

# SPECIAL REPORT

NO. 510 | JUNE 2022

UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE [www.usip.org](http://www.usip.org)

## Global Trends and Challenges to Protecting and Promoting Freedom of Religion or Belief

By Jason Klocek and Scott Bledsoe



Women pray near the Zitouna Mosque in Tunis during the Eid al-Fitr holiday, marking the end of Ramadan, on August 8, 2013. (Photo by Hassene Dridi/AP)

### Contents

Introduction .....	3
Freedom of Religion or Belief and Democracy .....	6
Freedom of Religion or Belief and Political Stability .....	10
Freedom of Religion or Belief and Economic Development.....	14
Recommendations .....	17

### Summary

- Religious restrictions and hostilities have risen steadily over the past few decades.
- Existing efforts to protect religious freedom primarily rely on international community mechanisms that hold national governments accountable for violations. Calls for more evidence-based approaches have also grown in recent years.
- Recognizing the importance of such approaches, the United States Institute of Peace conducted a two-year study on the relationship between freedom of religion or belief and regime type, political stability, and economic development.
- The analysis found that freedom of religion or belief correlates positively and significantly with democracy, and that some types of violations of religious freedom correlate positively and significantly with political instability. Although it did not find a statistically significant correlation with country-level economic development, the case studies illustrate how religious discrimination can influence local economies, and vice versa.
- Policymakers and peacebuilders should better integrate religious freedom into democracy-promotion efforts and the broader human rights agenda. They should also develop context-specific and locally owned initiatives and pursue evidence-based research and policy.

# SPECIAL REPORT

NO. 510 | JUNE 2022

---



## ABOUT THE REPORT

Drawing on quantitative cross-national analysis and select country case studies, this report explores the relationship between religious freedom and type of government, forms of political stability, and measures of economic development. Research was carried out as part of the Closing the Gap project initiated by USIP's Religion and Inclusive Societies Program and supported by USAID's Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Jason Klocek is an assistant professor at the University of Nottingham's School of Politics and International Relations, a senior researcher with the Religion and Inclusive Societies team at the United States Institute of Peace, and a faculty affiliate of the University of Notre Dame's Center for the Study of Religion and Society. Scott Bledsoe is a doctoral candidate at George Mason University's Schar School of Policy and Government.

---

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors alone. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Institute of Peace. An online edition of this and related reports can be found on our website ([www.usip.org](http://www.usip.org)), together with additional information on the subject.

© 2022 by the United States Institute of Peace

### United States Institute of Peace

2301 Constitution Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20037

Phone: (202) 457-1700  
Fax: (202) 429-6063  
E-mail: [usip\\_requests@usip.org](mailto:usip_requests@usip.org)  
Web: [www.USIP.org](http://www.USIP.org)

Special Report No. 510. First published 2022.

ISBN: 978-1-60127-889-0



UNITED STATES  
INSTITUTE OF PEACE PRESS



Buddhist monks hold placards during a protest outside the president's office in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on December 28, 2020, demanding the government continue its policy of mandatory cremations of Muslim victims of COVID-19. (Eranga Jayawardena/AP)

## Introduction

The global rise in religious restrictions and hostilities over the past few decades poses a significant, but still underappreciated, threat to international peace and security. More than three-quarters of the world's population now lives under governments that impose high or very high levels of regulation on the practice of faith, conversion to another faith, or the ability to profess no faith at all. Societal harassment of and violence toward minority religions, including in Western democracies, has also increased markedly in recent years—reaching an all-time high in 2018 according to the latest available global data.<sup>1</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic has only worsened these global trends. In the name of public health, numerous governments enacted or expanded policies that limit access to places of worship and that restrict burial rites and participation in pilgrimages. Sri Lanka, for example, required cremation of those who died from the coronavirus infection, or were merely suspected of having died from it; this policy posed a severe challenge to both Muslims and Christians, as many members of those communities view such practices as proscribed. Tensions between religious communities have also intensified as minorities—such as Yazidis in Iraq, Muslims in India, Hindus in Pakistan, and Jews in a number of locations—have been blamed for COVID-19 outbreaks in their respective countries.

The escalation of religious persecution and discrimination around the world matters not just for its scale, but also for its potential consequences. Several recent studies demonstrate a

connection between religious repression and restrictions on other freedoms, including women's rights, although the causal direction remains open to debate.<sup>2</sup> Additional research claims that religious repression correlates negatively with country-level economic growth.<sup>3</sup> Still other scholarship argues that limits on religion or belief undermine peace and stability.<sup>4</sup> For these reasons, politicians, policymakers, and peace practitioners have increasingly worried about how to better protect and promote freedom of religion or belief around the world.

## **EFFORTS TO PROTECT AND PROMOTE FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF**

Most undertakings to protect and promote freedom of religion or belief over the past two decades have focused on documenting violations and exerting external pressure on state and nonstate actors that do not comply with international standards. A wide range of entities at all levels of global politics have contributed to this work. Several Western governments and international institutions now have offices specifically devoted to advancing freedom of religion or belief. Notable examples include the US Department of State's Office of International Religious Freedom and the Freedom of Religion or Belief Programme within the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. Special envoys have also been appointed to lead those offices, such as the US Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, the Special Envoy for religion or belief in the Netherlands, and the European Union (EU) Special Envoy for the promotion of religion or belief outside the EU. The UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief leads similar efforts for the UN Human Rights Council.

Moreover, in recent years the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, and a number of other development agencies have all earmarked funds specifically for projects related to freedom of religion or belief. Coordination and advocacy for religious freedom by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) also continues to flourish through forums like the International Religious Freedom Roundtable, the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance, the International Contact Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief, and the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief.

In addition to institutional changes aimed at increasing accountability for national governments that violate freedom of religion or belief, a growing number of policy analysts and peacebuilders have called for context-specific and locally owned initiatives. These pleas stem from the twofold recognition that grassroots actors are well positioned to understand and identify the most pressing threats to freedom of religion or belief in their communities, and that these actors on the ground often remain weak, divided, and isolated in their efforts.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, peace practitioners continue to warn of problematic and unintended consequences of top-down efforts to advance freedom of religion or belief, such as reifying and exacerbating sectarian divisions, overlooking nontraditional religions, and reinforcing gender inequalities.

A related trend in efforts to protect and promote freedom of religion or belief has been appeals for more evidence-based approaches. This interest overlaps with a broader movement in public policy, as well as the abovementioned concern about a disconnect between international and local responses. It is also driven by the considerable volume of country-level data

on religious regulation and discrimination now available. That evidence highlights the steady decline of certain types of religious freedoms around the globe, but it has still not been widely leveraged to clarify the causes and consequences of this trend. Moreover, uncertainty and debate persist over the benefits and costs of particular strategies to safeguard and advance freedom of religion or belief.

## CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLATIONS

Against this backdrop, the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) collaborated with USAID's Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships to study the relationship between freedom of religion or belief and regime type, political stability, and economic development. The initiative, called Closing the Gap, consisted of two complementary strands of research—one a cross-national quantitative analysis, the other a qualitative set of case studies based on interviews and focus group discussions in five distinct countries.<sup>6</sup>

The first strand compiled and analyzed data on diverse measures of violations of religious freedom, regime type, political stability, and economic growth for 176 states over the period 1990–2014.<sup>7</sup> Data were drawn from conventional sources in the field, including the three most prominent global datasets on government religious restrictions and social hostilities: the Religion and State (RAS) dataset housed at Bar Ilan University, the Pew Research Center's Global Restrictions on Religion dataset, and the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project data managed by the University of Gothenburg's Department of Political Science.<sup>8</sup>

In line with those datasets, a minimal definition of freedom of religion or belief was adopted, referring to the absence of restrictions on individuals' or communities' ability to adhere to and practice their faith or belief system, or to hold no faith at all.<sup>9</sup> This definition does not include economic, political, or other forms of discrimination against religious communities. The research team considered two primary pathways by which violations of religious freedom commonly occur: government regulation of religion and social hostilities involving religion. The former pathway involves restrictions imposed by the state on the institutions and practices of a religious or belief community.<sup>10</sup> Examples include constraints on public or private religious observance, including participation in religious services, regulation of what religious symbols or clothing may or may not be worn in public, and restrictions on conversion to other (usually minority) religions. The social hostilities pathway involves discrimination, harassment, prejudice, or violence against members of religious or other belief communities by members of society who are not representatives of the government. Examples include anti-religious minority propaganda in the private media or attacks against properties owned by minority religious groups or people of no faith at all.

