

## Introduction: Religious Resurgence, Repression and Resistance

A beautiful, seemingly ordinary late summer morning witnessed one of the most barbarous atrocities in recent history. On that day, nineteen religious zealots hijacked four civilian airliners and skillfully guided them into two of the most recognizable buildings in the world: the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, DC, taking the lives of 3,000 civilians. The strikes of September 11, 2001 were the most spectacular and devastating attacks by a terrorist group against a state in world history and a catalyst for jihadi movements around the world. Many believe that the 9/11 attacks, carried out by an extremist Islamist organization known as al Qaeda, ushered in a new era of terrorism qualitatively different from previous periods of terrorist activity, distinguished by its overtly religious character, uncompromising worldview and relative lethality. The strikes also led to a fundamental rethinking of domestic and international security policy as decision makers took the unique threat posed by the “new terrorism” seriously. Americans quickly saw an overhaul and reorganization of their government bureaucracies and the implementation of broad-ranging security measures. Internationally, the United States embarked on a campaign known as the “Global War on Terrorism” to eliminate al Qaeda and related groups. This war witnessed the toppling of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan one month after the 9/11 attacks, the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and subsequent ten-year occupation of that country, drone wars in Pakistan and Yemen and special operations in dozens of other states.

Since those attacks at the turn of the century, the world has experienced a sharp increase in violent religious extremism. Today, religious terrorism poses a significant challenge for many countries around the world. Data derived and coded from the Global Terrorism Database reveal that in the year preceding the 9/11 attacks, the world witnessed only 255 identifiable religious terrorist attacks. By the year 2014, that number had risen nearly tenfold to 2,237.<sup>1</sup> The number of religious terrorist groups has proliferated as well. In 2001, the US Department of State designated only seven religious groups as “foreign terrorist organizations,” which it deemed posed a

<sup>1</sup> This number itself underestimates the number of religious terrorist attacks since it takes into account only “identifiable” religious terrorist incidents.

national security threat to the United States. By the year 2016, the number had reached forty-five.<sup>2</sup> During the same time that religious terrorism has been rising, terrorism rooted in secular concerns has seen a relative decline.

Religion-related terrorism has now become a daily occurrence. Anyone who opens a newspaper or watches cable news on a regular basis is bound to be inundated by stories of religious violence: the atrocities of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the conflict between Muslims and Christians in Central Africa, attacks by Buddhists against Muslims in Burma and Hindus in Sri Lanka, the kidnapping of schoolgirls in Nigeria by Boko Haram or recent lone-wolf attacks in Europe and the Americas. Hardly a day goes by without news headlines reporting religiously based beheadings, crucifixions, assassinations, bombings or attacks on holy sites. Episodes such as these testify to a world where religion exerts a consistent and deadly influence on patterns of violence. What lies behind this surge in religiously motivated terrorism?

To answer this question, we must consider three global trends related to religion. The first is the so-called global resurgence of religion.<sup>3</sup> Recent scholarship has shown that religion is gaining in strength worldwide and is more politically engaged today than it has ever been. Owing to processes like modernization, globalization and democratization – the very developments that the secularization thesis (the idea born of the Enlightenment that religion would eventually disappear as societies modernized) predicted would kill off religion – coupled with the evident failures of secular projects and ideologies in developing countries, the major world religions have experienced a newfound relevance in the modern world. Even today, nearly 85 percent of the global population subscribes to some form of religious belief.<sup>4</sup> The realization that the world is becoming more and not less religious led eminent sociologist Peter Berger, once an ardent supporter of the secularization thesis, to remark in 1999 that the world is “as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever.”<sup>5</sup>

The second trend involves the concurrent attempts to restrict religious practice in the face of this resurgence. Successive reports by the nonpartisan Pew Research Center have revealed that approximately three-quarters of people in the world live in countries characterized by “high” or “very high” religious restrictions. Incredibly,

<sup>2</sup> US Department of State, “Country Reports on Terrorism, 2000–2016,” last modified 2016, [www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/](http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/).

