

The Unfree Exercise of Religion: A World Survey of Discrimination against Religious Minorities

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What is Religious Freedom?

Religious Freedom is a term that is often used but far less often defined.

- The 1998 US Religious Freedom Act uses the term 173 times but never defines it.
- The academic literature uses this term and others in multiple ways with multiple meanings.

What is Religious Freedom?

Five questions any definition must answer:

1. May the government restrict public religious practices or institutions?
2. May the government restrict private religious practices?
3. May the government support religions unequally?
4. May the government support all religions equally?
5. May the government treat religious minorities unequally in matters other than religion?

What is Religious Freedom?

The free exercise of religion:

- The government may not limit religious practices or institutions.

Restrictions on public religious practices or institutions? No

Restrictions on private religious practices? No

Unequal government support for religion? Yes

Equal government support for religion? Yes

Unequal treatment of religious minorities in matters other than religion? Yes

What is Religious Freedom?

Religious persecution or repression:

- “An effort by the government to repress major activities by a given religious group” (Jenkins, 2007)

Restrictions on public religious practices or institutions? No

Restrictions on private religious practices? No

Unequal government support for religion? Yes

Equal government support for religion? Yes

Unequal treatment of religious minorities in matters other than religion? No

What is Religious Freedom?

Religious toleration (absence of intolerance):

- Putting up with those you dislike or with those with whom you disagree.
- “The willingness to extend civil liberties to outgroups” (Karpov, 2002)

Restrictions on public religious practices or institutions? **No**

Restrictions on private religious practices? **No**

Unequal government support for religion? **Yes**

Equal government support for religion? **Yes**

Unequal treatment of religious minorities in matters other than religion? **No**

What is Religious Freedom?

Discrimination on the basis of religion:

- Religious minorities may not be restricted in a manner that the majority is not.

Restrictions on public religious practices or institutions?	Yes if applied equally
Restrictions on private religious practices?	Yes if applied equally
Unequal government support for religion?	Yes
Equal government support for religion?	Yes
Unequal treatment of religious minorities in matters other than religion?	No

What is Religious Freedom?

A level playing field:

- The government may not prefer or disadvantage any religion
- No religion may be allowed to have any competitive advantage over another. (Finke, 1990, 2012)

Restrictions on public religious practices or institutions?	Yes if applied equally
Restrictions on private religious practices?	Yes if applied equally
Unequal government support for religion?	No
Equal government support for religion?	Yes
Unequal treatment of religious minorities in matters other than religion?	No

What is Religious Freedom?

Separationism:

- The government may not become involved in religion in any way.

Restrictions on public religious practices or institutions? No

Restrictions on private religious practices? No

Unequal government support for religion? No

Equal government support for religion? No

Unequal treatment of religious minorities in matters other than religion? No?

What is Religious Freedom?

Laicism / Secularism:

- The government may not support religion and religion is inappropriate for the public sphere.

Restrictions on public religious practices or institutions?	Yes, if applied equally
Restrictions on private religious practices?	Yes, if applied equally
Unequal government support for religion?	No
Equal government support for religion?	No
Unequal treatment of religious minorities in matters other than religion?	No

What is Religious Freedom?

Religious discrimination:

- The government may not place restrictions on the religious practices or institutions of religious minorities that are not placed on the majority religion. (Fox, 2008, 2015, 2016)

Restrictions on public religious practices or institutions?	Yes, if applied equally
Restrictions on private religious practices?	Yes, if applied equally
Unequal government support for religion?	Yes
Equal government support for religion?	Yes
Unequal treatment of religious minorities in matters other than religion?	Yes

The Religion and State Project:

Goals

- To provide an accurate description of government religion policies worldwide.
- To examine the influence of government religion policy on important social, political, and economic phenomena and vice versa.

The Religion and State Project- Minorities: Overview

- 183 countries and territories
- 767 minorities
- Yearly codings for 1990 through 2014
- 35 variables on religious discrimination

The Religion and State Project- Minorities: Overview

What is new?

- Religious discrimination scores for all relevant religious minorities
 - All minorities which are at least 0.25% of a country's population.
- Previous datasets either
 - Do not focus on religious minorities (eg. Gurr, Cederman et. al)
 - Include only country-level scores. (eg. Grim & Finke, Cingranelli & Richards)

The Religion and State Project- Minorities: Overview

What is new?

Includes 35 types of religious discrimination.

Restrictions on:

- Religious practices (12 types)
- Religious institutions and clergy (8 types)
- Conversion and proselytizing (6 types)
- Other forms of discrimination (9 types)

The Religion and State Project: Methodology

- Multiple sources of information
 - Government and NGO human rights reports
 - US State Department, UN, EU, etc.
 - Human Rights without Frontiers, Amnesty International, International Christian Coalition, Forum 18, etc.
 - Media sources: Full search of Lexis/Nexis
 - Academic sources: Articles, books, etc.
 - Primary sources: Laws, Constitutions, etc.

The Religion and State Project: Methodology

- The RA writes a report on a country.
- The report approved by the PI.
- The report is used by the RA to code the variables.
- The PI approves the codings.
- Backup codings by another RA.
 - Correlations between primary and backup codings: **.973 to .990** depending on the variable and the year.

The Religion and State Project: Methodology

Some Coding Rules FAQ Answers

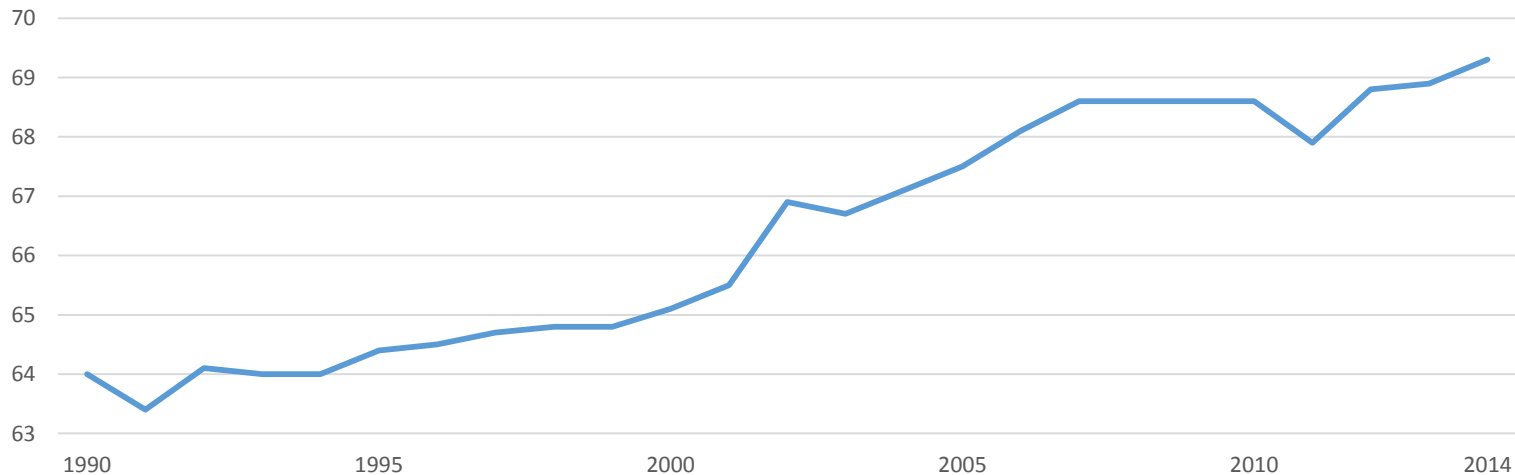
- Laws were coded unless there was clear evidence that they had gone unenforced for “several decades”.
- Consistent policies and actions were coded even if there was no identifiable legislation or regulation.
- Actions of local and regional governments were coded if there were a “significant plurality” of governments engaging in an action.
- All of the above was taken into account in the scaling of the variables.