The study's cross-national analysis employed an array of statistical models that considered differences both across contexts and over time and that controlled for potential confounding factors.<sup>11</sup> The statistical analysis tested for correlations between freedom of religion or belief and indicators of regime type, political stability, and economic development. It is important to note that the analysis did not make it possible to establish causation. The conditions under which freedom of religion or belief advances, undermines, or has no effect on democracy, peace, and development—or vice versa—remain an important avenue for future research.

The second strand of research produced country case studies of Sri Lanka, South Sudan, Sudan, Uzbekistan, and Venezuela. These cases were selected, in part, because they represent different levels of freedom of religion or belief.<sup>12</sup> The field research included interviews and focus group discussions led by local research teams in each country. A diverse set of actors participated in the study, including government officials, NGOs, and local faith leaders from both majority and minority religious communities. The case studies explored how peacebuilders on the ground understand challenges to freedom of religion or belief, and it also looked at community-level interfaith peacebuilding activities and faith-based development activities that aim to protect and advance these freedoms.

The remainder of this report summarizes the study's main findings and offers recommendations for policymakers and peace practitioners seeking to protect and promote freedom of religion or belief around the world.

## Freedom of Religion or Belief and Democracy

The idea that freedom of religion or belief and democracy go hand in hand is almost viewed as common sense today. For many, liberal democratic values instantiate and reinforce rights commonly associated with religious freedom. One cannot, for instance, have freedom to preach, proselytize, and educate without free speech; freedom of the press is necessary to print sacred texts and educational materials, as well as communicate via social media; and without the right to assemble there can be no freedom to celebrate and pray communally.

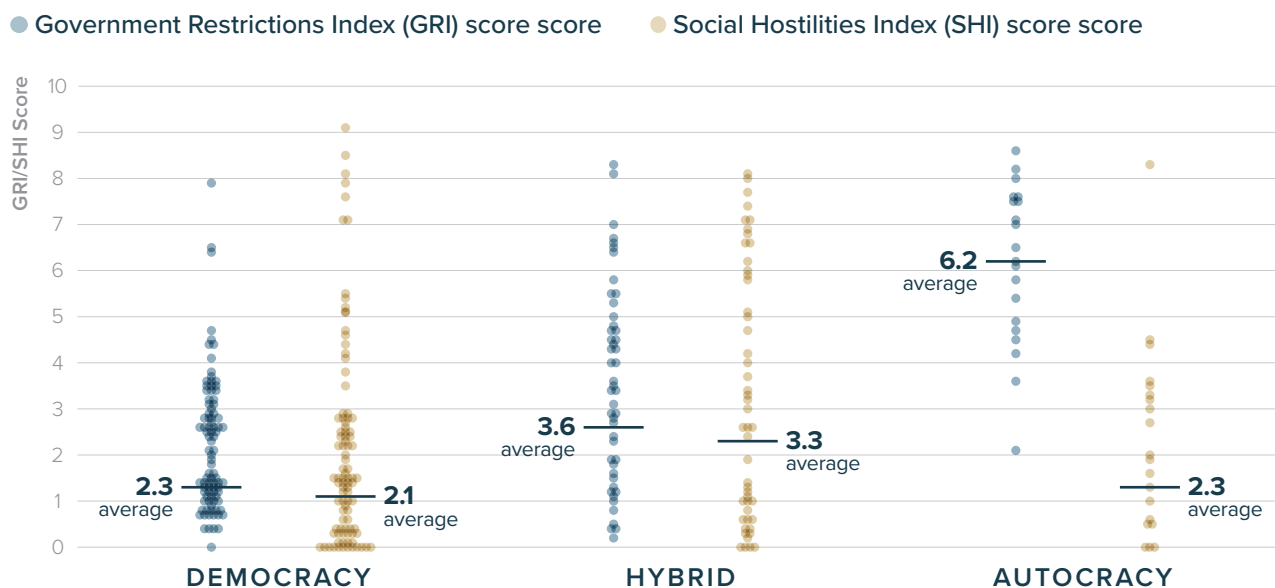
Others emphasize how freedom of religion or belief contributes to the types of activities commonly associated with democratic systems.<sup>13</sup> These activities include the freedom to assemble and the ability to use free speech to engage as a prophetic witness in the political process through advocacy, lobbying, and elections. It is further argued that when religious and other belief communities are free, they can strengthen civil society through their many public activities, such as running schools, universities, and hospitals. Faith communities have also proven to be an important check upon state power in some countries. The role of the Catholic Church in the People Power Revolution in the Philippines, the participation of Islamist parties (such as Morocco's Justice and Charity organization) in the Arab Spring protests, and advocacy against unfair tax policies by Tanzania's Interfaith Standing Committee on Economic Justice and Integrity of Creation are just a few examples.

The analysis described in this report generally supports the conventional view that freedom of religion or belief and democracy are related, although it cannot adjudicate whether one causes the other, or if the relationship is mutually reinforcing. What the analysis finds is a positive and significant correlation between religious freedom and a variety of democracy measures. By way of example, democracies accounted for more than 40 percent of countries with low levels of government restrictions on religion as captured by the RAS and Pew datasets in 2014. Australia, Canada, Ireland, Mauritius, and New Zealand ranked particularly low. In

FIGURE 1.

## Relationship between religious freedom violations and regime type, 2014

Democracies experienced lower levels of religious freedom violations in 2014 compared to other regime types, but the difference in mean levels of social hostilities between democratic and automatic regimes was much smaller.



**Note:** Analysis by the authors, based on the Pew Research Center's Global Restrictions on Religion dataset (2007–16) and the Polity V dataset.

contrast, autocracies comprised nearly three-quarters of countries with high levels of religious repression. Fewer than one-quarter of countries with low levels of government restrictions had authoritarian regimes.<sup>14</sup>

Figure 1 provides further detail on the correlation between freedom of religion or belief and regime type. Drawing specifically on the Pew dataset, the analysis shows a substantial difference in the mean level of government restrictions on religion for different regime types.<sup>15</sup> The average score for democracies is 2.3, nearly three times lower than that for authoritarian regimes, at 6.2. The average level of government restrictions on religion in hybrid (or semi-democratic) systems, at 3.6, also falls well below that of autocracies.

Another way to understand these findings is to consider the four levels of religious freedom violations typically presented in the Pew Research Center's annual reports (low, moderate, high, very high). On average, democracies cluster in the low category, which ranges in score from 0 to 2.4. By contrast, the mean level of government restrictions in autocracies falls at the upper limit of the high category (score range of 4.5–6.5). The mean score for hybrid regimes lies within the moderate category, which includes countries that score between 2.4 and 4.4.



Catholic nuns participate in a vigil in Quezon City, the Philippines, in protest of President Rodrigo Duterte's so-called war on drugs on February 22, 2017, the 31st anniversary of the country's People Power Revolution. (Photo by Bullit Marquez/AP)

## LIMITS ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF IN DEMOCRACIES

The correlation between freedom of religion or belief and democracy may be welcome news to advocates of human rights and democracy. However, there are at least two reasons to remain concerned. First, the levels of freedom of religion or belief in de-

mocracies vary substantially. Democratic countries do cluster toward the lower end of government restrictions on religion, as shown by the blue dots in figure 1, but several also hover around the highest levels of government restrictions. Some countries are on par with certain autocratic states.