<sup>3</sup> See José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Gilles Kepel, *The Revenge of God: The Resurgence of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism in the Modern World* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994); Peter L. Berger, *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999); Monica Duffy Toft and Timothy Samuel Shah, “Why God Is Winning,” *Foreign Policy* 155 (2006): 39–43; Monica Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott and Timothy Samuel Shah, *God’s Century: Resurgent Religion and Global Politics* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Pew Research Center, “The Global Religious Landscape,” last modified December 18, 2012, [www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec/](http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec/).

<sup>5</sup> Berger, *Desecularization of the World*, 2.

the reports also find that only 1 percent of the world's population lives in countries where religious liberty is increasing.<sup>6</sup> These findings are confirmed by the work of the director of the Religion and State Project, Jonathan Fox. His research shows that of thirty specific types of religious limitations, twenty-eight are more common today than they were in 1990.<sup>7</sup> High restrictions on religious belief and practice can be found in every region of the world and within every faith tradition. Religiously repressive regimes can be found in Christian Russia and Eritria, Buddhist Burma and Laos, Hindu India and Nepal, Muslim Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, and Jewish Israel.

The convergence of these two antithetical trends – religion's revival and simultaneous regulation – has given rise to a third development: resistance. Religious believers who find the practice of their faith stifled are likely to resist those efforts or support those who do. Sometimes this resistance takes the form of nonviolent protest as in Eastern Europe following the collapse of the Soviet Union. At other times, the reaction to repression can turn violent, even to the point of tearing countries apart and threatening the stability of their neighbors.

This book contends that these three trends are inextricably intertwined. The argument put forward in these pages is a simple one: attempts by states and societies to repress assertive religion produce the very fanaticism and terrorism that they seek to avoid. It is no coincidence that the vast majority of countries in the world from which the most serious threats to domestic and international peace and security arise are the very ones in which religious persecution is a significant problem. Not only do militant groups believe that their religions' teachings, rituals and scriptures justify violence, they must also engage in a battle for hearts and minds, attempting to convince the larger population that their ideas are justified. The greater the level of suppression, the more likely that the wider populace will take these claims seriously.

Because religion remains a primary identity of people (especially in highly religious countries), religious freedom is inevitably connected to peace, stability and successful political orders. Where religious liberty does not exist, the potential for domestic and international peace and stability will be greatly weakened. The compromising of religious liberty is particularly dangerous because of religion's proven ability to inspire deadly conflicts against those who hold different faith beliefs. While not necessarily always the direct proximate cause of conflict, restrictions that inhibit religious belief and practice can contribute to extremist theologies that result in aggression toward specific religious communities, the government or

<sup>6</sup> Pew Research Center, "Rising Tide of Restrictions on Religion," last modified August 9, 2011, [www.pewforum.org/2011/08/09/rising-restrictions-on-religion2/](http://www.pewforum.org/2011/08/09/rising-restrictions-on-religion2/); Pew Research Center, "Religious Hostilities Reach Six-Year High," last modified January 1, 2014, [www.pewforum.org/2014/01/14/religious-hostilities-reach-six-year-high/](http://www.pewforum.org/2014/01/14/religious-hostilities-reach-six-year-high/).

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Fox, "Equal Opportunity Oppression: Religious Persecution Is a Global Problem," *Foreign Affairs*, last modified August 31, 2015, [www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2015-08-31/equal-opportunity-oppression](http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2015-08-31/equal-opportunity-oppression).

even other countries. It is this overlooked dimension of terrorism on which this book hopes to shine light.