Findings

Religious discrimination is common and increasing.

- In 1990 **64.0%** of minorities experienced religious discrimination. By 2014 this reached **69.3%**.

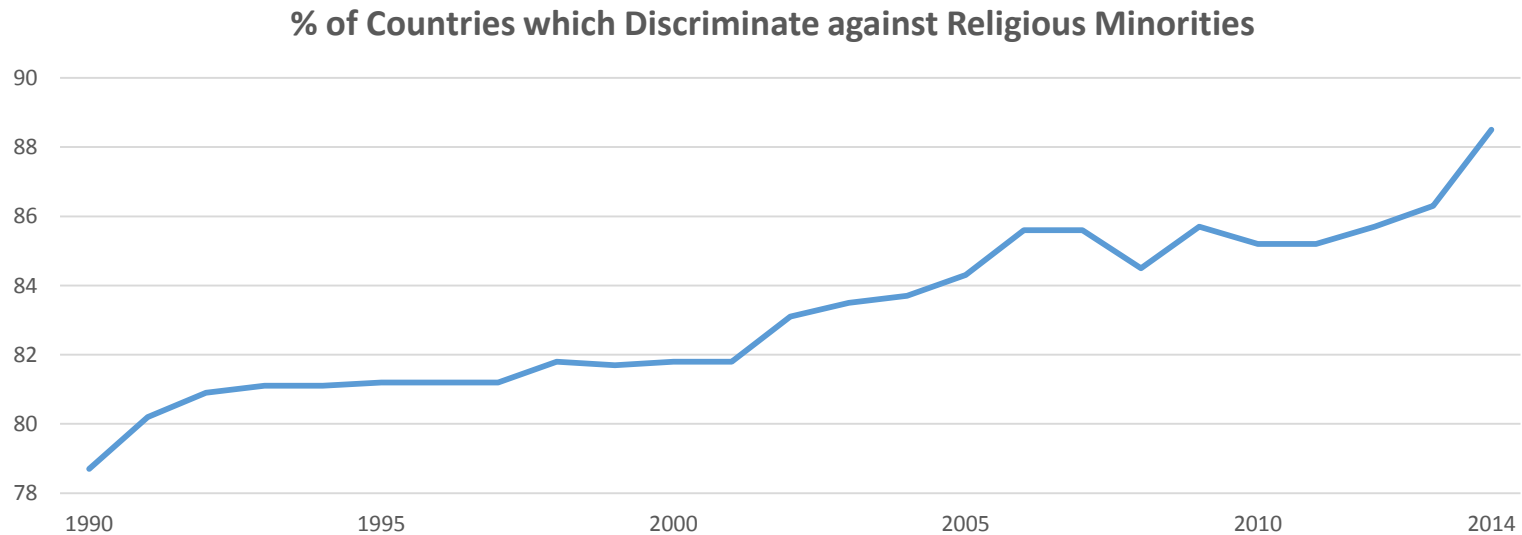
% of Minorities Experiencing Religious Discrimination



Findings

Religious discrimination is common and increasing

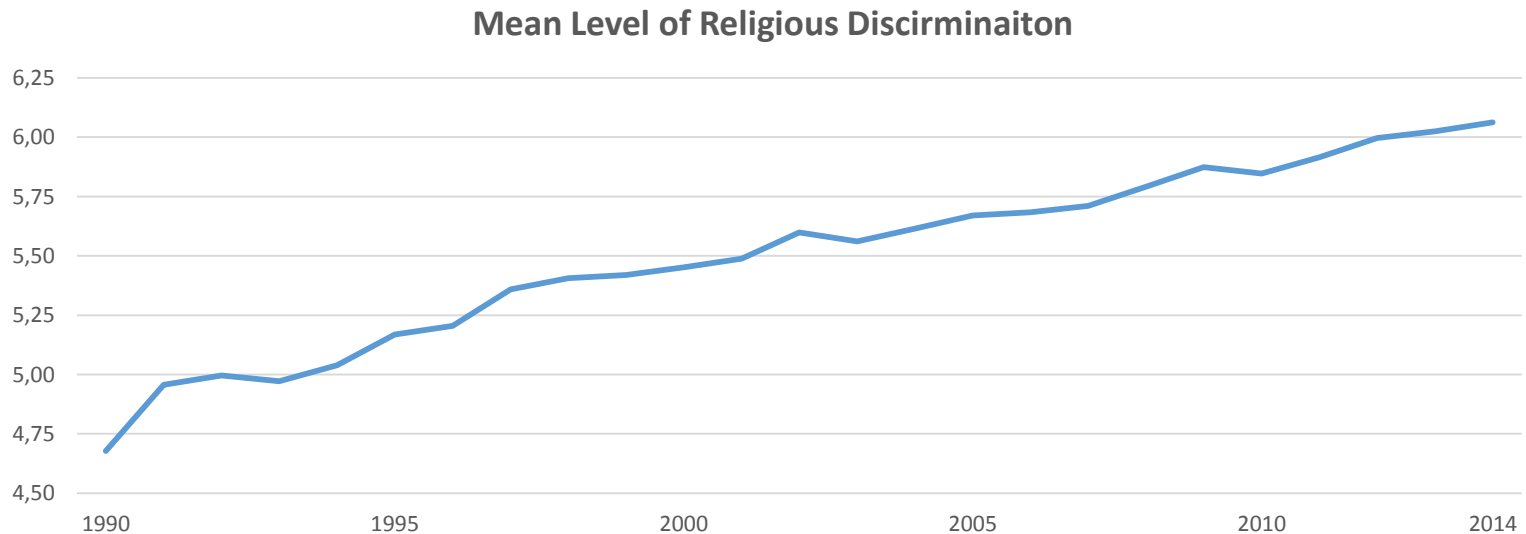
- In 1990 **78.7%** of countries discriminated against at least one minority. By 2014 this increased to **88.5%**



