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Building Composite Measures of  
Religion and State

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# Building Composite Measures of Religion and State<sup>†</sup>

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## Abstract

With increasing amounts of cross-country data on religion available, it is important to assess the optimal design of the variables in the datasets. This study assesses the strengths and weaknesses of existing cross-country data on religion. It then presents the Religion and State round 2 (RAS2) dataset as a potentially superior alternative to existing data collections on government religion policy. The comparison shows that the RAS2 dataset has a number of advantages over other data collections. It contains more variables covering a longer time period, and the data are based on a wider variety of sources than is the case with other data collections. The codings include scaling for the severity of a policy. RAS2 avoids methodological problems that are present in several other data collections. Finally, it is the only data collection on religion that can claim to include codings for all relevant government actions. Although previous datasets have some of these advantages, several are unique to RAS2, and the others are not present in all cross-country data collections of state religion policy that include indexes. The study also compares the RAS2 indexes, which weight all components equally, to indexes that are weighted on the basis of expert assessment and factor analysis and finds that the nonweighted indexes are statistically nearly identical to the weighted indexes.

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The study of religion in general and cross-country quantitative studies specifically have been experiencing a renaissance in recent years. As recently as 2006, Grim and Finke (2006: 3) lamented that “religion receives little attention in international quantitative studies. Including religion in cross-national studies requires data, and high-quality data are in short supply.” More attention is being given to religion in cross-country studies that are not based on survey or demographic data, with an increasing number of studies being published. These include studies based on the data Grim and Finke developed,<sup>1</sup> studies based on the Religion and State dataset,<sup>2</sup> and data collections on more specific topics, such as religious human rights organizations (Bush 2010); religious political parties (Fink 2008); public statements made by religious leaders (Kratochwil 2005); the presence of official religions in a state<sup>3</sup> (Barret, Kurian, and Johnson 2001; Kuru 2006, 2008); and the role of religious institutions in democratization (Toft, Philpott, and Shah 2011), terrorism (Ransler and Thompson 2009), and conflict (Fox 2007; Svensson 2007; Svensson and Harding 2011; Toft 2007; Toft, Philpott, and Shah 2011).

Thus as data become more available, it is important to assess the optimal way to design religion variables. Put differently, the most important issue in the quantitative cross-country study of religion is becoming less a lack of data hampering research (Grim and Finke 2006: 3) and more how to obtain the highest-quality data possible. This article addresses this issue, examining the strengths and weaknesses of existing cross-country data. It then presents the Religion and State round 2 (RAS2) dataset as a potentially superior alternative to existing data collections.

### *PREVIOUS CROSS-COUNTRY MEASURES OF RELIGION*

In this section, I examine the existing cross-country measures of religion. This is not to denigrate measures that use a different unit of analysis, such as the individual, congregations, political parties, or any of the other units of analysis that are included in the wide and varied quantitative literature on religion.<sup>4</sup> Rather, this is intended to place the data collection that is the focus of this study in the context of comparable data collections. Religion is, among other things, a multifaceted political and social phenomenon, and no single data collection can capture all of its relevant influences on society and politics.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Branas-Garza and Solano (2010), Cosgel and Miceli (2009), Driessen (2010), Grim and Finke (2006, 2007, 2011), Grim and Wike (2010), Sarkissian (2010), and Traummuller (2011).

<sup>2</sup> As of July 25, 2011, forty-one such publications from 2006 or later were listed on the Religion and State webpage at <http://www.religionandstate.org/>.

<sup>3</sup> The Religion and State dataset and Barret, Kurian, and Johnson (2001) also include this type of variable.

<sup>4</sup> For an extensive listing and archive of religion data, see the Association of Religion Data Archives at [www.thearda.com](http://www.thearda.com).