The relationship between religious freedom and religious terrorism is not necessarily self-evident. There is also a competing perspective. This position holds that unrestrained religious liberty opens the floodgates to religious extremism, especially in an interconnected world where radical ideas can spread like wildfire. According to this line of reasoning, religious extremists benefit from environments of religious freedom to create a world where they can ultimately impose their view of religion upon everyone else.<sup>8</sup> Conversely, increasing repression of religious groups can raise the costs of rebellion and deter potential terrorists.<sup>9</sup> This logic rests on the assumption that liberalism shackles governments from using all of the weapons in their arsenal to optimize their counterterrorism strategies. In countries where this thinking prevails, the result is a perceived zero-sum game: religious restrictions, as morally problematic as they might be, are seen as necessary to curtail religious terrorism.

Many state leaders around the world have bought into this logic, contending that effectively averting terrorism may require their governments to limit or suspend freedoms like religious liberty in the name of national security. In the Middle East and North Africa, leaders have resorted to sham trials, severe sentences for non-violent dissidents and the widespread use of force in the name of combating terrorism.<sup>10</sup> In Central Asia, thousands of men of faith have reported being detained and forced to shave their beards by authorities keen on battling radicalism and foreign religious influences. In 2015, the Tajik parliament voted to ban Arabic-sounding foreign names, while the Supreme Court voted to outlaw the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan, the country's only Islamic political party, and sentenced several of its members to prison terms the following year.<sup>11</sup> In neighboring Uzbekistan, the state has engaged in a campaign of systematic persecution of religious groups, targeting nonviolent believers who preach or study religion outside of officially sanctioned state institutions. The Uzbek government has justified the repression of religion as a necessary step to prevent terrorism.<sup>12</sup> In China, the state has passed a series of laws targeted against religious groups, ranging from bans on fasting during Ramadan to prohibitions on the wearing of religious garb, ostensibly

<sup>8</sup> Katerina Dalacoura, *Islamist Terrorism and Democracy in the Middle East* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> Shadi Hamid, *Temptations of Power: Islamists and Liberal Democracy in a New Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>10</sup> Luke Lagon and Arch Puddington, "Exploiting Terrorism as a Pretext for Repression," *Wall Street Journal*, January 28, 2015, A15.

<sup>11</sup> Hardeep Matharu, "Tajikistan Police Shave Beards of 13,000 Men to 'Tackle Radicalism,'" *Independent*, last modified January 21, 2016, [www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/tajikistan-police-shave-beards-of-13000-men-to-tackle-radicalism-a6825581.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/tajikistan-police-shave-beards-of-13000-men-to-tackle-radicalism-a6825581.html).

<sup>12</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Creating Enemies of the State: Religious Persecution in Uzbekistan*, last modified March 29, 2004, [www.hrw.org/report/2004/03/29/creating-enemies-state/religious-persecution-uzbekistan](http://www.hrw.org/report/2004/03/29/creating-enemies-state/religious-persecution-uzbekistan).

for the purpose of nipping religious extremism in the bud.<sup>13</sup> In Europe, far-right parties like France's National Front, Germany's Alternative Party, Hungary's Jobbik, Austria's Freedom Party and Greece's Golden Dawn have been surging in popularity, owing, in large part, to their hostility to Muslim immigration – a stance spurred by the Syrian refugee crisis. In the wake of separate terrorist attacks in Paris in 2015, some French politicians called for the official institutionalization of mosques and for banning the Arabic language during Muslim ceremonies. Likewise, across the Atlantic, in his quest to become America's forty-fifth president, Donald Trump persistently scorned refugees, embraced the idea of a mandatory Muslim registry and the policing of predominately Muslim neighborhoods, proposed torturing the family members of suspected terrorists and vowed to ban Muslims from entering the country. During his first week in office, Trump signed an executive order temporarily banning citizens of seven Muslim countries from entering the United States for a period of ninety days and refugees from Syria indefinitely. The president justified these unprecedented measures on national security grounds.