Findings

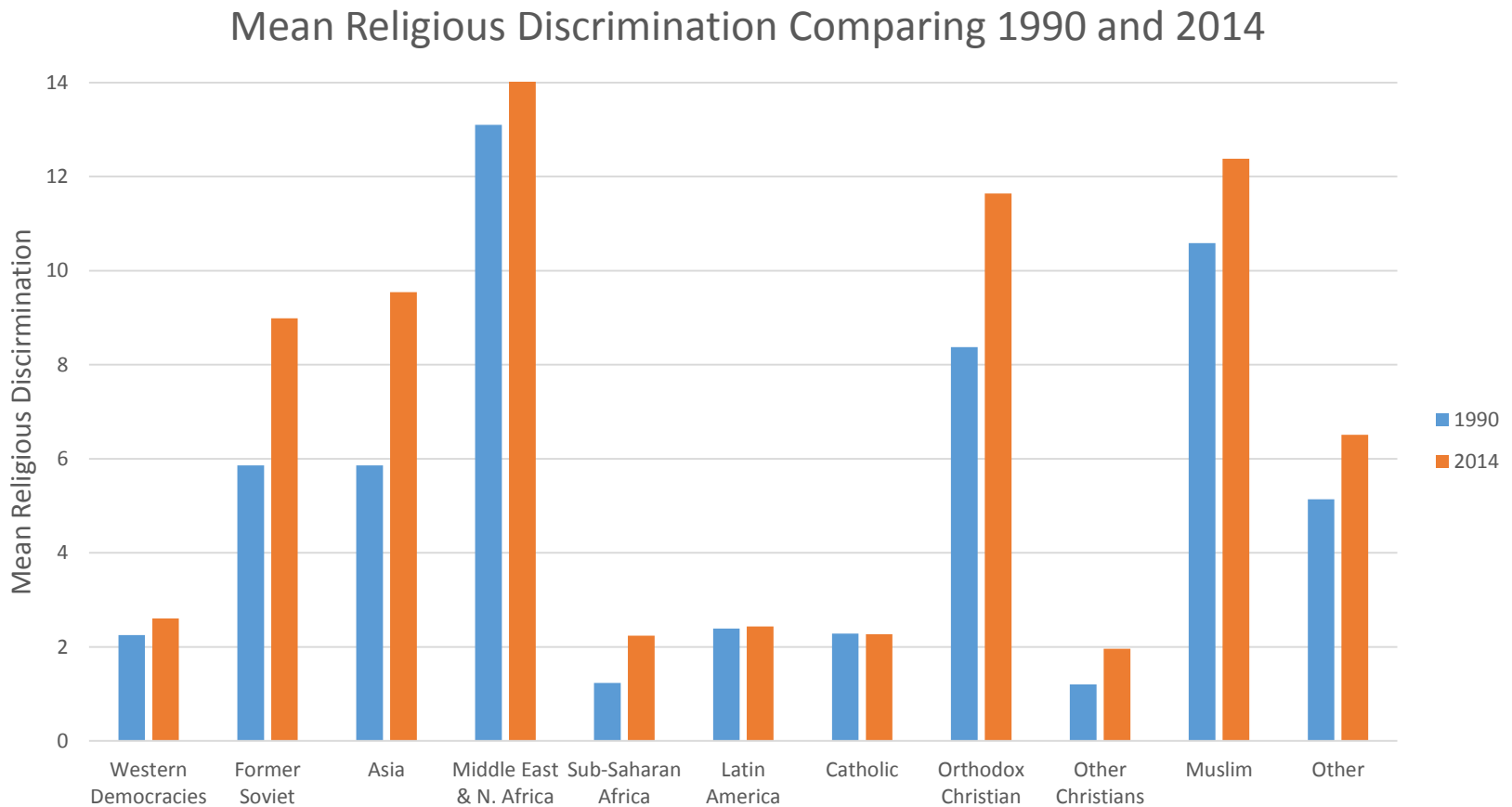
Religious discrimination is common and increasing

- Mean levels increased from **4.68** in 1990 to **6.06** in 2014, an increase of **29.5%**



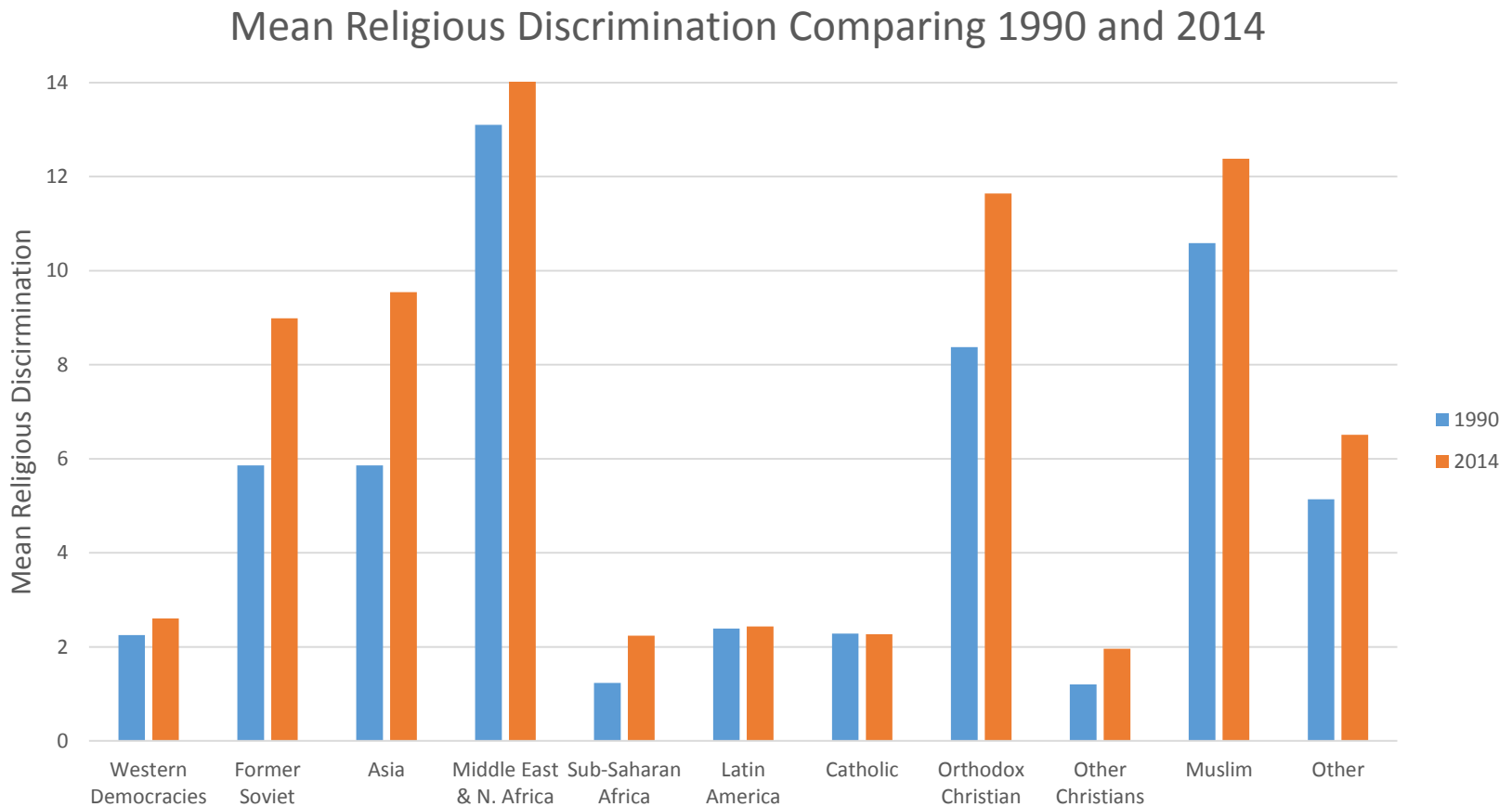
Findings

This rise in religious discrimination is consistent across world regions and major religions.