Cross-country measures of religion can be placed into the following five categories:

- *Religious attributes of governments.* Popular measures in this category include the extent of religious discrimination by a government (Abouharb, Rodwan, and Cingranelli 2006; Barret, Kurian, and Johnson 2001; Fox 2004, 2008; Grim and Finke 2006, 2011; North and Gwin 2004), other aspects of state religion policy such as religious laws and regulation of all religions (Driessen 2010; Fox 2008; Marshall 2000; Price 1999, 2002), and measures of whether a country has an official religion (Barret, Kurian, and Johnson 2001; Barro and McCleary 2005; Fox 2008). Some studies have mixed these types of measures into a more global measure of state support for religion (Chaves and Cann 1992; Chaves et al. 1994; Fox 2008; Gill 1999; Norris and Inglehart 2004).
- *Religious attributes of society.* This type of variable provides a country-level measure of some aspect of religion within society. Grim and Finke (2006, 2011) created a state-level indicator for religious intolerance and persecution in society that is separate from intolerance and persecution by governments. However, it is more common to take polling data from surveys such as the World Values Survey and create country-level measures. For instance, several studies have used these data to create a national average for survey questions such as “Do you believe in God?” and “Do you attend religious services at least once a week?” This national average is the percentage of people who said yes to these types of questions, which constitutes a country-level indicator of the level of religiosity in a population (Barro, Hwang, and McCleary 2010; Barro and McCleary 2003; Fox 2008; McCleary and Barro 2006a, 2006b; North and Gwin 2004).
- *Religious content.* These studies assess whether a politically relevant event or process has some religious content. In the case of datasets on conflict, this usually takes the form of one or both sides making religious demands or expressing religious goals. This type of variable is usually dichotomous, simply measuring the presence or absence of religious content (Fox 2007; Pearce 2005; Svensson 2007; Svensson and Harding 2011; Toft 2007; Toft, Philpott, and Shah 2011).
- *Religious identity.* This type of variable measures which groups, countries, or individuals belong to which religions (e.g., Christians, Muslims, Buddhists). Studies using these variables then tend to assess whether religious identity influences the behavior of these individuals, groups, or countries (Cavalcanti, Parente, and Zhao 2007; Cherif 2010; Facchini 2010; Fisch 2002; Midlarsky 1998; Pearce 2005; Toft 2007).
- *Religious demography.* These measures generally assess the level of religious heterogeneity in a country using some formula based on the distribution of different religious identity groups in a country. This type of measure gives a

single score for a geographic location, usually a country (Lacina 2006; Olzak 2011; Reynal-Querol 2002; Rummel 1997; Vanhanen 1999).

Few of these variables are composite variables—variables that include multiple components. This is true of all variables in the last three categories. Within the first category—measures of attributes of governments—there are several data collections that include multiple indicators that can be combined into a single global indicator. This is also true of one data collection in the second category. However, most of these data collections have drawbacks.

Before discussing specific datasets, it is important to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the different data collection alternatives, each of which captures a different aspect of religion's social and political influence. Religious identity and demography variables are useful but limited. They have the advantage of being simple to collect and use. However, they are limited. They can assess only whether certain types of populations behave differently from others. For example, both Midlarsky (1998) and Fisch (2002) ask whether Muslim states are less democratic than non-Muslim states are. While their finding that Muslim states are less democratic is important, the identity variables that they use are unable to address the causal mechanism behind this finding. Is it true of states that are more strongly connected to Islam? Is this relationship stronger in states with more religious populations? Perhaps there is some other cultural or political commonality among Muslim states that is causing this correlation. Identity variables cannot address such issues.

The religious content variables are similarly limited. They tend to be compatible with a specific dataset, which makes them useful only in the context of studies using that dataset. Also, while they can assess whether events that include religious content are different from events that do not, they cannot address the causal mechanisms that create these differences.

The religious attributes of society variables that are based on survey data are, in theory, ideal variables, but in practice, they are problematic. Creating a score for each country on how a population feels about a religious issue provides an excellent measure of this type of phenomenon, other than the general issues involved in survey data and whether they are comparable on a cross-country basis. The major practical drawback of this type of variable is missing data. The World Values Survey, which is the study with the most countries, includes fewer than half of the world's states and fewer than one third in any single round of the study. In addition, the countries that are included are heavily biased toward Western and developed countries. Thus basing a cross-country study on these data creates serious issues of selection bias.

The final methodology for building cross-country religion measures that is present in the literature is event analysis coding. This involves choosing a source

or set of sources with information about religion and using this information to answer a question or set of questions to form a variable or set of variables. An example of this is variables that measure whether a state has an official religion. Barret, Kurian, and Johnson (2001), Fox (2008), and Kuru (2006, 2009) use this methodology to collect such a variable.