Given the reality of religious terrorism today, political leaders in these countries might be forgiven for believing that measures like these are the best weapon against violent religious extremism. This book directly challenges this view, arguing that repressive environments like these that choke religious liberty and independent thinking serve as a natural breeding ground for terrorism. In addition to suppressing the positive contributions that religion can make to society, repression also silences the voices of liberalism and moderation and empowers the narrative of extremists who claim that the state is acting unjustly toward people of faith.<sup>14</sup> Violence occurs because religious restrictions both create grievances on the part of targeted groups and sometimes encourage dominant religious groups to undertake violence themselves against other religious communities. Thus, regimes that repress religion invite the very belligerency they seek to thwart through such restrictions.

Conversely, religiously free countries allow for the development of a wide range of diverse perspectives, religious practices and cross-cutting cleavages.<sup>15</sup> The freedom of thought and exchange of ideas that is part and parcel of religious liberty serves to create a marketplace of views that can empower liberal and moderate voices who challenge the claims made by religious extremists, thus diminishing the appeal of extremism and prospects for religious strife. In such countries, individuals belonging to different religious communities tend to see each other as legitimate, even if they disagree on matters of faith and

<sup>13</sup> Li Ya, "China Bans Many Muslims from Ramadan Fast," *Voice of America News*, last modified July 8, 2014, [www.voanews.com/a/china-bans-many-ughur-muslims-from-ramadan-fast/1952829.html](http://www.voanews.com/a/china-bans-many-ughur-muslims-from-ramadan-fast/1952829.html).

<sup>14</sup> Lisa Anderson, "Fulfilling Prophecies: State Policy and Islamist Radicalism," in *Political Islam: Revolution, Radicalism, or Reform?*, ed. John L. Esposito (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers), 17–31.

<sup>15</sup> Chris Seiple and Dennis R. Hoover, "Religious Liberty and Global Security," in *The Future of Religious Liberty: Global Challenges*, ed. Allen D. Hertzke (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 315–330.

practice.<sup>16</sup> Freedom thus has the effect of leveling the playing field among the different religious groups in society. Furthermore, the political openness attendant to religious liberty allows potential extremists to work through alternative and legitimate channels – electoral participation, grassroots activism and civic engagement – by which they can seek to shape religion, politics and society.<sup>17</sup> Finally, regimes tolerant of religion promote stability through the civic activities in which they allow religious bodies to engage: running schools, hospitals, orphanages and charities; reducing poverty; and promoting faith-based reconciliation practices. Illiberal religious groups holding radical theologies may well exist in religiously free countries, but the environment of freedom can serve to deprive fringe groups of the legitimacy they need to thrive.<sup>18</sup>

#### FIVE QUALIFICATIONS

Before proceeding, it is necessary to underscore five qualifications about the nature of the argument. First, this book in no way suggests that religiously free countries *never* experience religious terrorism or that countries with high levels of religious restrictions *always* do. Much depends on the nature of the repression and the political opportunities present. In fact, a good case can be made that the most brutally authoritarian states like Nazi Germany, Stalinist Russia or contemporary North Korea are best at suppressing terrorist impulses because they effectively block all collective action avenues for terrorists to organize around their cause.<sup>19</sup> In these cases, the degree of religious persecution is so intense and pervasive that religious groups cannot carry out *any* practices central to their faith, let alone engage in violence.<sup>20</sup> This extreme and exceedingly rare form of repression notwithstanding, however, the basic correlation between religious repression and religious terrorism still holds as most states lack the ability or the desire to regulate religious life to such an extent. Indiscriminate and widespread repression of religion generally raises the costs of *remaining peaceful* for ordinary citizens, insofar as armed resistance presents the possibility of changing the status quo, thus decreasing the costs of collective

<sup>16</sup> Anthony Gill, *The Political Origins of Religious Liberty* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>17</sup> Alfred C. Stepan, “Religion, Democracy, and the ‘Twin Tolerations,’” *Journal of Democracy* 11, no. 4 (2000): 37–57.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas F. Farr, *World of Faith and Freedom: Why International Religious Liberty Is Vital to American National Security* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 243–272.