Findings

But there is variation in levels across world religions and majority religions



Findings

The most common types of religious discrimination:

	Minorities	Countries Against at least one minority
Minority must register in some manner not incumbent on the majority religion.	255 (33.2%)	82 (44.8%)
Restrictions on chaplains.	246 (32.9%)	54 (29.5%)
Restrictions on building maintaining or repairing places of worship.	224 (29.1%)	95 (51.9%)
Restrictions on proselytizing. -including foreign missionaries.	160 (20.8%)	62 (33.9%) [99 (54.1%)]

Findings

The most common types of religious discrimination:

	Minorities	Countries Against at least one minority
Mandatory religious education in a religion other than your own in public schools.	144 (18.7%)	45 (24.6%)
Restrictions on the public observance of religious rites or holidays.	140 (18.2%)	61 (33.3%)
Restrictions on religious schools and education.	130 (16.9%)	42 (33.0%)
Restrictions on religious publications.	131 (17.0%)	48 (26.2%)

Findings

Countries with no religious discrimination

Christian

Barbados

Burundi

Cameroon

Canada

Congo-Brazzaville

Lesotho

Namibia

Philippines

Solomon Islands

Uruguay

Vanuatu

Muslim

Burkina Faso

Djibouti

Niger

Senegal

Sierra Leone

Other

Benin

Guinea Bissau

Ivory Coast

South Korea

Taiwan

Findings

Countries with no religious discrimination

Christian

Barbados

Burundi

Cameroon

Canada

Congo-Brazzaville

Lesotho

Namibia

Philippines

Solomon Islands

Uruguay

Vanuatu

Muslim

Burkina Faso

Djibouti

Niger

Senegal

Sierra Leone

Other

Benin

Guinea Bissau

Ivory Coast

South Korea

Taiwan

Findings

Countries with no religious discrimination in 2014

Christian

Barbados

Burundi

Cameroon

Canada

Congo-Brazzaville

Lesotho

Namibia

Philippines

Solomon Islands

Uruguay

Vanuatu

Muslim

Burkina Faso

Djibouti

Niger

Senegal

Sierra Leone

Other

Benin

Guinea Bissau

Ivory Coast

South Korea

Taiwan

Findings

Most countries which engage in discrimination do so unequally (1990-2014)

- 152 (83.1%) countries discriminate unequally.
 - This includes 4 countries which single out a small minority not included in the study.
- 18 countries do not discriminate at all between 1990 and 2014.
- 5 countries have only one religious minority included in the study.
- Only 8 (4.4%) countries have multiple minorities and discriminate equally.
 - Cape Verde, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Guyana, Peru, Portugal, & Swaziland.

Why Unequal Discrimination?

Religious Ideology

General explanation: States whose governments are guided by or associated with a religious ideology tend to be more intolerant of religious minorities.

Differential discrimination: Higher against minorities considered more ideologically objectionable to the majority religion.

Why Unequal Discrimination?

Maintaining a Religious Monopoly

General explanation: Religions favor a religious monopoly when they are the majority religion. (Gill, 2005; 2008)

Differential discrimination: Higher against minorities which threaten the religious monopoly.

- Eg. Demography, or conversion

Why Unequal Discrimination?

Nationalism and Protection of National Culture

General explanation: Many states seek to protect their national culture and identity from outside influences.

Differential discrimination: Higher against non-indigenous religious minorities and minorities considered a threat to the national culture or identity.

Why Unequal Discrimination?

Anti-Cult Policies

General explanation: Many states seek to protect their citizens from “abusive,” “dangerous,” and “predatory” “cults”.

Differential discrimination: Higher against minorities perceived as cults.

- Often small non-indigenous minorities

Why Unequal Discrimination?

Ethnoreligious Conflict

General explanation: Discrimination often takes place in the context of ethnic conflicts and many ethnic minorities are also religious minorities.

Differential discrimination: Higher against minorities engaged in ethnic conflict with the state.

Why Unequal Discrimination?

Security and Securitization

General explanation: Discrimination is often targeted against minorities considered a security threat.

– Securitization theory.

Differential discrimination: Higher against minorities considered a security threat.

Why Unequal Discrimination?

Political Threats

General explanation: Discrimination is often targeted against minorities considered a political threat, even if they are not a security threat.

Differential discrimination: Higher against minorities considered a political threat.

Why Unequal Discrimination?

Primordialism

General explanation: Identity conflict is often the result of long-standing rivalries.

- Conflict occurs today because it occurred yesterday.

Differential discrimination: Higher against minorities with a history of enmity with the majority group.

Why Unequal Discrimination?

Instrumentalism and Mobilization

General explanation: Political entrepreneurs often use identity as a basis for political mobilization.

Differential discrimination: Higher against minorities targeted by majority politicians.

Why Unequal Discrimination?

Societal Discrimination

General explanation: Societal discrimination and prejudices are a major precursor to government discrimination against religious minorities ([Grim & Finke, 2011](#)).

Differential discrimination: Higher against minorities which are subject to higher levels of societal discrimination and prejudices.

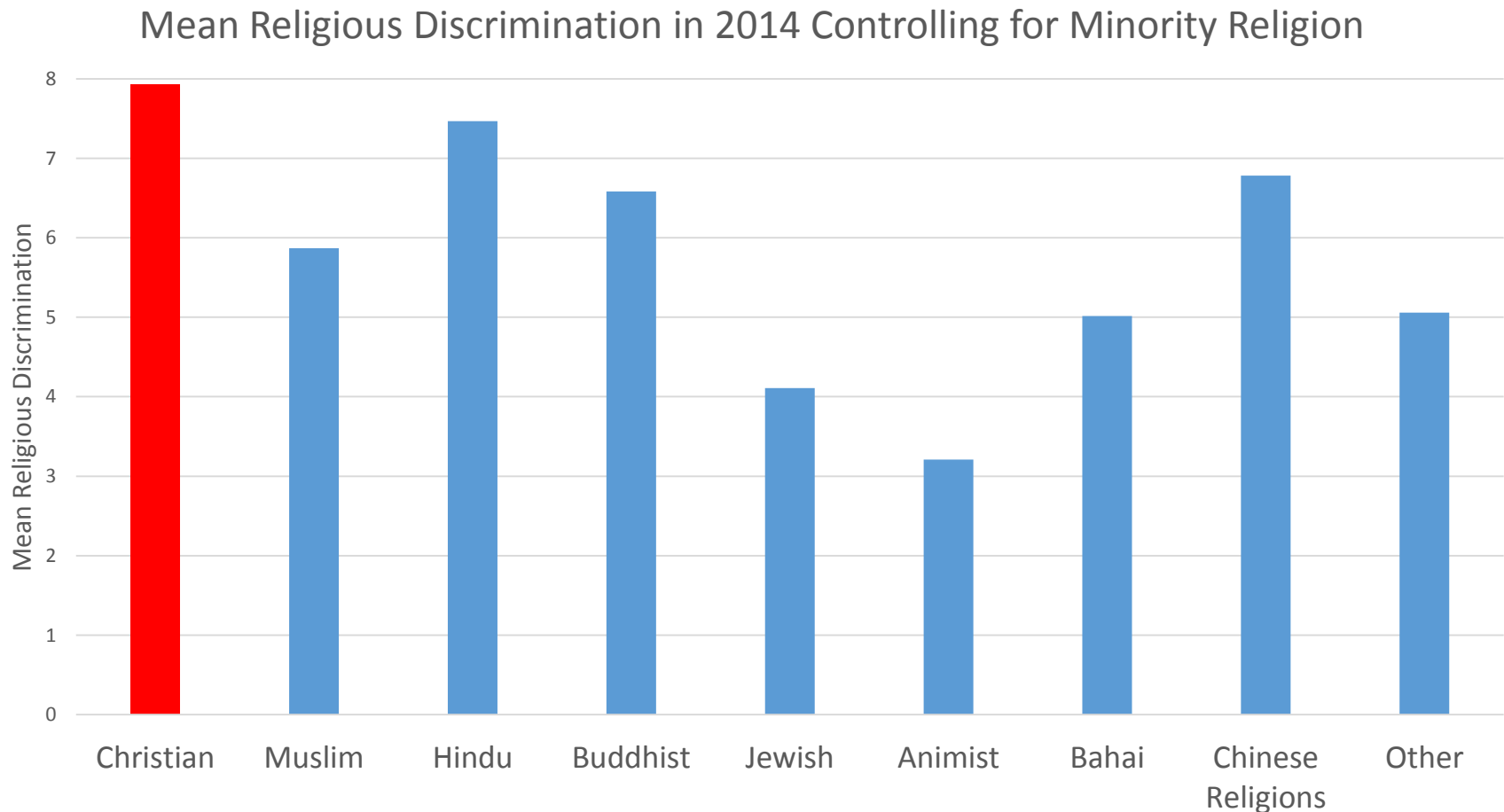
Why Unequal Discrimination?

