12-1-2003

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CULTURE AND TIME: A STUDY ON THE DETERMINANTS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Daniel M. Butler

There is a growing literature about the relationship between democracy and human rights. This article extends that research by specifically examining the relationship between democracy and religious tolerance. In this article, I also improve upon existing literature by using an OLS regression on a cross-section of 70 countries to identify a new important relationship between regime durability (i.e. how long a regime has remained in power) and the level of religious tolerance. I find that, in democracies, regime length does not determine the level of repression, but, in non-democracies, regime length does affect the level of religious tolerance. I find that after holding the level of democracy/autocracy constant, authoritarian regimes become more repressive the longer they survive.

With the recent regime change in Afghanistan and the current situation in Iraq, many have wondered about the prospects for democracy in Islamic countries. Can the Islamic culture support democracy? The discussion of the chances for Islamic democracy is reminiscent of debates about the prospect of democracy in Asia (Kim 1994; Culture is Destiny 1994). My purpose in this paper is not to determine the likelihood of democracy under various religious traditions; instead, I will take the debate one step further by exploring what form democracy will take under differing religious circumstances. To examine that question, I will proceed on the premise that

Special Thanks
I would like to express appreciation to Professors Danny Danzon and Darren Hawkins and to the editing staff of Sigma, all of whom gave extensive comments on my research.
democracy is possible in any culture. Certainly Japan, South Korea, and other Asian countries have developed strong democracies, and even among Islamic countries there is evidence that democracy can survive. Mali is an Islamic country that enjoys a consolidated democracy, and other countries such as Turkey and Jordan have become more democratic. While these examples certainly do not provide firm evidence that Islamic countries can support long-term democracy, they do justify making the assumption that democracy is possible.

This assumption allows us to ask the more intriguing questions: what form will democracy take under different cultures? Is democracy so uniform that in every culture it has the same characteristics? Or does the quality of democracy depend upon a country’s political culture?

In the present study, I measure the quality of democracy by measuring a country’s level of religious freedom. When I examine the relationship between a country’s dominant religious culture (a measure of political culture) and its level of religious freedom, I find that religious culture does determine the level of freedom. A country’s religious tradition does affect the quality of its democracy. This finding has important implications for policy makers. It shows that democracy does not necessarily come in a one-size fits all package.

In this study, I consider another understudied relationship: the effect of regime durability (the length a regime has survived) on the level of freedom (in this case religious freedom) in that country. I find that, after controlling for the level of democracy, regime durability has no impact on religious freedom in democracies, but it has a negative impact in non-democracies. In other words, holding the level of democracy/autocracy constant, authoritarian regimes will become more repressive of religious freedom the longer they survive, while democratic regimes do not change over time.

Some reading this paper will wonder why I have chosen to discuss these two relationships together when each deserves its own separate consideration. While these two considerations are clearly different topics, they are both trying to determine what affects the same phenomenon: the level of religious freedom. Does religious tradition affect a country’s level of religious freedom? What about regime length? Or is it a combination of both? Examining these relationships together allows us to control for the effects of the other causal factor.

Why Study Religious Tradition/Culture as a Crucial Causal Factor?

As I stated above, there is an ongoing debate about the relationship between culture and democracy. The difficulty in measuring political culture makes testing the relationship between political culture and democracy difficult. The advantage of using a country’s dominant religion as a measure of its culture is that religion is a measure that is valid, parsimonious, and easy to collect.

The measure is valid because a country’s dominant religion reflects its population’s major values (i.e. its culture). It is parsimonious because it captures so
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many aspects of culture at the same time. In reality, political culture includes a variety of attitudes and motivations. When trying to capture all of these aspects separately, the explanation gets laborious. Looking at religion simplifies the situation without losing descriptive accuracy by capturing many of these concepts in a single measure. Finally, it is a useful measure because identifying a country's dominant religion is relatively easy to do.

Certainly others have used religion as an important explanatory variable. The hypothesis that democratic performance is associated with the prevailing religious order in a society has played a major role in democratic theory (Eckstein et al. 1998, 365). Starting with studies on the effect of the Protestant work ethic, religion has been recognized as playing a role in shaping a nation's political culture. While religion is recognized as an important causal factor, Eckstein states that not enough research has been done to examine its relationships to democracy (1998, 365). This study uses this important (but often overlooked) factor to study the level of religious freedom that exists in a given country.