It is also worth noting that Western liberal democracies do not necessarily display the highest levels of tolerance for religious and other belief communities—a point emphasized in a recent study by Jonathan Fox of the Religion and State Project at Bar Ilan University.<sup>16</sup> Drawing on the RAS dataset, Fox demonstrates that democracies and even some non-democracies in Latin America, Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa consistently engage in lower levels of religious regulation than some Western liberal democracies in Europe and North America. One reason for this might be the secular ideologies underpinning Western states. While in theory liberal principles encourage freedom for both secular and religious communities, there is often a tension in practice. For example, Fox points out that opposition to infant circumcision, ritual slaughter, and covering of women's hair is most pronounced in Western countries, since these practices do not conform with secular understandings of equality and dignity.

The distribution of social hostilities involving religion, represented by the gold dots in figure 1, casts further uncertainty on the propensity of religious freedom to reinforce democratic principles and activities, or vice versa. There was relatively little difference in the mean levels of social hostilities shown by democratic regimes (2.1), hybrid regimes (3.3), and autocratic regimes (2.3) in 2014. The observed scores all fall within the moderate category of social hostilities involving religion according to the Pew ranking system, which sets the range for this grouping from 1.5 to 3.5. And while democracies do tend on average to display lower levels of social hostilities than other regime types democracies also include several outliers, such as Germany, Greece, Mexico, and India.



## BACKSLIDING BY DEMOCRACIES

A second reason to remain guarded about the role of freedom of religion or belief in strengthening democracy, or vice versa, is the substantial democratic backsliding currently taking place across the globe. For the first time since 2001, the majority of countries in the world are autocracies.<sup>17</sup> The number of countries holding elections has dropped dramatically since 2017, and government harassment of opposition parties is becoming more commonplace when elections are held.<sup>18</sup> In addition, more countries declined than improved in overall rule of law performance for a third year in a row, according to the most recent World Justice Project Rule of Law Index.<sup>19</sup> Restrictions on civic freedoms—such as freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and due process—were especially sharp and widespread. Violations of religious freedoms may not be unconnected with these trends.

In line with broader trends related to democratic backsliding, both the Pew and RAS datasets reveal that some of the largest increases in religious restrictions over the past half decade have been in Western democracies, especially in Europe. Numerous European countries or cities, for instance, have banned people from wearing religious symbols or religious clothing, either completely or in certain circumstances. Jewish and Muslim communities in particular have faced increased social hostilities, including a sharp uptick in online abuse and attacks on places of worship.

Case studies of Sri Lanka and Venezuela undertaken as part of this study further underscore how democratic backsliding can pose additional challenges to freedom of religion or belief. In Sri Lanka, for instance, the 2018 constitutional crisis and continued growth of Buddhist nationalism have exacerbated several points of tension between majority and minority religious communities. One issue of particular concern to interviewees and focus group participants was the new de-radicalization regulation issued in March 2021. Formally titled the Prevention of Terrorism (De-radicalization from holding violent extremist religious ideology) Regulations No. 01, it enables public or military officers to detain any individual suspected of being involved in promoting violence, as well as hold that person for up to a year without due process. Several respondents were concerned that the law specifically targeted Muslims and could lead to further radicalization of extremist groups. They also speculated that the law might be an act of vengeance against the Muslim community, which largely did not vote for the Sri Lanka Podu Jana Peramuna party in the 2020 parliamentary election.

Interviewees raised similar concerns in Venezuela, which used to be Latin America's oldest democracy but has been ruled by an increasingly authoritarian regime since the election of Hugo Chávez in 1998 and is now a hybrid regime. In particular, respondents discussed how the freedom of religious leaders to express themselves on matters related to government policy, democracy, or human rights has gradually and indirectly been minimized. Interviewees did not cite explicit censorship, nor did they report that critical voices necessarily face legal repercussions. However, several people shared examples of indirect harassment faced by religious leaders or groups that are critical of the regime; for example, they may be accused of unsubstantiated crimes, or experience delays or other forms of obstruction when trying to use state services. While this type of harassment cannot be considered a violation of religious freedom under the minimal definition of freedom of religion or belief used in this study, there are warning signs that such actions are intensifying to include specific forms of religious repression. According to

one respondent, for instance, Catholic priests in some rural communities have felt they have no choice but to support the government in order to continue their ministries.

In the end, the correlation between freedom of religion or belief and democracy cannot be taken for granted. Not only do some democracies engage in high levels of religious repression, but the global decline in democracy also poses severe challenges to religious and other belief communities. These communities not only face the possibility of increased regulation, they also face constraints on the very activities that can enhance democracies, such as the operation of schools, universities, and hospitals.

## Freedom of Religion or Belief and Political Stability

Another oft-cited association with freedom of religion or belief is political stability and peace. A conventional view is that religious restrictions and hostilities create grievances, especially among minority communities who may already feel marginalized. That discontent can subsequently lead communities to take up arms in order to overcome their marginalization.<sup>20</sup> Conversely, freedom of religion or belief is understood to reduce tensions between the state and minority communities, as well as foster tolerance and even trust between local communities.

The current study, along with other recent analyses, supports and extends the popular view that freedom of religion or belief is associated with political stability. As will be explained below, the statistical analysis found noteworthy associations between certain types of religious freedom violations and two primary indicators for political instability included in the analysis: armed conflict and regime change.<sup>21</sup> Religious civil wars, in particular, are linked to government repression. Civil wars, more generally, and political transitions are both associated with higher levels of social hostilities involving religion. These findings suggest that political instability does not relate to all types of freedom of religion or belief in the same way. Just as with regime type, the analysis did not establish that violations of religious freedom drive instability, or that instability drives violations of religious freedom. Nor could it definitively conclude whether there may be cycles of religious repression and violence.

### ARMED CONFLICT AND SOCIAL HOSTILITIES INVOLVING RELIGION

Figure 2 summarizes the findings for the relationship between religious freedom violations and armed conflict, where armed conflict is measured by civil war occurrence in 2014. Each figure shows the percentage of countries that experienced a civil war across the above-mentioned levels of religious freedom violations typically presented in the Pew Research Center's annual reports (low, moderate, high, very high). Countries with armed conflict represent a larger proportion of the very high and high categories than the moderate or low categories for both types of violations of religious freedom—those imposed by the government and those related to social hostilities.

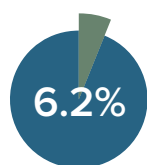
FIGURE 2.

## Relationship between religious freedom violations and armed conflict by civil war occurrence, 2014

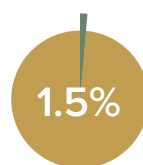
Countries that experienced armed conflict in 2014 (as measured by civil war occurrence) also had higher levels of religious freedom violations, particularly social hostilities involving religion.

### Government restrictions

### Social hostilities



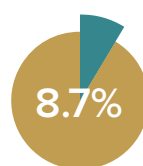
of countries with **low levels of religious freedom violations** imposed by the government had a civil war in 2014.



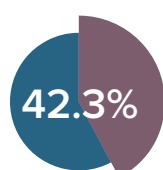
of countries with **low levels of religious freedom violations** related to social hostilities had a civil war in 2014.



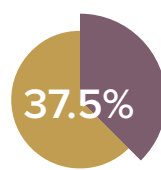
of countries with **moderate levels of religious freedom violations** imposed by the government had a civil war in 2014.



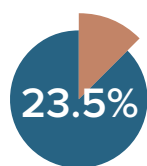
of countries with **moderate levels of religious freedom violations** related to social hostilities had a civil war in 2014.