The Limits of General Causal Theory

- All of these explanations describe many specific cases
- However I could find no single explanation or combination of explanations which consistently explained which minorities were subject to more discrimination.
- Explanations work only on a case by case basis or sometimes for small groups of states.

Findings

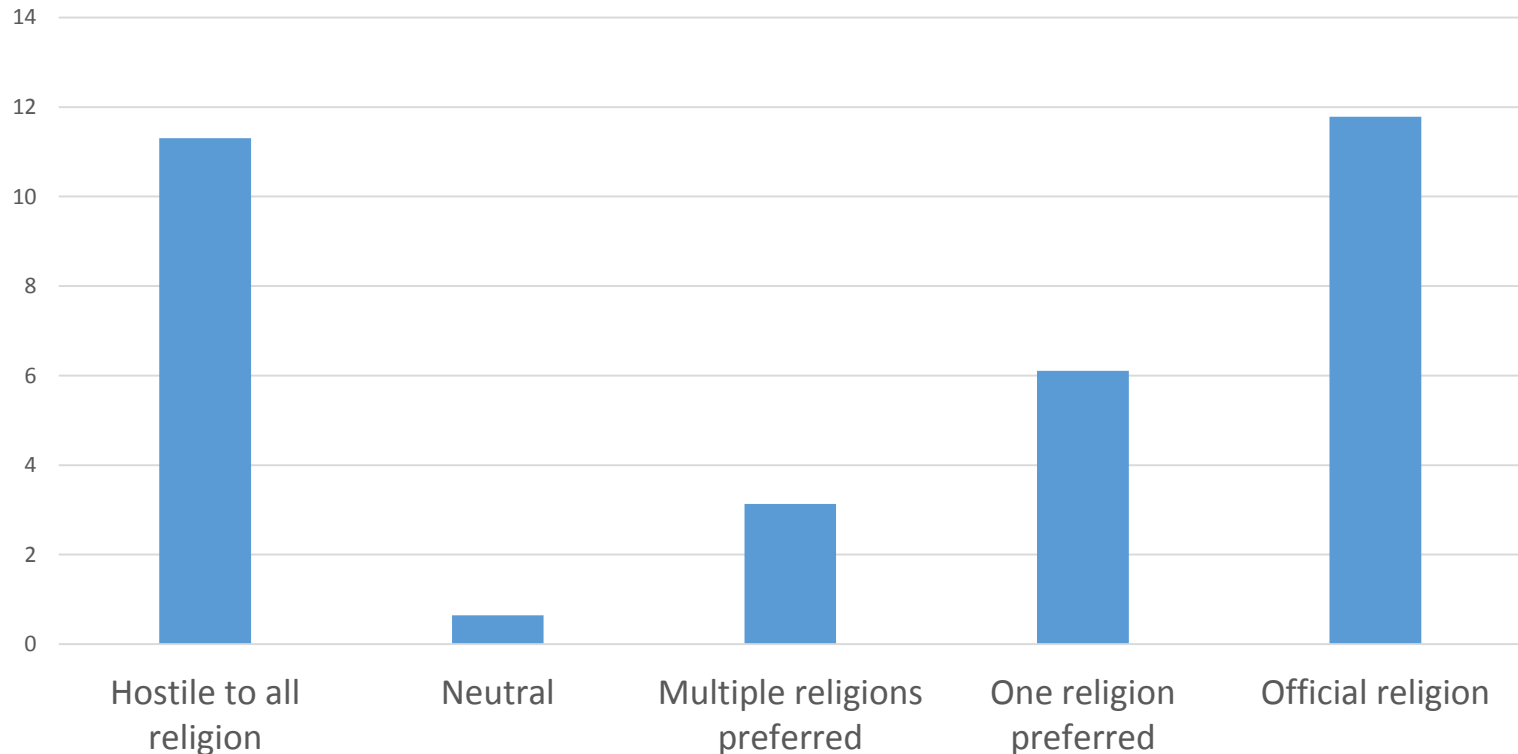
Christians are the most persecuted minority in the world.



Findings

Prediction: States which are associated with a particular religion will discriminate more.