Why Study Regime Type and Durability?

Poe and Tate (1994) found that the level of government repression decreased with increasing levels of democracy. Since then many authors have confirmed those findings in their own research on related topics (Keith 1999; Blanton 2000). I also find that decreased levels of repression of religious freedom are associated with increasing levels of democracy.

One causal factor that these authors have not considered is the relationship between repression and regime durability (the length the regime survives). When a regime is first established, its weak bureaucracy may limit its ability to act. As a result, even if the government has popular support, it may not be able to implement and enforce policies. As time goes by, the regime will develop a better and more effective bureaucratic infrastructure and will accordingly become more or less oppressive.

There are reasons to believe that various regime types use their increased bureaucratic strength differently. In authoritarian states, organized religion, unless it is state sponsored and controlled, is most typically a threat to the regime. First, it raises citizens' expectations. Having enjoyed religious freedom, citizens want more freedom in other areas. Second, religion competes with the state for citizens' loyalty. To survive, authoritarian governments must command complete loyalty of the people. Third, organized religion provides a mechanism and vehicle for organized resistance. For example the local Catholic clergy played an important role in the downfall of many of the authoritarian regimes in Latin America.

Organized religion clearly poses a threat to the authoritarian regime. However, a newly established authoritarian regime may not be secure enough to repress religion and religious freedom. However, as time goes by and governments develop stronger bureaucracies, they will employ that strength to repress threatening opposition, in this case, organized religion.
In democracies, governments typically do not use their bureaucracies as tools for systematic religious repression because organized religion plays a constructive role; religion is an important aspect of civil society that strengthens the state. Alexis de Tocqueville commented on the place of religion in democracies and authoritarian regimes. He argued, “despotism may govern without faith, but liberty cannot. Religion...is more needed in democratic republics than in any other” (qtd. in Kessler 1997, 123). The point is not that democratic governments use their bureaucratic strength to promote religious freedom, but rather that they have no reason to use their bureaucratic arm to repress religious freedom. Thus, when controlling for the level of democracy, a regime’s durability has no effect on the level of religious freedom in democracies. In summary, in authoritarian states we would expect regime durability to lead to decreased levels of religious freedom, but in democratic states there should be no relationship between regime durability and the level of religious freedom.

**Why Study Religious Freedom?**

In reference to his own career, A.M. Rosenthal, the former executive of the New York Times, said:

> Early this year I realized that in decades of reporting, writing, or assigning stories on human rights, I rarely touched on one of the most important. Political human rights, legal, civil, and press rights, emphatically often; but the right to worship where and how God or conscience leads, almost never. (qtd. Marshall 2000. 9)

One reason to study the determinants of religious tolerance is simply because this topic has not received adequate attention. While there is a growing body of literature on the determinants of human rights (see for example Poe and Tate, 1994; Booth and Richard 1996; Davenport 1999), researchers have ignored the determinants of religious freedom.

More particularly, using religious freedom as the dependent variable has two important benefits in this case. First, one purpose of this study is to see if authoritarian regimes are more likely to use their repressive arm to consolidate. For the reasons I articulated above, an authoritarian regime is likely to be particularly aggressive against organized religious groups. Using the level of religious freedom allows us to determine if authoritarian regimes are more repressive of religion the longer they have survived.

Second, religious freedom is a good measure of what I have referred to as the “quality” of a regime type; it indicates what freedoms are enjoyed under a given government. One goal of this research is to determine if democracy manifests itself differently depending on the religious culture. Since I am using democracy as one of the control variables, it is important to measure the quality of democracy in a way that is not already captured in the definition of democracy but at the same time gives some indication of the manifestation of the quality of democracy. This approach is admittedly problematic and its validity depends upon how one defines democracy. While I do not know of any definition that explicitly incorporates religious freedom into its definition, there
are others that incorporate the concepts of freedom of thought and belief. In the present study, I use the Polity IV measure of democracy, which focuses on political competition and executive constraints. I also verify my results using Freedom House scores.