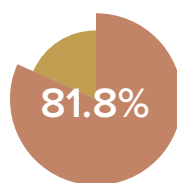
of countries with **high levels of religious freedom violations** imposed by the government had a civil war in 2014.



of countries with **high levels of religious freedom violations** related to social hostilities had a civil war in 2014.



of countries with **very high levels of religious freedom violations** imposed by the government had a civil war in 2014.



of countries with **very high levels of religious freedom violations** related to social hostilities had a civil war in 2014.

Sources: Pew Research Center's Global Restrictions on Religion dataset (2007–16) and the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset version 21.1.

While armed conflict is one factor associated with higher levels of anti-religious harassment and discrimination, it is not the only one. Regime durability also matters.

However, the patterns are far more striking when it comes to the latter type of violation. Nearly all the countries with very high levels of harassment or violence by nonstate groups were also involved in a civil war. Nearly 40 percent of countries in the high category for social hostilities similarly experienced a civil war, while nearly all the

countries in the low category were free of civil conflict in 2014.

Qualitative evidence from the country case studies extends these descriptive statistics by illustrating how social hostilities involving religion persist even after armed conflict ends. Sri Lanka again provides a useful example. Respondents underscored the persistent and prevalent harassment of and violence toward religious and other minority groups, including Evangelical, Catholic, and Hindu communities, since the formal end of the civil war in 2009. Of course, religious differences between Sinhalese Buddhists and Tamil Hindus also characterized the Sri Lankan civil war, at least on the surface. That said, the primary focus of respondents was on the increase of anti-Muslim sentiment since the Easter Sunday attacks on Christian churches and tourist hotels in 2019, and especially since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Several respondents noted that anti-Muslim hate speech and the boycotting of businesses run by Muslims had increased substantially. They also expressed concern about possible future rounds of anti-Muslim violence, such as those that occurred in 2014 and 2018 and resulted in hundreds of displaced people as homes, mosques, and places of business were destroyed.

Other Sri Lankan respondents emphasized the role of Buddhist monks and organizations in fomenting distrust of and violence toward minority religions. They also expressed a concern that Buddhist groups enjoyed impunity from the law. In particular, respondents pointed to the lack of convictions under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights Act of 2007, which is aimed specifically at increasing accountability for acts of violence against minority communities. They noted as well that some members of the Buddhist majority community seem to act with the “strong belief that they have the state on their side.”

## **REGIME CHANGE AND SOCIAL HOSTILITIES INVOLVING RELIGION**

While armed conflict is one factor associated with higher levels of anti-religious harassment and discrimination, it is not the only one. Regime durability also matters. The statistical analysis showed that countries with durable regimes were far more likely to have lower levels of social hostilities involving religion than countries with frequent political transitions. A significant correlation between regime duration and government restrictions on religion was not found.

A forthcoming and related study supports these findings. Looking specifically at Arab Spring countries, Jason Klocek, Hyun Jeong Ha, and Nathanael Gratias Sumaktoyo find that societal hostilities involving religion, but not government restrictions on religion, increased substantially in only those countries that experienced regime change (i.e., Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Yemen).<sup>22</sup> They argue this is because social divisions were exacerbated and social unrest was difficult to contain in those environments, while at the same time policy change was difficult to enact and enforce. Interviews in Sudan illustrate the plausibility of these mechanisms, with many respondents identifying a lack of government resources and commitment as the major obstacle to

further advancing freedom of religion or belief in the country. Several respondents also pointed to a rise in hate speech, directed especially at interfaith groups, and several expressed concern about the potential for deteriorating relations between ethnic and religious communities, especially Christians and Muslims, if these patterns persist.

Interviews in Venezuela, Uzbekistan, and Sri Lanka add more nuance. The first two countries—both characterized by relatively stable regimes during the early 2000s—have exhibited substantially lower levels of social hostilities involving religion than government restrictions on religion, according to the Pew and RAS datasets. In Venezuela, religious affiliation in itself was not discussed as a source of discrimination, and reports of harassment based on religion were rare. However, several respondents did suggest that active engagement of religious groups, leaders, and individuals in societal or political initiatives could lead to state repression. A few interviewees also reported that *colectivos*, or criminal groups, are being paid by the regime to intimidate religious leaders who are too critical. For example, their cell phones may be stolen, or stones thrown at their houses in the middle of the night. Again, such actions are not violations of religious freedom under the minimal definition used in this study, but they may be part of an important pattern to watch.

In Uzbekistan, respondents highlighted and called for more interfaith efforts to promote understanding between religious and other minority communities. They admitted that tensions still exist between some religious communities and even noted certain flashpoints, such as the opening of new Christian churches. Overall, though, they were optimistic about points of cooperation; one pastor even noted that he has called the head imam in his town to get advice on a newly registered church.

The amity in Uzbekistan stands in stark contrast to the situation in Sri Lanka, where social hostilities have only spiked more since the 2018 constitutional crisis. As discussed above, many Sri Lankan respondents expressed concern about a culture of impunity regarding violence against religious and other minorities. Several also expressed skepticism about interfaith dialogue between top-level religious leaders, suggesting it was merely a symbolic exercise that rarely translated into messages of peace within local faith communities.

## **RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE AND GOVERNMENT REGULATION OF RELIGION**

While general forms of armed conflict and regime change do not appear to significantly correlate with government restrictions on religion, other research does find an effect for a specific type of armed conflict: civil wars in which at least one conflict party claims to be fighting for a religious goal. Drawing on cross-national data from 1990 to 2009, Peter Henne and Jason Klocek demonstrate how these armed conflicts increase both the types and severity of government repression of religion. What is more, restrictions tend to increase against all religious groups in a country, not just those that rebelled against the state.<sup>23</sup> For instance, Russia ramped up its regulation of faith communities once frontline rebel commanders in the North Caucasus began framing the conflict as a holy war and attracting an influx of foreign fighters. Nilay Saiya finds similar effects for religious terrorism. For instance, countries with low levels of freedom of religion or belief have experienced 13.5 times more attacks by religiously motivated terrorists than countries with high levels.<sup>24</sup>

In sum, the relationship between freedom of religion or belief and political stability is not as straightforward as often presented. General types of armed conflict and regime change appear to be primarily linked to social hostilities involving religion. Specifically religious violence is positively correlated with government repression of religious freedom. It is also worth noting that some countries, including some of the case study countries, often appear to become entrenched in cycles of religious repression and violence. In Sri Lanka, for instance, increased levels of social hostilities involving religion both preceded and followed armed conflict and terrorist attacks in the country. Similarly, religious discrimination in Myanmar has been prevalent both before and after various incidents of intercommunal violence, most recently clashes between Buddhist and Rohingya communities. These patterns underline the need for context-specific interventions that consider the complex associations between freedom of religion or belief and political instability in particular countries.

## Freedom of Religion or Belief and Economic Development

The idea that religious freedom is good for business remains a widely repeated maxim in some advocacy circles. The general argument is that religious restrictions and hostilities—and associated conflicts—can contribute to conditions that undercut domestic and foreign investment, thereby curtailing economic growth. These conditions include deterring of investment in the civilian economy, disruption of critical sectors of the economy (including basic supplies, equipment, and access to jobs), and limitations on diversity in the marketplace.<sup>25</sup> Much of the analysis backing these claims draws on the Pew dataset, focuses on conditions in a single year, and looks at country-level development.

The current study does not find support for these claims. Neither the analysis of data over time nor the evaluation of countries in a specific year—including a wide range of measures for country-level economic development and growth—offers evidence of a robust, positive relationship between freedom of religion or belief and global economic growth.

Figure 3 displays trends in the mean level of violations of religious freedom as measured by the RAS dataset and in economic growth as measured by gross domestic product (GDP) over two and half decades (1990–2014). The primary takeaway is that GDP has increased, but violations of religious freedom have also increased, or at best remained steady, in every global region. This holds for both government restrictions on religion and social hostilities involving religion.