These event-based variables can be single variables, such as the one described above, or sets of related variables that can be combined into an index. In Fox (2008), I use both types of variables and demonstrate that the indexes provide a more accurate and nuanced analysis of religious phenomena by showing, among other things, that while the presence of an official state religion remains static, three variables with a combined sixty components show considerable change over a thirteen-year period.

Therefore, I argue that the future of quantitative cross-country religion research will be best served by the collection and use of nuanced indexes that include as many components as possible. These components need to be created with compatibility in mind; by this, I mean that all the component variables in an index should relate to the same topic. Why and how this can become an issue are demonstrated in the following discussion of existing religion indexes. This is not to imply that demographic, identity, survey-based, and single variables are not useful. Even with their limitations, they can provide important information, especially when they are used in conjunction with relevant index variables. In fact, most studies based on index variables use identity and demographic variables as controls and generally find that these controls contribute significantly to the study.

In this article, I discuss all existing cross-country data collections of index variables on religion of which I am aware that relate to some aspect of state religion policy as well as a few related studies that include index variables collected with events-data methodology looking at social attitudes toward religion.

Chaves and Cann (1992) developed an index of thirteen variables for eighteen European states measuring various aspects of state religion policies. A series of later studies (Chaves, Schraeder, and Sprindys 1994; Gill 1999; Norris and Inglehart 2004) expanded this to the following twenty variables and added a number of Latin American and former communist states to the countries covered:

- “The constitution limits freedom of religion.
- The constitution does not recognize freedom of religion.
- A single official (established) state church exists.
- The state favors one religion.
- Religious organizations must register with the state or be designated by it to operate legally, or the government imposes restrictions on those organizations not registered or recognized.
- The state issues legal permits for religious buildings.

- The state appoints or approves church leaders, church leaders appoint or approve government officials, and/or church leaders have specific positions in the government.
- The state pays church salaries directly.
- The state subsidizes some/all churches.
- The state provides tax exceptions for some/all churches.
- The state bans clergy from all or some specified religions from holding public office.
- The state owns some church property and buildings.
- The state mandates some religious education in state schools, even though students can be exempted from this requirement with a parent's request.
- There are reports of forced religious conversions.
- The state restricts some denominations, cults, or sects.
- The state restricts/bans some missionaries from entering the country for proselytizing purposes.
- The state restricts/censors some religious literature entering the country or being distributed.
- The state imprisons or detains some religious groups or individuals.
- The state fails to deter serious incidents of ethno-religious conflict and violence directed against some minority groups.
- The state is designated a country of particular concern for freedom of religion by the U.S. Department of State.<sup>5</sup>

This data collection has at least four drawbacks. First, it is missing most of the world's states. Second, it does not differentiate between different types of religion policy, which can have different motivations. It looks at three categories of variables, each of which can represent different motivations:

1. *Religious legislation and state support for religion.* This is the situation when a state supports a single religion, or sometimes a few religions, to the exclusion of all others. The state does not necessarily restrict other religions; it is possible to support a state religion without directly restricting the religious practices of minority religions (Mazie 2006). In fact, studies show that there is a wide variance of levels of restrictions on minority religions in states with high levels of support for religion (Fox 2008). This support is generally motivated by a desire to give one religion, or a small number of religions, preference in a state. This can create an uneven playing field for other religions that do not receive this support, but unless it involves making aspects of a religion mandatory, it is not in and of itself a restriction on religious freedom.

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<sup>5</sup> This list is the expanded list in Norris and Inglehart (2004), which was coded for forty-three countries in Western Europe and the former Soviet bloc. The Latin American states that were coded in Gill (1999) include only the same thirteen variables as those in Chaves and Cann (1992) and Chaves et al. (1994).