Defining Religious Freedom

Unfortunately, a uniform measurement for the level of religious freedom across all states does not exist. One potential source for these rankings is the U.S. State Department's annual *International Religious Freedom Report*. The State Department identifies five levels of religious intolerance (U.S. Department of State Executive Report 2001). It also lists some of the nations that are the worst offenders in each category. Unfortunately, it only lists 25 countries. Further, it only lists the worst offenders. The sample does not include any nations that are religiously tolerant, limiting the variation in the sample and introducing potential bias.

Outside of the State Department’s annual report, the best and most comprehensive measurement comes from the Center for Religious Freedom: A Division of Freedom House. As part of a recent report, the Center for Religious Freedom assigned a score between 1 and 7 to a list of 75 countries that represent all the major religions and regions in the world. A score of 1.0 to 3.0 indicates that a nation is free, a score of 3.5 to 5.0 indicates that a nation is partly free, and a score of 5.5 to 7.0 indicates that a nation is not free. As with Freedom House’s annual survey, the religious freedom scores are based on consistent survey criteria. The survey criteria employed were based on four sources: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, the European Convention on Human Rights, and from a list of criteria developed by Willy Fautre (Marshall 2000, 334-335).

The criteria used do not measure all forms of religious persecution, but rather only violations that are specifically directed against (at least in a major way) an individual’s or group’s religion. The report explains:

By religious freedom or persecution, I do not mean human rights violations against “religious” persons. After all, since most people in the world claim some sort of religious identity, then most human rights violations of any kind are presumably against religious believers. Rather, we are concerned not with all forms of persecution of religious people but with persecution where the focus or the grounds are themselves religious—where a person's religion is a component of the persecution or discrimination they suffer. Hence, we do not cover situations such as, for example, Rwanda where, even though most of those who were killed (and who killed) were relatively religious, the genocide was itself ethnically based. (Marshall 2000, 9)

Finally it is important to note that the report points out that the religious tolerance measurements do not necessarily reflect a nation's governmental policy, but “the situation in countries. . . . In some cases, such as in civil war, there may be little religious freedom, but a government may be able to do little about it.”
While this point is well taken, I believe that generally a government may do a lot about it. The exception of civil war is well noted, but it is just that — an exception. In general, religious freedom means that a government not only provides laws of religious freedom, but actively strives to enforce them. Such government actions go a long way in protecting religious minorities. For the purpose of this study, I consider governments that do not enforce laws protecting religious freedom to be compromising religious freedom.

In order to verify that the Freedom House measure captures the level of religious freedom, I tested the correlation between the U.S. State Department’s ranking and the Freedom House scores, since the State Department scores explicitly measure the level of religious freedom laws. The high correlation between these variables justifies the use of the Freedom House measures to capture the level of religious freedom.

To facilitate interpretation, I kept the scale ranging from 1 to 7, but I inverted the scale. Therefore a score of 7 indicates that a country is free, while a score of 1 indicates that it is not free. In the results, a positive coefficient signifies an improvement in religious freedom.

**Modeling the Level of Religious Freedom**

Having identified the dependent variable and its operational definition, I will now focus on the independent variables that I include in the analysis. I chose most of the control variables based on the work of Poe and Tate (1994). It was natural to follow Poe and Tate because they also examine the determinants of one aspect of human rights.

**Democracy**

As I explained above, Poe and Tate found a strong relationship between democracy and the level of human rights repression. I include it here as a control variable. Measuring democracy is very difficult and there is widespread disagreement on how it should be defined. For the reasons I stated above, I choose to use measures from the Polity IV data set (Polity IV project 2000). In that data set, 161 countries are rated on the autocratic and democratic aspects of their regimes. Both measures are given on an 11-point scale (0-10). An increasing democracy rating indicated greater general political openness. In contrast, an increasing autocracy score indicates greater political closedness. Both ratings are based upon each nation's ratings in nine different areas that focus on political competition and executive constraints. In my analysis I used the combined scores of these two ratings, a measure I refer to as democratic strength. Democratic strength is calculated by subtracting each nation's autocracy rating from its democracy rating. Measured on a scale from -10 to 10, an increasing score of democratic strength effectively captures the move away from authoritarianism and towards democratic consolidation.