<sup>19</sup> Mayer N. Zald and John D. McCarthy, *The Dynamics of Social Movements: Resource Mobilization, Social Control and Tactics* (Cambridge, MA: Winthrop Publishers, 1979); Doug McAdam, John D. McCarty and Mayer N. Zald, *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>20</sup> Although, at least in the case of the Soviet Union, a good argument can be made that decades of brutal repression by Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin and more recently Vladimir Putin against the tiny Chechen enclave gave rise to an extreme Islamist secessionist movement and cycles of violence and extremism.

action.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, while terrorism in religiously free settings may occur, it tends not to be widespread and is often perpetrated by “lone wolf” terrorists who lack broad-based societal support for their violent actions. While terrorism indeed poses a threat to both religiously free and religiously restrictive societies alike, it is apparently able to flourish only in the latter. When faith-based terrorism does occur in religiously free countries, it can usually be linked in some way to a religiously restrictive state.

Second, this book focuses on one particular manifestation of religious repression: the manner in which governments restrict religion. There are other ways in which religion can be repressed, however. Most important apart from government restrictions are restrictions on religion that arise at the societal level. Often, the most vocal advocates for religious restrictions are those of dominant religious groups. As explained by sociologists Brian Grim and Roger Finke, established or dominant religious groups frequently call not only on political leaders but also their own followers to deny religious freedoms to others in order to advance their own religious agenda, shut out religious competitors or protect the culture and society as a whole.<sup>22</sup> Such restrictions can include harassment or intimidation of religious groups, detention or displacement of individuals, forced conversions and the imposition of religious dress. The reason I do not examine the ways in which these social religious restrictions foment terrorism is a methodological one. Such restrictions are often carried out by extremist organizations (including terrorist groups), and including them in the present analysis risks conflating the explanation – religious repression – and the outcome – terrorism. I thus leave it to future work to disentangle the relationship between social religious regulation and terrorism.

Third, I in no way discount the importance of ideas in explaining religious terrorism. Indeed, political theology – the ideas a religious group holds about political authority – matters a great deal in explaining religious terrorism.<sup>23</sup> Theological explanations for religious terrorism rightly note that how religious militants interpret their faiths’ foundational claims, key sacred texts, historical doctrines and contemporary contexts can inspire them to take up the gun.<sup>24</sup> Such theologies can also exist in any country and at times operate independently of a

<sup>21</sup> Nilay Saiya, “Explaining Religious Violence across Countries: An Institutional Perspective,” in *Mediating Religion and Government: Political Institutions and the Policy Process*, ed. Kevin R. den Dulk and Elizabeth Oldmixon (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2014), 209–240; Nilay Saiya and Anthony Scime, “Explaining Religious Terrorism: A Data-Mined Analysis,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 32, no. 5 (2015): 487–512; Nilay Saiya, “Religion, State and Terrorism: A Global Analysis,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*. doi: 10.1080/09546553.2016.1211525.

<sup>22</sup> Brian J. Grim and Roger Finke, *The Price of Freedom Denied: Religious Persecution and Conflict in the 21st Century* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 202–213.

<sup>23</sup> Daniel Philpott, “Explaining the Political Ambivalence of Religion,” *American Political Science Review* 101, no. 3 (2007): 505–525.

<sup>24</sup> Bruce Hoffman, “‘Holy Terror’: The Implications of Terrorism Motivated By a Religious Imperative,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 18, no. 4 (1995): 271–284; Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley, CA: University of California



country's level of religious freedom. That said, in general, such beliefs tend to become radicalized and more widespread under conditions of repression for the reasons outlined earlier. When religious actors are denied autonomy and freedom to carry out their faith-based practices and these actors subscribe to a political theology that sees violence as an acceptable means to an end, the turn to the gun becomes far more likely.<sup>25</sup>

Fourth, I do not claim here that repression of religion explains *all* aspects of religious terrorism. As a multifaceted and complex phenomenon, terrorism cannot be reduced to a single cause. Indeed many factors – economic dislocation, foreign occupation, a sense of victimhood and threats to traditional ways of life – can certainly exacerbate religious tensions and function as catalyzing agents. Sometimes these forces combine with the denial of religious liberty to fuel grievances and perpetuate conflict. That said, while religious factors may not be the only ones that matter, religious terrorism cannot be properly understood absent their consideration. It is my argument that religious freedom is among the most important but also overlooked of these religious considerations.