If anything, the statistical analysis suggests a negative association between freedom of religion or belief and country-level economic development after controlling for other factors. This result is perhaps less surprising when one considers that state repression is costly—requiring personnel and funds for enforcement. Many oil-rich authoritarian governments, especially in the Middle East, have some of the highest levels of government restrictions on religion in the world; they also have the resources required to enforce such policies.<sup>26</sup>

These findings, of course, do not mean that a relationship between freedom of religion or belief and economic development is not worth additional consideration. Directing attention to

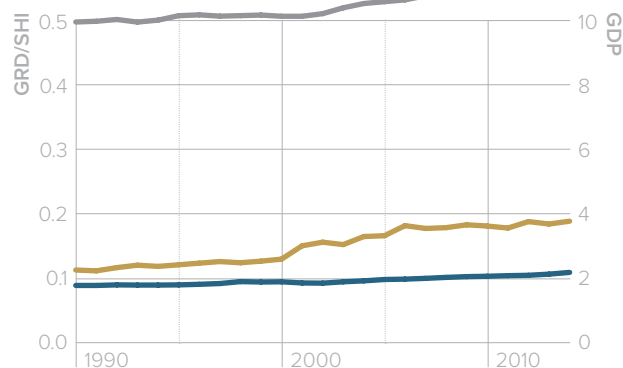
FIGURE 3.

# Mean levels of government restrictions, social hostilities, and GDP by region, 1990–2014

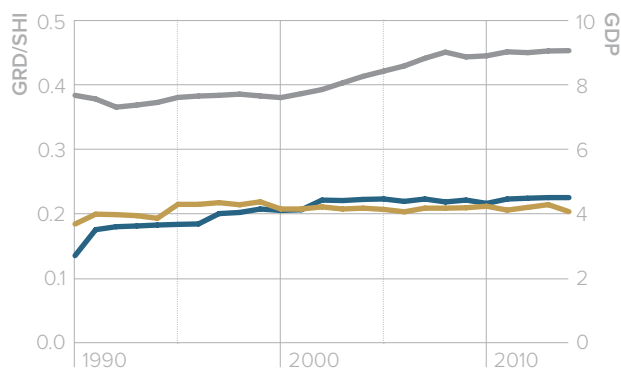
Despite global economic growth from 1990 to 2014, religious freedom violations continued to rise in every world region.

— Mean GRD    — Mean Social Hostilities Index (SHI) score    — Mean GDP (log)

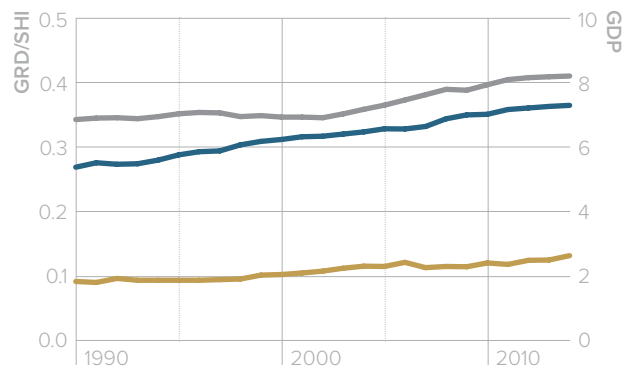
## WESTERN DEMOCRACIES



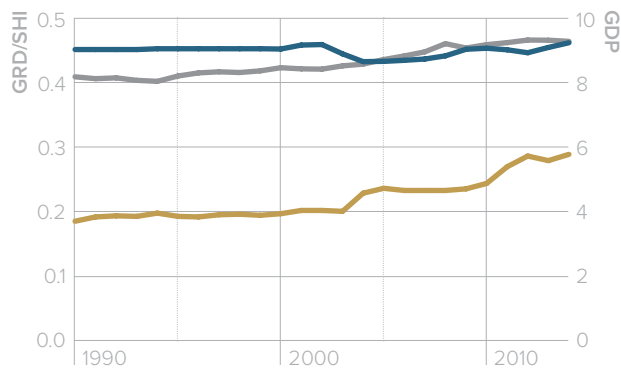
## EASTERN EUROPE/EURASIA



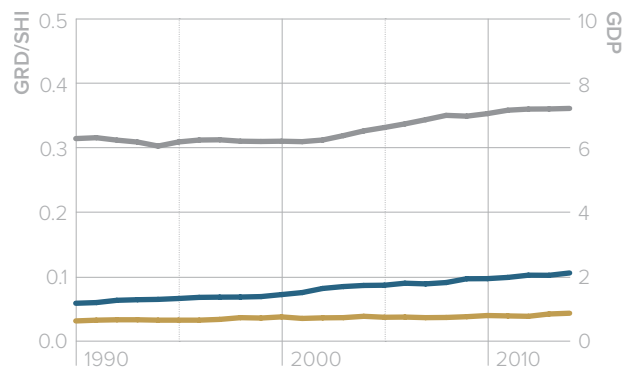
## ASIA



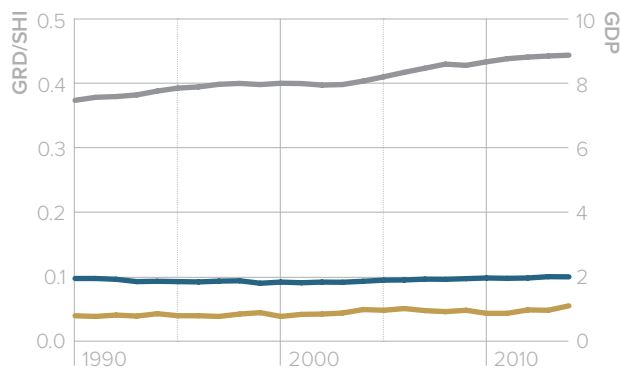
## MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA



## SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA



## LATIN AMERICA



Sources: Religion and State (Round 3) dataset and the World Bank's World Development Indicators (2020).

economic development at the grassroots level rather than the country level may tell a different story. In fact, several of the case studies illustrate the impact of religious restrictions and hostilities on local communities, even if those effects do not always aggregate up to the national level. Three of the most common issues discussed were economic dominance of particular sectors, job discrimination, and land rights.

The first issue, the perceived or actual success in business by certain religious minorities, was a major flashpoint in the case studies. In Sri Lanka, for example, participants shared their belief that the Muslim community's economic dominance in certain sectors, coupled with the lack of economic development in Sinhalese communities, fueled riots between Muslim and Sinhalese groups in Dharga Town (2014) and Digana (2018). Rioters specifically targeted Muslim businesses on both occasions. Tensions between the Muslim community and other communities further intensified in the immediate aftermath of the 2019 Easter Sunday attacks. This led to additional hardships, including the boycott of Muslim businesses. The second issue, job discrimination, stood out in different contexts. In Sri Lanka, some Muslims reported that they were fired by private-sector companies run by Sinhalese, Tamils, or Christians following the Easter Sunday attacks. In Sudan, focus group participants spoke of the disadvantage Christians faced in securing government jobs; many believed that such candidates were rejected for their religious affiliation.

In other contexts, religious affiliation may be contributing to positive job discrimination for particular communities. For instance, although most respondents in Uzbekistan did not feel that being Muslim accorded any sort of economic advantage, at least one Protestant interviewee expressed concern. He stated, "I can see that businesses are becoming harsher towards non-Uzbeks and non-Muslims. If a Russian converts to Islam, she/he will have a great advantage in business or career, with the exception of government jobs." Similarly, in Sudan, one of the focus group participants asserted that the son of a Sufi Muslim leader was appointed to a particular position because of his father's status. Several respondents in South Sudan likewise noted the persistent nepotism in hiring practices there, especially for government positions held primarily by Christians. These patterns can further undermine relations between communities because they contribute to other grievances about religious and economic discrimination.