To verify my results, I used Freedom House's democracy ratings to run a regression of the same model. The Freedom House ratings are based on each country’s performance in granting electoral rights and civil liberties to its citi-
zens. Each of these scores is given on an ascending scale of 1 to 7 where one is the highest score. I calculated the democracy rating by adding the two scores together and dividing by two. I then inverted the scale so that it ranged from 1 (being the least democratic) to 7 (being the most democratic). Using a different measure of democracy did affect some of my results. In the discussion of the regression results that follows, I offer some potential reasons for those observed differences.

Population

The rationale for including population size is that as nation becomes larger, its leaders use more repressive means to keep control (Poe and Tate 1994, 857). Further, other researchers have noted the high incidence of democratic consolidation among small nations (Dahl and Tufte 1973; Diamond 1999, 117-160). It may be that smaller nations are less likely to use oppressive means. I used the United State's Central Intelligence Agency's World Factbook 2000 to find the population of each nation.

GNP

Poe and Tate's rationale for testing the effects of economic factors on democratic strength is that increasing development relieves repression (1994, 857-858). The expectation is that as the wealth of a country increases so does its middle class. The middle class has more time and resources to devote to politics. In both pseudo-democracies and non-democracies, the middle class pushes for political reforms that will benefit it politically and economically. I measured economic strength of a country by using its Gross National Income (GNI) per capita in the year 2000. I took this information from the World Bank group (2002).

Religious Dummy Variables

The first key independent variable comes from the study by the Center for Religious Freedom. It placed nations into nine categories: Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Mixed Christian, Mixed Muslim and Christian, Islam, Jewish, Hindu, and Buddhism and related religions. In the following sections, I include a table that catalogues in which group each nation was placed.

As I stated in the introductory part of the paper, religion should capture the essence of a nation's culture. However, it is also possible that geography affects a nation's culture more than religious persuasion. Nations that are near to each other are likely to have increased trade and intertwined histories. To test that theory, I ran a regression that included dummy variables for both religious persuasion and geographic location. While geography proved insignificant, almost all of the religious identification variables were quite significant. Therefore, in the analysis presented here, I only include the variables for religious persuasion.

Regime Durability

The other key independent variable is regime durability by regime type. To create the variables necessary to capture this variable, I first used the democratic strength rating to place each nation into one of three categories: non-democratic,
quasi-democratic, and democratic. I labeled each nation with a democratic strength score less than -5 as non-democratic; I labeled nations with a democratic strength score between -5 and 5 as quasi-democratic; and I labeled each nation with a democratic strength score greater than 5 as democratic. Using these designations, 45 nations were labeled as democracies, 11 as quasi-democracies, and 14 as non-democracies.

After creating dummy variables for each of these three categories, I interacted these dummy variables with the durability variable from the Polity IV data set. The durability measure simply measures how long the current regime has been in power. The durability scores start at the year 1900, so any regime that has lasted more than 100 years still only gets a score of 100. This is not a concern because only a few of the regimes have even lasted that long (the United Kingdom, the United States). The democratic durability, quasi-democratic durability, and non-democratic durability variables capture the effect of time passage on the level of religious toleration in each type of regime.

As I said above, I also used Freedom House's measure of democracy as a check on my results. In the regression that included the Freedom House ratings, I divided the nations by regime types using Freedom House's three categories: free, partly free, and not free. I label these three categories as democratic, quasi-democratic, and non-democratic respectively. I again created dummy variables for these values and then interacted them with the durability score, giving me a measure of the effects over time for each regime.

**Description of Sample**

The data set includes 71 of the 76 countries rated in Marshall's book. I excluded five cases because of insufficient data in the other sources from which I gathered information. Those nations did not include information for various reasons. Tibet could not be included because it is under the rule of China and is not a sovereign nation. Lebanon, East Timor, Mauritania, and Eritrea were excluded because the Polity IV data set did not give these countries democratic and autocratic ratings for the year 2000.