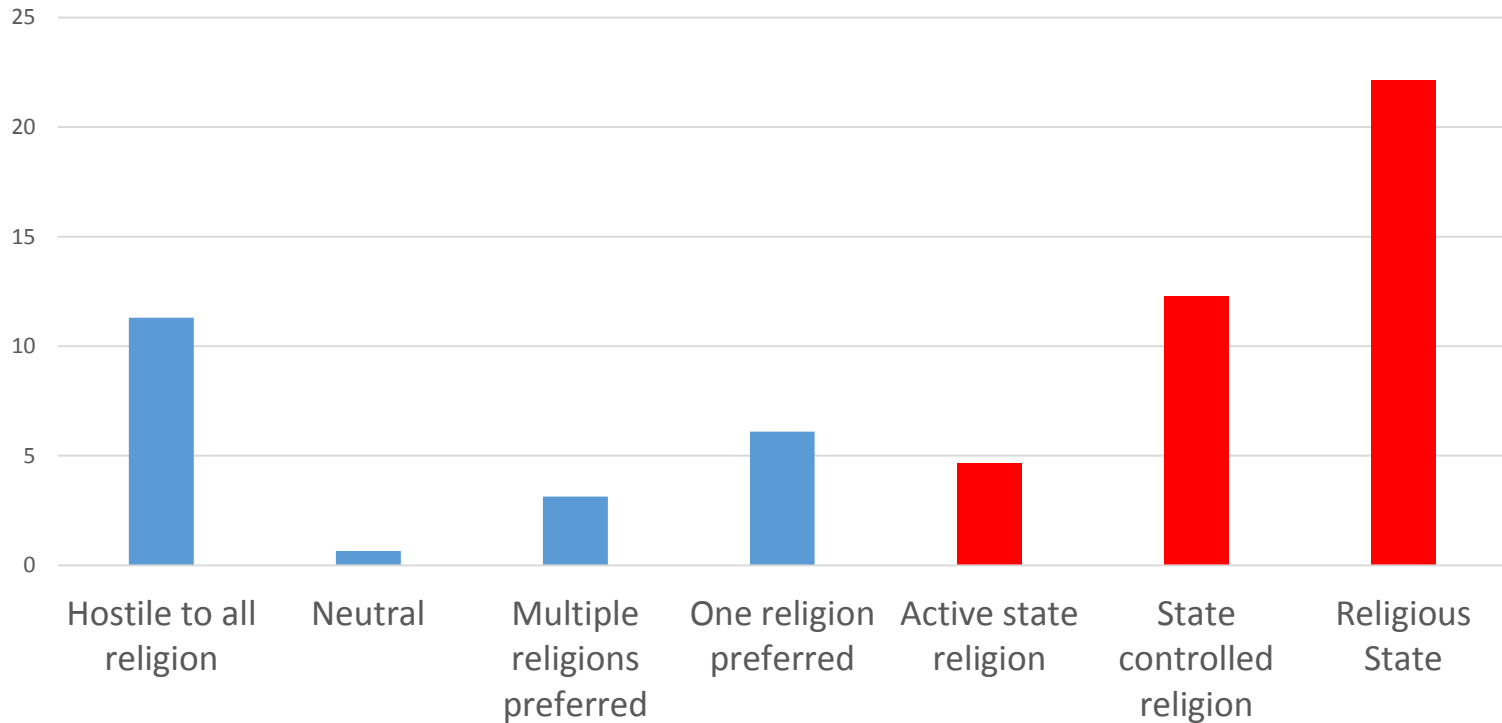
Mean Religious Discrimination in 2014 Controlling for Government Religion Policy



Findings

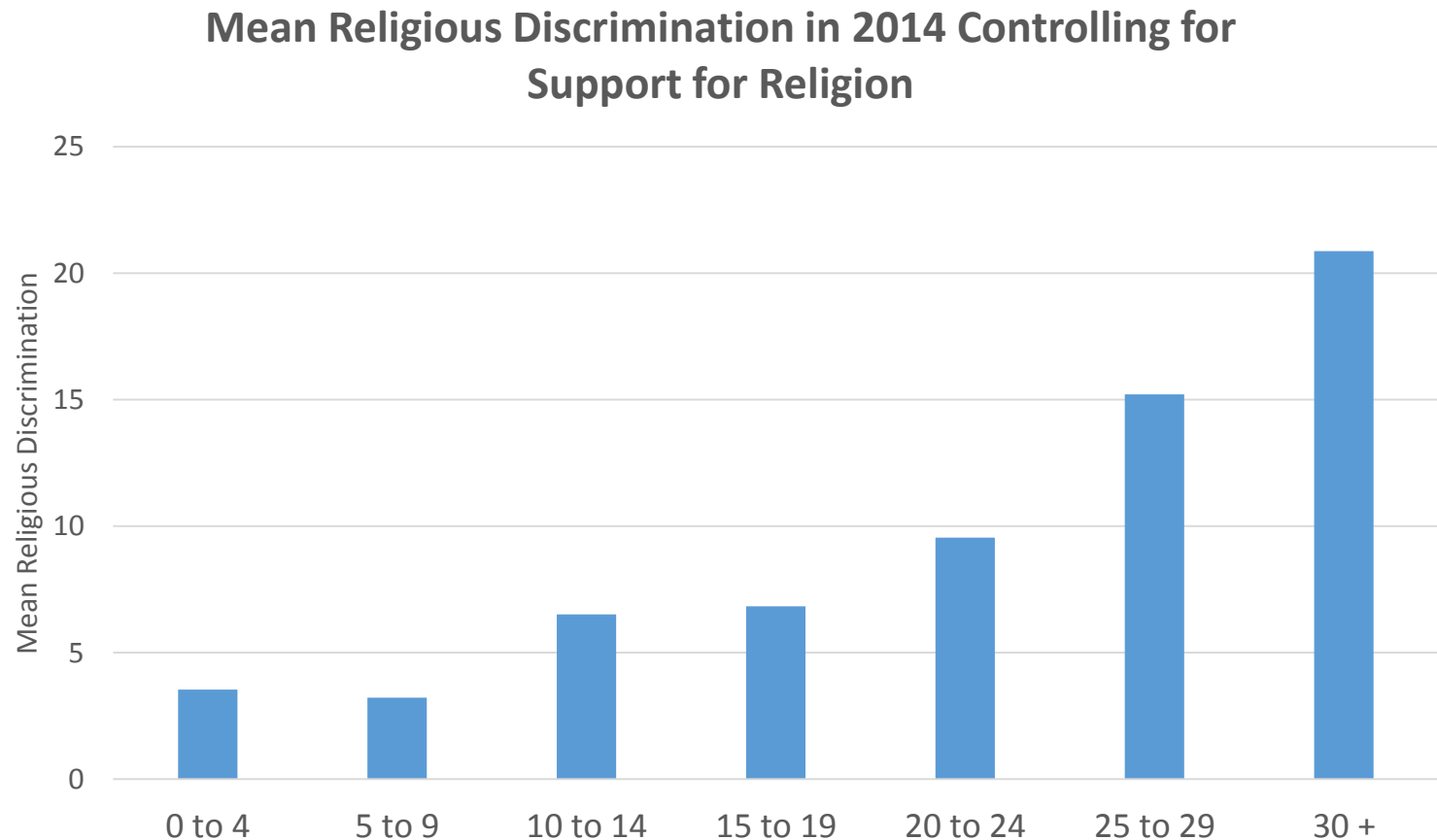
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Mean Religious Discrimination in 2014 Controlling for Government Religion Policy