The third issue, tension over land rights and revenue from land, was a persistent theme across the case studies when discussing local economies. In Sri Lanka, respondents frequently cited unresolved issues of access to land, water, and other resources, not religious beliefs, as a significant source of division among Muslims, Hindus, and Christians. Foreign investment in the Muslim community from the Middle East has worsened the situation, as the uneven development between the three communities has deepened mistrust. A similar pattern emerged in South Sudan, where divisions in livestock and other local markets have exacerbated discrimination against Muslims. Finally, in Venezuela, the poverty and food insecurity resulting from the current countrywide economic crisis is increasing competition for resources between religious and other minority communities.

In sum, the resources and opportunities for local communities may play a critical role in protecting and promoting freedom of religion or belief. In the future, efforts to understand the relationship between religious freedom and economic development could productively focus less on the country level and more on the grassroots level.



# Recommendations

The global community stands at a pivotal point with respect to the global decline of freedom of religion or belief—and of human rights and democratic institutions more generally. The moment calls for both renewed commitment and new approaches.

This report produced three key findings: first, that freedom of religion or belief correlates positively and significantly with democracy; second, that some types of violations of religious freedom correlate positively and significantly with political instability; and third, that while the analysis showed no statistically significant correlation between freedom of religion or belief and country-level economic development, the case studies suggest that some actors perceive a relationship between religious discrimination and local economies. These findings point in turn to three key recommendations (which echo those of other initiatives that considered distinct country cases, such as research by the Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development).

## **1. More effectively integrate policies and programming that promote freedom of religion or belief into broader democracy promotion and human rights efforts.**

The concurrent decline in other human rights and democracy in recent years underscores that freedom of religion or belief cannot be protected and promoted in isolation.<sup>27</sup> It needs to be integrated into broader frameworks that address this larger set of challenges to the global community.<sup>28</sup> This effort will require dialogue and coordination among advocates for freedom of religion or belief at the global, national, and local levels.

To be sure, anxiety persists in some circles that such an approach will lower religious freedom's profile as a policy priority. Yet such concern needs to be balanced with the growing evidence that demonstrates a strong link between freedom of religion or belief and other human rights, including freedom of assembly, speech, expression, and movement. Discussing freedom of religion or belief in relation to these other rights may sometimes alter the form of discourse. However, approaches that address these freedoms as part of a larger and interrelated set of threats to human rights and civil liberties can better ensure the flourishing of all.

An approach that integrates religious freedom into efforts to preserve human rights and democracy will also encourage a broader understanding of violations of religious freedom. Initial efforts to draw policymakers' attention to the global threat posed by religious discrimination has led to a somewhat narrow focus—what this report refers to as a “minimal definition.” This definition has offered a helpful starting point to raise awareness and demonstrate the scale of the problem, but it has obscured a number of larger questions that persist about how to identify and understand violations of freedom of religion or belief. For example, existing datasets focus primarily on government and overt societal acts of discrimination that attract public attention; this is understandable, given the inherent difficulty in collecting information on abuses states and other actors seek to conceal. But existing data often omit less overt, yet still routine, forms of discrimination that impact individuals' or communities' ability to adhere to their faith, convert to a different faith, or hold no faith at all. Such discrimination includes vandalism of rural shrines or places of worship not always reported by the media, as well as street harassment.



Rohingya refugees, displaced from their homes following attacks by the military in Myanmar, pray at the Kutupalong refugee camp, in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, on November 23, 2017. (Photo by Adam Dean/New York Times)

In addition, many discussions about violations of religious freedom focus on majority and traditional religious communities in a country. But freedom of religion or belief applies to all religious and belief groups. It extends to atheists in Bangladesh and beyond who have been imprisoned and killed for speaking out about their beliefs. It also applies to circumstances where religious identities intersect with other attributes, such as race, gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. Oppression today of Rohingyas, Tibetan Buddhists, Uyghurs, and Kazakhs involves such a mix of factors. So too do recent attacks on Black churches and a Sikh Temple in the United States, or wherever Islamophobic or anti-Semitic discrimination or violence targets people with overlapping identity markers. Persecution of those with nonorthodox beliefs or practices—such as LGBTQ Christians in Uganda, who have been prevented from creating worship spaces where they feel safe to practice a theology that affirms their dignity—highlights the need to address freedom of religion or belief in a human rights context. Global actors will need to work more directly with local communities, not merely rely on cross-national statistics, to identify and understand these dynamics. This study underscores the promise of such an approach, shedding light on dynamics obscured by studies that rely solely on religious freedom datasets. For example, the Venezuelan case study points to collaboration between the state and criminal groups in

efforts to intimidate faith communities, and research in Sri Lanka highlights the need to move from top-level to grassroots interfaith programming.

An approach that integrates freedom of religion or belief with human rights could have two additional benefits. First, it might help address and potentially resolve some of the inherent tensions that arise in promoting the two separately. For example, it could open up discussion on how promoting freedom of religion or belief may reinforce, rather than undermine, rights related to gender equality and sexual orientation. It is not necessary to see such rights as contradictory, and more attention needs to be given to their intersection, especially in particular contexts.

A broader framework for freedom of religion or belief and other human rights could also diversify and amplify democracy promotion efforts around the world. Here it could be useful to build on recent efforts to develop and expand networks related to freedom of religion or belief, including the governmental International Contact Group, the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance, the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief, and various national and regional NGO networks. Networks that more directly connect advocates for freedom of religion or belief with other human rights advocates are also needed. Currently, it is difficult to systematically coordinate the efforts of domestic actors with those working at the international level. This situation sometimes leads local actors to feel that a particular understanding of freedom of religion or belief is being imposed from outside the country, which points to a second recommendation:

## **2. Develop context-specific and locally owned policies and practices that promote freedom of religion or belief.**

Freedom of religion or belief has complex causes and consequences that may not operate in the same way in all environments. Yet many discussions and debates on how to protect and promote this freedom take global data as their starting point.<sup>29</sup> This report reaffirms the value of that information while also pointing out how aggregate information obscures other patterns and contextual factors. For instance, its findings on political instability make clear that there may be distinct drivers for different types of violations of religious freedom. Armed conflict and regime change appear to correlate with social hostilities involving religion, but not necessarily with government regulation of religion.

Consequently, policies and programs aimed at advancing freedom of religion or belief and other human rights need to take local realities into account. The different perspectives on interfaith dialogue in Uzbekistan and Sri Lanka offer one illustration of this point. Such programs are less controversial, and consequently more effective, where conflict and deep religious divisions are absent. Of course, this raises a further challenge—that certain religious freedom programming may be least likely to succeed where it is most needed.

This reality points to opportunities rather than reasons to abandon such work altogether. First, it underscores the importance of context-specific information so as to ensure that interventions do not exacerbate current tensions, as foreign investment in Sri Lanka's Muslim community has done. Second, it affirms the value of and need for more qualitative research. Narrative accounts can capture the different ways freedom of religion or belief is understood in practice, as well as the ways religious discrimination overlaps with other social, political, and cultural dynamics.

This last point has critical consequences for potential interventions. While some external actors might focus on religious discrimination, economic or political inequalities may be the more proximate drivers of discrimination in certain contexts. Even more troubling, foreign actors' focus on the religious dynamics of discrimination and violence may make such identities more salient than they were before an intervention, as local actors adjust their mobilization strategies. This result has the unintended consequence of further increasing the vulnerability of minorities, a pattern repeated from Sri Lanka and Myanmar to Nigeria and Iraq.

### **3. Pursue evidence-based approaches to support freedom of religion or belief.**

Finally, evidence-based policy on freedom of religion or belief and other human rights can bolster the above recommendations. More than two decades of international efforts to promote accountability for violations of religious freedom may have prevented a sharper decline than otherwise would have occurred. However, additional tools are now needed to curb the continued rise in religious restrictions and violations around the world.