Using only half of the countries in the world introduces the possibility of bias. It should be noted that when choosing which nations to include in the sample, the Center for Religious Freedom focused on large countries. They point out that the sample of countries includes over 90 percent of the world population (Marshall 2000, vii). If there is a trend among small countries that is different from large ones, this sample will produce biased results. Yet as the tables below show, this group of nations includes nations from all the regions and religious persuasions of the world. Because the sample is representative of the world at large, I feel justified in extending my conclusions to all nations.

**Countries by Geographic Region**

*Former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe:* Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan
North Africa and West Asia: Egypt, Greece, Israel, Iran, Morocco, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Turkey

Western Europe and North Atlantic: Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States

Asia: Bangladesh, Burma, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, North Korea, Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Vietnam

Africa: Botswana, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Zimbabwe

Latin America: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico

Countries by Major Religious Persuasion

Catholic: Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, El Salvador, France, Guatemala, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Mexico, Philippines, Poland, Spain

Protestant: Botswana, Estonia, Finland, Namibia, Netherlands, Norway, South Africa, Sweden, Tanzania, United Kingdom, United States, Zimbabwe

Orthodox: Armenia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Ukraine

Mixed Christian: Germany, Latvia

Hindu: India, Nepal

Buddhism and related religions: Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Mongolia, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Bhutan, China, Vietnam, Burma, North Korea

Islam: Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Morocco, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan

Jewish: Israel

Mixed Muslim/Christian: Nigeria
Table 1: Democracy's effect on Religious tolerance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>5.05***</td>
<td>2.77***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Strength (Polity IV)</td>
<td>0.098***</td>
<td>(0.028)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Durability (Polity IV)</td>
<td>0.0088</td>
<td>(0.014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo-democratic Durability (Polity IV)</td>
<td>-0.0053</td>
<td>(0.020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-democratic Durability (Polity IV)</td>
<td>-0.017*</td>
<td>(0.0093)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy (Freedom House)</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.51***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free (FH) Durability</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.085)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partly Free (FH) Durability</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Free (FH) Durability</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNI per capita in 2000 (reported in $1000)</td>
<td>0.028***</td>
<td>.0087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population (in 1,000,000)</td>
<td>-0.43</td>
<td>-0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>-0.99***</td>
<td>-0.90***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>-1.57***</td>
<td>-1.11***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>-2.61***</td>
<td>-2.41***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>-1.28***</td>
<td>-0.96**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>-2.14***</td>
<td>-1.58***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>-1.50</td>
<td>-1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Christian</td>
<td>-1.70***</td>
<td>-1.49*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Muslim/Christian</td>
<td>-2.40***</td>
<td>-1.91**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj. R-Square</td>
<td>.7481</td>
<td>.8259</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Standard Errors are given in parentheses
*Significant at .10  **Significant at .05  ***Significant at .01
Discussion of Results

Although Poe and Tate found population to be a significant predictor of human rights, it appears insignificant in both of the regressions I performed. This does not necessarily indicate that population is an insignificant predictor of religious freedom; more likely, it indicates something about the nature of the sample. The focus of the Freedom House survey was large nations. By limiting the sample to the largest nations, the variation is limited. If a full sample of nations was included, this measure may well appear to be significant.

The differences between the results of the two regressions, which are found in Table 1, can be attributed to the different democracy measures. The Polity IV data focuses on political competition and executive constraints. In contrast, the Freedom House measure accounts for the level of political and civil liberties. Because civil liberties encompass the idea of religious freedom to some extent, the measure for democracy in the second model may be artificially high. The potentially high correlation between these variables may be soaking up all of the variation, explaining why GNI per capita and non-democratic durability drop out as insignificant.

In contrast to the variables that drop out as insignificant, the religious identification variables remain significant and substantial in both regressions. This indicates the strength of this relationship. The values on the religious persuasion variables indicate that all things being equal, Protestant countries enjoy the most religious freedom. The large values for the coefficients added to the fact that each of the variables proved to be significant indicates the strength of this relationship. Since I controlled for the degree of democratic strength in each nation, the coefficients indicate how nations of different religious persuasions compare when democracy/autocracy is at the same level in each. For example, a Protestant nation that receives the highest democratic strength score of 10 is expected to rate 1 point higher (on a scale of 7) on its level of religious freedom than a Catholic nation with a democracy score of 10. The fact that all the religion coefficients are negative indicates that, relative to Protestant nations, the level of religious freedom is lower in all non-Protestant countries.