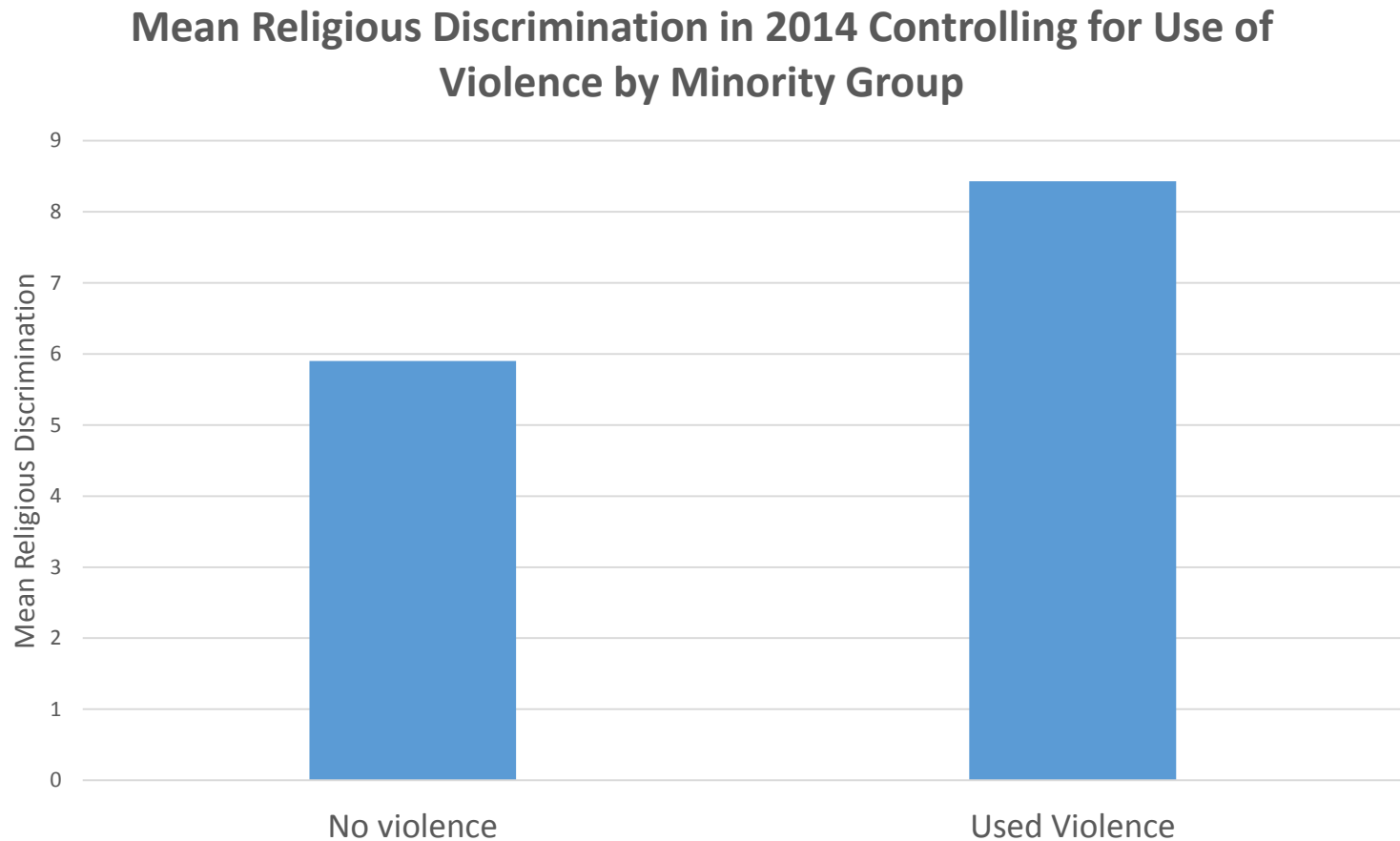
Findings

Prediction: States which are associated with a particular religion will discriminate more.



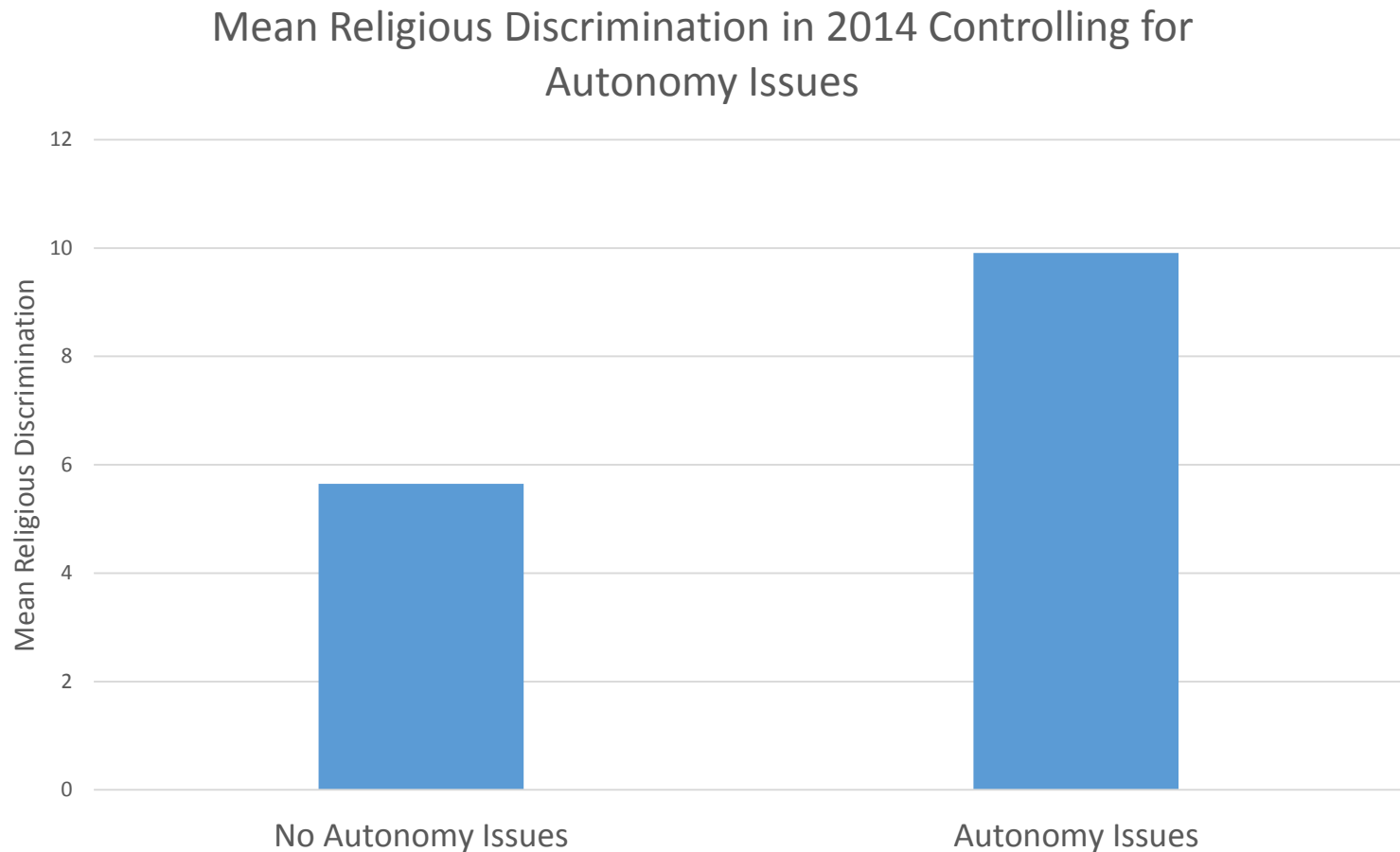
Findings

Prediction: There will be more discrimination against minorities which are violently challenging the state.