Finally, it is possible that countries might become more repressive in *response* to terrorist attacks, thus explaining part of the correlation between religious restrictions and terrorism.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the need to effectively respond to terrorism can prompt governments to adopt measures that curb a range of freedoms, including religious liberty. For this reason, the relationship between repression of religion and terrorism is best understood as a dynamic, interactive and ongoing cycle: states repress religion; faith-based groups resist and strike back; repression of these groups intensifies as terrorism is used as a pretext for cracking down further on religion.<sup>27</sup> While a spiral of violence is common in religiously repressive countries, a careful examination of the historical record shows that widespread terrorism usually follows rather than precedes repressive policies. Governments might then use the realized threat of terrorism as a justification for further repression.

Press, 2003); Magnus Ranstorp, "Terrorism in the Name of Religion," *Journal of International Affairs* 50 (1996): 41–62; Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill* (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2003); Assaf Moghadam, *The Globalization of Martyrdom: Al Qaeda, Salafi Jihad, and the Diffusion of Suicide Attacks* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

<sup>25</sup> Philpott, "Explaining the Political Ambivalence of Religion," 518–521; Farr, *World of Faith and Freedom*, 243–272; Roger Finke and Jaime D. Harris, "Wars and Rumors of Wars: Explaining Religiously Motivated Violence," in *Religion, Politics, Society, and the State*, ed. Jonathan Fox (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 53–71.

<sup>26</sup> Peter S. Henne and Jason Kloczek, "Taming the Gods: How Religious Conflict Shapes State Repression," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. doi: 10.1177/0022002717728104.

<sup>27</sup> Brian J. Grim and Roger Finke, "Religious Persecution in Cross-National Context: Clashing Civilizations or Regulated Religious Economies?" *American Sociological Review* 72, no. 4 (2007): 633–658.



## WHAT IS RELIGIOUS TERRORISM?

Some might take issue with the topic under investigation in this book – religious terrorism, the form of violence most likely to result from religious repression. These scholars might argue that because religion is an inherently nebulous concept with imprecise boundaries, the religious–secular dichotomy is best avoided altogether. They would also point out that any attempt to define religion would either leave behind particular belief systems that are generally recognized as religions or include certain systems that most would classify as nonreligious. Religion, in their view, is nothing more than a social and modern construction, and, therefore, it is impossible to distinguish religious from secular violence.<sup>28</sup> Theologian William Cavanaugh, for example, maintains that “the very distinction between secular and religious violence is unhelpful, misleading, and mystifying.”<sup>29</sup>

It is indeed difficult to develop a definition of religion that is narrow enough to encompass everything people generally think of as “religious,” but that does not include other systems of thought that share certain commonalities with religion and that is also broad enough to include both theistic and nontheistic religions. That religion is notoriously difficult to define should not, however, prevent scholars from studying this subject of importance as a unique class of phenomena. After all, one would be hard-pressed to point to *any* concept of interest to social scientists on which scholars are unanimous in their understanding – i.e., power, politics, democracy, peace, etc. Yet the fact that these ideas are difficult to assign a precise definition has not prevented social scientists from using them effectively and furthering knowledge on these issues. The same logic can be applied to religion.