The strong relationship between a nation’s major religious persuasion(s) and its level of religious freedom suggests that the former affects the quality of the nation’s democracy. Religious political culture does not preclude the establishment of democracy, but a nation’s major religious persuasion(s) affects the way that democracy looks.

While the results of the regression analysis provide strong evidence for the effect of religious persuasion on the level of religious freedom, they give a mixed story about the importance of regime length. In the first regression, the results came out as we expected: non-democratic durability was the only durability variable that proved significant. Admittedly, it was only significant at the .10 level, but in a sample of only 71 observations, even this finding is not completely insignificant.
The fact that the relationship drops out as insignificant in the second regression indicates the weakness of the relationship. However, it does not mean there is no relationship. As I indicated above, the change in the second regression is most likely due to the fact that the Freedom House democracy score takes civil liberties into account. While the results of the second regression do not completely ruin my results, it does indicate that the relationship between regime durability and religious freedom is weak.

These scores indicate that, in states with democratic and quasi-democratic regimes, the level of overall democracy determines the level of religious freedom. The length of a democratic regime's existence does not affect the quality of democracy. If during that period a country improves its quality of democracy, religious freedom will improve, but passage of time alone has no effect. It only has an effect inasmuch as it affects the consolidation of democracy.

In contrast, the coefficient on the non-democratic durability indicates that, in an authoritarian state, the longer a regime endures the more repressive it becomes of religious freedom. The inclusion of the democratic strength variable precludes the possibility that this is simply a result of the level of a regime's autocratic characteristics.

To illustrate the effect of regime length on the level of religious freedom, we can theoretically compare several countries. In democracies, it is the level of democratic strength that is important in determining the level of religious freedom. If two countries receive a score of a level 8 for their democratic strength rating, but one has been around for two years and the other around for twenty years, they will have the same religious freedom score. Of course, this typically does not happen because democracies that have been around for only two years typically do not have democracy ratings as high as those that have been around for twenty years. But, when the democratic strength of a country is controlled for, regime durability has no significant effect on the level of religious freedom in democracies. The same is true of quasi-democracies.

In contrast, if two non-democracies each receive a -8 for their democratic strength rating, but one has been around for two years and the other for twenty years, the citizens under the regime that has been around for twenty years will enjoy less religious freedom. Therefore the length that a non-democratic regime is in power is related to its level of repression of religious freedom.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have shown that the major religious persuasion of a nation, a measure of its political culture, is a significant predictor of its level of religious freedom. In fact, it proved to be more robust than the economic factor I included, GNI. Religious persuasion needs to be considered more often as an explanatory variable.

The strength of the religious persuasion variables also indicates that when all other things are equal, the religious persuasion of the nation will affect the level of religious freedom. This suggests that the democracy we see in America
Butler

is not the exact same type of democracy we will see in other countries. I am not making a normative argument that it should or should not be that way, or even that it will always be that way; rather, I am suggesting that it is that way right now. Democracy does not look exactly the same in every nation.

The second finding about regime length is inconclusive. Certainly the relationship is weak at best. Yet the fact that the relationship appears, even as only a weak one, in the first regression, suggests that this is a topic worth more exploration. The evidence suggests that authoritarian regimes might become more repressive with time. It is possible, as I have suggested, that authoritarian regimes get more restrictive of religious freedom with time in order to consolidate power. Future researchers should examine the strength of this relationship and explore the reason behind it.

Married to Deborah Lynn Shepherd, Daniel Butler is a senior at BYU majoring in political science. Of Richard J. and Diane Butler’s five sons, he is the fourth in number and the shortest in height. Despite that disadvantage, he enjoys playing basketball as well as other sports. He currently works as a Political Science 200 T.A. and as one of Dr. Sven Wilson’s Research Assistants. In the fall he will begin a Ph.D. program in political science.

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