In particular, there is still no firm understanding of the efforts of community-level peacebuilding and development activities, including those by faith-based organizations and interfaith coalitions, to protect and advance freedom of religion or belief. Additional study is needed to capture the full range of such undertakings, especially engagement with religious actors, as well as the conditions under which they are more or less impactful. A deeper appreciation of the benefits and unintended consequences of national and international partnerships with such organizations is also needed. Finally, more systematic investigation of the purported link between religious engagement and freedom of religion or belief could better inform the tools, training, and policies of multilateral, governmental, and nongovernmental agencies seeking to partner with faith-based organizations.

USIP's Closing the Gap project illustrates the value of more evidence-based approaches. Drawing on existing country-level data and novel interview research data in five countries, its findings support, challenge, and extend conventional thinking on policy for and protection of freedom of religion or belief. The project found, for instance, that while democracy may have a positive correlation with religious freedom, it is not sufficient to ensure respect for all religious and other belief communities. It also clarified that different forms of political instability correlate with distinct types of violations of religious freedoms. Finally, it emphasized the need to think more systematically about the link between freedom of religion or belief and local, rather than national, economies.

In conclusion, the project's findings raise important questions about how to scale up the international community's efforts to protect and promote freedom of religion or belief. Most importantly, they stress the need for more understanding of when and where freedom of religion or belief is most likely to impact peace and development. The extent to which practitioners continue to critically reflect on policies and practices aimed at protecting and promoting freedom of religion or belief will determine the degree to which millions of people around the world are free to practice their faith or choose no faith at all.

# Notes

The authors wish to thank the Closing the Gap project advisory team, Elizabeth Cassidy, Kent Hill, Katherine Marshall, and David Saperstein, for their support and guidance over the past two years, as well as our USAID partners, including Adam Nicholas Philipps and Kirsten Evans, for an engaging and productive collaboration. A special note of thanks to Amanda Vigneaud for her stalwart backing of the project's research efforts and coordination with USAID regional bureaus. The authors also wish to acknowledge and express appreciation for constructive feedback from David Yang, vice president of the Applied Conflict Transformation Center at the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) and two anonymous reviewers. Their comments made the report clearer and more precise. In addition, the authors are deeply grateful for the guidance and encouragement from current and former colleagues in USIP's Religion and Inclusive Societies Program, especially Susan Hayward, Palwasha Kakar, Melissa Nozell, and Kelli Clark. Finally, Jason Klocek thanks the University of Notre Dame's Center for the Study of Religion and Society, especially its director, Kraig Beyerlein, and associate director, Sara Skiles, for providing an intellectual home in which to conduct and reflect on this research.

1. Pew Research Center, "In 2018, Government Restrictions on Religion Reach Highest Level Globally in More Than a Decade," November 10, 2020, [www.pewforum.org/2020/11/10/in-2018-government-restrictions-on-religion-reach-highest-level-globally-in-more-than-a-decade](http://www.pewforum.org/2020/11/10/in-2018-government-restrictions-on-religion-reach-highest-level-globally-in-more-than-a-decade). "High" and "very high" levels of government restrictions refer to the scoring categories used by the Pew Research Center, which ranks both government restrictions and social hostilities as "very high," "high," "moderate," or "low." See the "Methodology" section of the Pew report for more detail.
2. See Brian J. Grim and Roger Finke, *The Price of Freedom Denied: Religious Persecution and Conflict in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); and Pazit Ben-Nun Bloom, "State-Level Restriction of Religious Freedom and Women's Rights: A Global Analysis," *Political Studies* 64, no. 4 (2016): 832–53.
3. See Brian J. Grim, "God's Economy: Religious Freedom and Socio-Economic Wellbeing," in *Religious Freedom in the World*, ed. Paul A. Marshall (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 42–47; and Brian J. Grim, Greg Clark, and Robert Edward Snyder, "Is Religious Freedom Good for Business?: A Conceptual and Empirical Analysis," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* 10, no. 4 (2014): 2–19.
4. See Matthias Basedau, Birte Pfeiffer, and Johannes Vüllers, "Bad Religion? Religion, Collective Action, and the Onset of Armed Conflict in Developing Countries," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 60, no. 2 (2016): 226–55; and Matthias Basedau and Johanna Schaefer-Kehnert, "Religious Discrimination and Religious Armed Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Obvious Relationship?," *Religion, State and Society* 47, no. 1 (January 1, 2019): 30–47.
5. Marie Juul Petersen and Katherine Marshall, *The International Promotion of Freedom of Religion or Belief: Sketching the Contours of a Common Framework* (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for Human Rights, 2019), [www.humanrights.dk/publications/international-promotion-freedom-religion-belief](http://www.humanrights.dk/publications/international-promotion-freedom-religion-belief).
6. Launched in 2020, the Closing the Gap project employs two complementary strands of research—quantitative cross-national analysis and country case studies—to explore the causal processes linking religious freedom, peace, and development outcomes and to provide insights for more effective policy and programing addressing the global decline of religious freedom. For more information, see the project page on the USIP website at [www.usip.org/programs/closing-gap-analyzing-link-between-religious-freedom-peace-and-development](http://www.usip.org/programs/closing-gap-analyzing-link-between-religious-freedom-peace-and-development).
7. This time period and sample of states provided the greatest overlap between data on freedom of religion or belief and other existing datasets. In robustness checks, findings were also compared with the larger set of countries and alternative time periods available in the Pew Global Restrictions on Religion and Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) datasets. Replication data are available at <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/closingthegap>.
8. Datasets are accessible as follows: Religion and State Round 3 dataset, [www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Descriptions/RAS3.asp](http://www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Descriptions/RAS3.asp); Pew Research Center's Global Restrictions on Religion dataset, [www.pewforum.org/dataset/global-restrictions-on-religion-2007-2016](http://www.pewforum.org/dataset/global-restrictions-on-religion-2007-2016); and the Varieties of Democracy dataset (v11.1), [www.v-dem.net/en/data/data/v-dem-dataset-v11.1](http://www.v-dem.net/en/data/data/v-dem-dataset-v11.1).
9. There is a general consensus about what freedom of religion or belief means in theory, based on Article 18 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the 1981 Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, but there is disagreement about how to determine and evaluate who is committing violations of this freedom, what targets are aimed at, and what methods are used. See Jonathan Fox, "What Is Religious Freedom and Who Has It?," *Social Compass* 68, no. 3 (2021): 321–41.
10. Government restrictions on religion typically target minority religious communities but can also be placed on the majority religion, such as in Bahrain, Oman, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