Following scholar of religion Ivan Strenski, I attempt to use the term “religion” within a specific bounded context such that it is clear what does and does not constitute religion in the pages that follow.<sup>30</sup> I conceive of religion in terms of the core components common to most of the world’s faith traditions: (1) a separation of the sacred and profane; (2) a belief in a supernatural being or beings with whom communication is possible; (3) a belief in transcendent realities or an afterlife; and (4) the use of rituals and symbols to attain “knowledge of and harmony with the widest reaches of transcendent reality.”<sup>31</sup> I therefore define “religion” as the interconnected set of beliefs, rituals and practices that form around transcendent, all-encompassing and supernatural answers to ultimate questions related to the purpose of existence. Some might criticize this definition as “essentialist.” Nevertheless,

<sup>28</sup> Terry Nardin, “Review: Terror in the Mind of God,” *Journal of Politics* 63, no. 2 (2001): 683–684; Alexander Spencer, “Questioning the Concept of ‘New Terrorism,’” *Peace, Conflict & Development* 8 (2006): 1–33; William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Jeroen Gunning and Richard Jackson, “What’s so ‘Religious’ about ‘Religious Terrorism?’” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 4, no. 3 (2011): 369–388.

<sup>29</sup> Cavanaugh, *Myth of Religious Violence*, 7.

<sup>30</sup> Ivan Strenski, *Why Politics Can’t Be Freed from Religion* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

<sup>31</sup> Toft, Philpott and Shah, *God’s Century*, 21.

focusing on beliefs and practices rooted in supernatural assumptions has the benefit of allowing for the differentiation of religious and secular frameworks and avoiding debates as to whether ideologies like Marxism or nationalism constitute religions. Another benefit is that a focus on transcendence allows for the separation of terrorist groups driven by a professed religious ideology from groups that may coalesce around a common religious identity but do not have religious goals or motivations as in the cases of the Tamil Tigers, the Irish Republican Army and the Greek Orthodox National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters (EOKA).

Like religion, terrorism has proven a notoriously difficult concept to define. Some estimates put the number of definitions at more than 100.<sup>32</sup> Still, as with defining religion, it is possible to delineate certain features of terrorism that recur in these various definitions. In general, terrorism (1) involves violence and destruction, (2) has political objectives, (3) is premeditated, (4) attempts to instill fear in members of society and (5) primarily targets civilians. For the purposes of this book, then, religious terrorism is defined as premeditated violence, political in nature, which is perpetrated against noncombatants by subnational actors who are driven by a discernible religious motivation or ideology and whose attacks have the intention of instilling fear in members of society.<sup>33</sup>

Much of the quantitative work on terrorism does not attempt to disaggregate terrorism with respect to ideology, motivations or tactics. The majority of these studies tends to lump terrorist groups together without taking into account the guiding ideologies of different organizations. There are good reasons, however, to disaggregate religious and secular terrorism. First, scholarship has shown that religious terrorism constitutes a distinct form of political violence, inherently different from other manifestations of violence. Religious terrorists look to their faith as a source of inspiration, legitimation and worldview, resulting in a totally different incentive structure than exists for their secular counterparts.<sup>34</sup> The belief that they have divine sanction to wage a spiritual war plausibly influences the nature and scope of the demands religious militants make and the violence they undertake. Second, even though religious terrorism is a subset of terrorism in general, only about half of all identifiable terrorist attacks were carried out by religious actors since the end of the Cold War, leading to the possibility that the traits that characterize terrorism in general may not apply to religious terrorists specifically. A general category of “terrorism” runs the risk of being an overly aggregate outcome variable. For this reason, it might be a better idea to differentiate terrorist incidents based on who the perpetrators are and their long-term objectives.

The fact that religious terrorists are motivated by faith beliefs does not preclude the possibility of them seeking religiously informed *material* goals. Studies on

<sup>32</sup> Walter Laqueur, *The New Terrorism: Fanaticism and the Arms of Mass Destruction* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), 6.

<sup>33</sup> Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2006), 81–131.

<sup>34</sup> Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 125–126.