters provide descriptions of GIR for each country in the study as well as the country codings on each of the 62 RAS variables. Each chapter also provides a discussion of regional trends in GIR, including how each country fits into a basic taxonomy of GIR, which is developed in these chapters.

Chapter 11 examines several factors at the intermediate level of analysis. This includes a study analyzing which of the 60 types of religious discrimination, religious regulation, and religious legislation increased and decreased, controlling for religious tradition and world region. It also further examines the intersection between GIR and both individual religiosity and regime type.

Chapter 12 accomplishes two goals. First, it places all of the diverse findings of this study into a more comprehensive framework. Second, it makes the argument that while this study focuses on one aspect of the religious economy, the evidence presented here is sufficient to argue that religion remains an important social and political force. This is not to say that religion is monolithically becoming more important or even maintaining the same level of importance. Rather, religion is a dynamic social phenomenon that is evolving in an ever-changing environment. Some aspects of the religious economy are becoming more influential at the same time as other aspects are becoming less influential. Put differently, while secularization can be said to be occurring in some parts of the religious economy, sacralization is occurring in others. Thus, the evidence presented here contradicts the predictions by many secularization theorists of an overall and monolithic drop in religion's influence.

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In all, this study does not fully answer most of the questions asked in this chapter. Because of all of the limitations described here it is not really possible to do so. However, this study can be described as similar to the never-ending quest for perfection. The goal is never reached but in striving to achieve it, we can come closer to our goal. This study does not constitute the final word on even the limited topics of the extent of SRAS and GIR in the world. However, it does provide some new insights and new information that significantly adds to our knowledge of the topic.