11. The statistical models included a variety of theoretically relevant control variables. The cross-sectional analysis used time-variant and -invariant characteristics, such as the population size, population density, and land area of countries. Each of these measures was taken from the World Bank (<https://data.worldbank.org>). Additionally, the analysis included measures of established religion and official support of religion from the Religion and State Round 3 dataset. The analysis controlled for religious and ethnic fractionalization in a country, drawing on the Historical Index of Ethnic Fractionalization (HIEF) dataset. For more on HIEF, see Lenka Drazanova, “Introducing the Historical Index of Ethnic Fractionalization (HIEF) Dataset: Accounting for Longitudinal Changes in Ethnic Diversity,” *Journal of Open Humanities Data*, 6, no. 2 (2020): 6. For the panel analysis, only time-variant factors were included.
12. These five countries were selected because they represent a wide range of values characterizing the variables of interest in the study—an approach known as a diverse-case, or maximum variation, method. For more, see Jason Seawright and John Gerring, “Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options,” *Political Research Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (2008): 294–308. For more on case selection criteria, visit <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/closingthegap>.
13. See Daniel Philpott, “Religion: A Friend to Democracy,” Religious Freedom Institute, June 28, 2016, [www.religiousfreedominstitute.org/cornerstone/2016/6/28/religion-a-friend-to-democracy](http://www.religiousfreedominstitute.org/cornerstone/2016/6/28/religion-a-friend-to-democracy); and Nilay Saiya, “The Religious Freedom Peace,” *International Journal of Human Rights* 19, no. 3 (2015): 369–82.
14. The Pew Research Center’s eleventh annual study of restrictions on religion demonstrates a similar pattern. See Pew Research Center, “In 2018, Government Restrictions on Religion Reach Highest Level Globally.”
15. Regime types are classified using the Polity V dataset. The findings are robust to measures from other datasets, including V-Dem and the Democracy Index compiled by the Economist Intelligence Unit.
16. See Jonathan Fox, *Thou Shalt Have No Other Gods before Me: Why Governments Discriminate against Religious Minorities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).
17. Anna Lührmann et al., “Autocratization Surges—Resistance Grows: Democracy Report 2020,” Varieties of Democracy Institute (V-Dem), March 2020, [www.v-dem.net/media/filer\\_public/de/39/de39af54-0bc5-4421-89ae-fb20dcc53dba/democracy\\_report.pdf](http://www.v-dem.net/media/filer_public/de/39/de39af54-0bc5-4421-89ae-fb20dcc53dba/democracy_report.pdf).
18. Susan D. Hyde, “Democracy’s Backsliding in the International Environment,” *Science* 369, no. 6508 (2020): 1192–96.
19. World Justice Project, “World Justice Project Rule of Law Index 2020,” [www.worldjusticeproject.org/our-work/research-and-data/wjp-rule-law-index-2020](http://www.worldjusticeproject.org/our-work/research-and-data/wjp-rule-law-index-2020).
20. Basedau and Schaefer-Kehnert, “Religious Discrimination and Religious Armed Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa”; Yasemin Akbaba and Zeynep Taydas, “Does Religious Discrimination Promote Dissent? A Quantitative Analysis,” *Ethnopolitics* 10, no. 3–4 (2011): 271–95; and Matthias Basedau et al., “Does Discrimination Breed Grievances—and Do Grievances Breed Violence? New Evidence from an Analysis of Religious Minorities in Developing Countries,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 34, no. 3 (2017).
21. A regime duration score measured the number of years since the most recent regime change (defined by a three-point change in the Polity V score over a period of three years or less). Data on civil wars were drawn from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program. A supplemental analysis looked at the number of terrorist attacks per year (from the Global Terrorism Database) as a third indicator.
22. Jason Klocek, Hyun Jeong Ha, and Nathanael Gratis Sumaktoyo, “Regime Change and Religious Discrimination after the Arab Uprisings,” *Journal of Peace Research* (forthcoming). For evidence of a similar pattern, see Yasemin Akbaba and Jonathan Fox, “Societal Rather than Governmental Change: Religious Discrimination in Muslim-Majority Countries after the Arab Uprisings,” *All Azimuth* 8, no. 1 (2019): 5–22.
23. Peter S. Henne and Jason Klocek, “Taming the Gods: How Religious Conflict Shapes State Repression,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 63, no. 1 (January 1, 2019): 112–38.
24. Saiya, “Religious Freedom Peace.” This estimate is based on data from the Global Terrorism Database.
25. See Grim, Clark, and Snyder, “Is Religious Freedom Good for Business?”; Grim, “God’s Economy”; Grim and Finke, *Price of Freedom Denied*; and Anthony Gill, *The Political Origins of Religious Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
26. See Stephen M. Shellman, “Process Matters: Conflict and Cooperation in Sequential Government-Dissident Interactions,” *Security Studies* 15, no. 4 (2006): 563–99; and Christian Davenport, “State Repression and Political Order,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 10 (2007): 1–23.
27. The disconnect between efforts to support freedom of religion or belief and the broader human rights agenda is, of course, merely one example of the balkanized nature of the human rights field. The idea of fully integrating all types and subtypes of human rights work also extends to human trafficking, LGBTQ rights, and labor issues.
28. The authors are not taking a position on the debate in the US and other democratic countries concerning whether there ought to be an office devoted to freedom of religion or belief with a staff separate from the human rights office and staff of foreign ministries, or whether they should be merged. Either way, democracies ought to integrate their freedom of religion or belief project with their human rights project—functionally if not formally.
29. See Judd Birdsall and Lori Beaman, “Faith in Numbers: Can We Trust Quantitative Data on Religious Affiliation and Religious Freedom?,” *Review of Faith and International Affairs* 18, no. 3 (2020): 60–68.

## ABOUT THE INSTITUTE

---



The United States Institute of Peace is a national, nonpartisan, independent institute, founded by Congress and dedicated to the proposition that a world without violent conflict is possible, practical, and essential for US and global security. In conflict zones abroad, the Institute works with local partners to prevent, mitigate, and resolve violent conflict. To reduce future crises and the need for costly interventions, USIP works with governments and civil societies to help their countries solve their own problems peacefully. The Institute provides expertise, training, analysis, and support to those who are working to build a more peaceful, inclusive world.

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

---

George E. Moose (Chair), Adjunct Professor of Practice, The George Washington University, Washington, DC • Judy Ansley (Vice Chair), Former Assistant to the President and Deputy National Security Advisor under George W. Bush, Washington, DC • Eric Edelman, Roger Hertog Practitioner in Residence, Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, Washington, DC • Joseph Eldridge, Distinguished Practitioner, School of International Service, American University, Washington, DC • Stephen J. Hadley, Principal, Rice, Hadley, Gates & Manuel LLC, Washington, DC • Kerry Kennedy, President, Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights, Washington, DC • Ikram U. Khan, President, Quality Care Consultants, LLC, Las Vegas, NV • Stephen D. Krasner, Graham H. Stuart Professor of International Relations, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA • John A. Lancaster, Former Executive Director, National Council on Independent Living, Potsdam, NY • Jeremy A. Rabkin, Professor of Law, Antonin Scalia Law School, George Mason University, Arlington, VA • J. Robinson West, Former Chairman, PFC Energy, Washington, DC • Nancy Zirkin, Executive Vice President, Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, Washington, DC

### Members Ex Officio

Antony J. Blinken, Secretary of State • Lloyd J. Austin III, Secretary of Defense • Michael T. Plehn, Lieutenant General, US Air Force; President, National Defense University • Lise Grande, President and CEO, United States Institute of Peace (nonvoting)

## THE UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE PRESS

---

Since 1991, the United States Institute of Peace Press has published hundreds of influential books, reports, and briefs on the prevention, management, and peaceful resolution of international conflicts. The Press is committed to advancing peace by publishing significant and useful works for policymakers, practitioners, scholars, diplomats, and students. In keeping with the best traditions of scholarly publishing, each work undergoes thorough peer review by external subject experts to ensure that the research, perspectives, and conclusions are balanced, relevant, and sound.

## OTHER USIP PUBLICATIONS

---

- *Sowing the Seeds of Nonviolent Action in Sudan* by Marija Marovic and Zahra Hayder (Special Report, May 2022)
- *Darfur after Bashir: Implications for Sudan's Transition and for the Region* by Jérôme Tubiana (Special Report, April 2022)
- *Dissent and Dialogue: The Role of Mediation in Nonviolent Uprisings* by Isak Svensson and Daan van de Rijzen (Special Report, April 2022)
- *Afghan Taliban Views on Legitimate Islamic Governance: Certainties, Ambiguities, and Areas for Compromise* by Clark B. Lombardi and Andrew F. March (Peaceworks, February 2022)
- *Nonviolent Action in the Era of Digital Authoritarianism: Hardships and Innovations* by Matthew Cebul and Jonathan Pinckney (Special Report, February 2022)



UNITED STATES  
INSTITUTE OF PEACE PRESS

2301 Constitution Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20037  
(202) 457-1700  
[www.USIP.org](http://www.USIP.org)