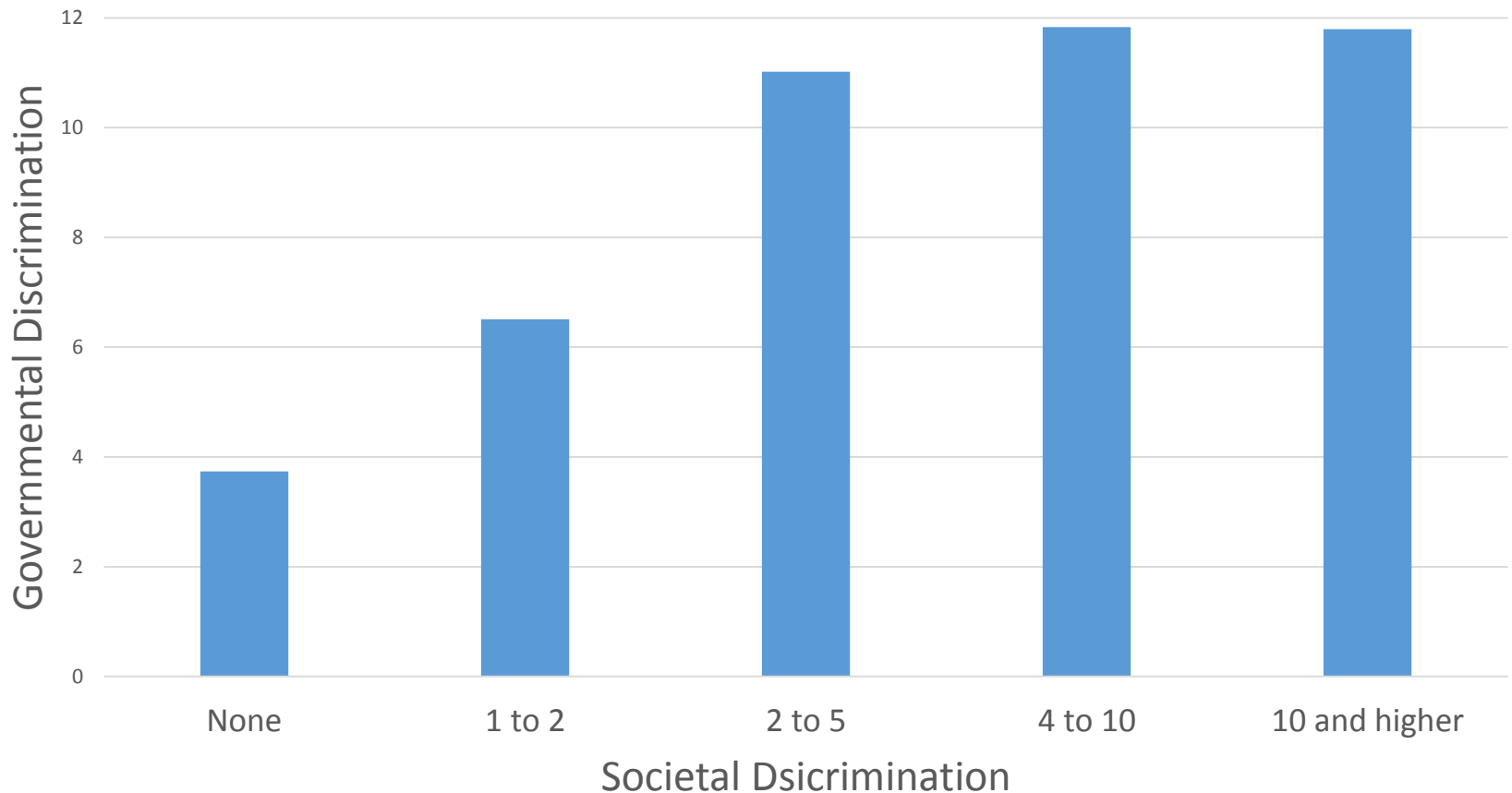
Findings

Prediction: There will be more discrimination against minorities which make self-determination demands.



Findings

Prediction: Societal discrimination leads to governmental discrimination



Findings

Support for religion increases religious discrimination

	Beta	Significance
Government Support for Religion	.378	.000
Minority % of Population	-.086	.002
Autonomy Issues	.048	.075
Minority Used Violence	.006	.845
Minority is Christian	.130	.000
Minority is Muslim	.009	.764
Majority is Catholic	-.007	.835
Majority is Orthodox Christian	.186	.000
Majority is Protestant	-.031	.297
Majority is Muslim	-.015	.690
Democracy (Polity Index)	-.379	.000
Log of Country Population	.045	.101
Log of Per Capita GDP	.055	.056
Societal Discrimination 2009-2014	.174	.000
Df		768
Adjusted R-Squared		.510

Findings

Larger minorities experience less discrimination

	Beta	Significance
Government Support for Religion	.378	.000
Minority % of Population	-.086	.002
Autonomy Issues	.048	.075
Minority Used Violence	.006	.845
Minority is Christian	.130	.000
Minority is Muslim	.009	.764
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Adjusted R-Squared		.510

Findings

Autonomy issues and past violence are not significant

	Beta	Significance
Government Support for Religion	.378	.000
Minority % of Population	-.086	.002
Autonomy Issues	.048	.075
Minority Used Violence	.006	.845
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Minority is Muslim	.009	.764
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Findings

Societal discrimination leads to governmental discrimination

	Beta	Significance
Government Support for Religion	.378	.000
Minority % of Population	-.086	.002
Autonomy Issues	.048	.075
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Societal Discrimination 2009-2014	.174	.000
Df		768
Adjusted R-Squared		.510

Findings

Religious identity is a significant predictor

	Beta	Significance
Government Support for Religion	.378	.000
Minority % of Population	-.086	.002
Autonomy Issues	.048	.075
Minority Used Violence	.006	.845
Minority is Christian	.130	.000
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Adjusted R-Squared		.510

Some Final Findings

- Religious discrimination is increasing
- Both the majority and minority religions matter
 - But there is no larger pattern.
- Religions are not monolithic
- Local vs. national policies.

"Jonathan Fox's latest global analysis of the status of religions solidifies his standing as the leading empirical scholar on the subject. He shows that discrimination against the practices and institutions of 597 minority religions is ubiquitous. More than six out of ten minorities in this new study faced discrimination on one or more of the 29 indicators... Whether the state has an official religion and whether the minority is seen as a security threat are relevant factors, but there are many others. It may be unsurprising that discrimination against religious minorities of every major sect, in every world region, has increased since 1990. But who would have thought that the prosperous Christian democracies would be more discriminatory than their democratic counterparts in the Third World? Could we have anticipated that, globally, Christian religious minorities are most likely to be subject to discrimination and Muslim minorities least so? This book is a remarkable data-based study that spans the entire range of questions, both descriptive and causal, about the nature, causes, and impact of discrimination against religious minorities in 177 countries."

Ted Robert Gurr, *Distinguished University Professor, University of Maryland*

"Political scientist Jonathan Fox brings his characteristic blend of analytic acuity, encyclopedic coverage, and moral concern to the phenomenon of religious discrimination. Drawing from the extraordinary dataset that he has constructed over several years, he brings striking results to bear: all across the globe religious discrimination is widespread and is getting worse."

Daniel Philpott, *Professor of Political Science and Peace Studies, and Director of the Center for Civil and Human Rights*

Cover illustration: Lone woman arguing for freedom for all faiths discusses her position with anti-Islamists from the BNP. Photograph courtesy of © Paul Davey/Demotix/Corbis

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