2. *Religious discrimination against minority religions.* This constitutes placing restrictions on minority religions that are not placed on the majority religion (Fox 2008; Grim and Finke 2011). This can have the same motivations as those for religious legislation, but there are other potential motivations, including the desire to protect indigenous culture and the desire to protect a population from what are perceived to be dangerous cults and sects (Fox 2008). It can also occur in the context of conflict between majority and minority groups over issues such as separatism or political participation (Fox, 2004). Thus while statistically correlated with religious legislation, it is not the same thing (Fox 2008).
3. *Regulation of the majority religion.* Regulations and limitations placed on the majority religion are clearly different from supporting a religion and from discrimination against religious minorities. That is, the actual restrictions may be similar to those in the previous category, but a policy decision to limit or regulate all religions is inherently different from singling out minority religions for these limitations. The motivations for regulating a majority religion or all religions in general are diverse. They can include hostility to all religion, seeing religion as a potential political threat to the regime, and a desire to control religion and use it to support the state (Fox 2008).

The combined data collection of Chaves and Cann (1992), Chaves, Schraeder, and Sprindys (1994), Gill (1999), and Norris and Inglehart (2004) includes items from all three categories, though mostly the first two in the same scale. Thus its measure of religion includes crosscutting actions such as both supporting religion and limiting it. However, if this were the only issue, it would be possible to separate out the individual items into separate scales. Imagine if one had a barrel of apples and oranges. One could sort these apples and oranges into different barrels.

Unfortunately, this type of sorting does not solve all of this index's issues with combining incompatible topics because the third problem with this index is that many of the individual items in it are ambiguous as to what they measure. Consider, for example, the first item: "The constitution limits freedom of religion." For whom does it limit the freedom—only minority religions or everyone? Iran's constitution states that "Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian Iranians are the only recognized religious minorities, who, within the limits of the law, are free to perform their religious rites and ceremonies, and to act according to their own canon in matters of personal affairs and religious education." In this case, there is religious freedom for some minorities but not others. Similarly, when an item measures whether "the state imprisons or detains some religious groups or individuals," is this applied only to minority groups or to the majority group as well? Several of the individual measures have this type of issue.

This problem is more akin to having a container in which orange juice and apple juice have been mixed. They are combined in such a way that it is not possible to differentiate them. When measures are imprecise in this manner, the only way to sort things out is to engage in a new data collection that essentially



repeats all the work of the original one. This involves constructing new, more precise variables and going over the sources for the original codings in order to code the new variables.

Fourth, many of the variables require measures of strength. For example, the item that measures whether “the state imprisons or detains some religious groups or individuals” can apply to a few arrests a year in which those who are arrested are released in a short amount of time and to thousands of prisoners who may be detained for years. There is a significant difference between the two.

It is important to stress that the distinction between legislation, discrimination, and regulation has both practical and theoretical import. On a practical level, it distinguishes between the type of action taken and the object of the action. The first key distinction is the type of action taken. Does the government support or limit religion? Legislation is a form of support for religion. While, as Stark and Finke (2000) note, this may create an uneven playing field that disadvantages minority religions, its primary effect is to strengthen and support a religion or, in some cases, a group of religions. Thus any religions that are disadvantaged by this are disadvantaged only in the sense that they have fewer benefits than other religions have, but supporting one religion does not represent a government effort to limit other religions. By contrast, regulation and discrimination are intended to limit and control of religion. The second distinction, the object of the action, distinguishes between regulation and discrimination. Regulation, as defined here, refers to limitations on the majority religion or on all religions; discrimination limits only minority religions.

These distinctions have important political consequences. For example, in liberal democratic theory, the obligations of democratic governments to provide religious freedom has multiple interpretations that effectively use these distinctions. Many liberal thinkers argue in favor of separation of religion and state, but this can mean many things. Here, I discuss four models within this tradition and an additional model that does not require democracies to separate religion and state. While the terms for these models differ across the literature, I will rely on those developed by Fox (2008), Madeley (2003), and Raz (1986).

The *secularist-laicist* model not only bans state support for any religion, but also restricts the presence of religion in the public sphere. Supporters of this model see religion as a wholly private matter, and the state enforces this view through restrictions on public religious activities and on religious institutions (Durham 1996; Esbeck 1988; Haynes 1997; Keane 2000; Kuru 2009; Stepan 2000). Thus this model bans religious legislation but allows limitations on religion as long as they apply to all religions. To limit some religions and not others would be to effectively advantage the religions that are not limited. In our terminology, this allows regulation but not legislation and discrimination. France is usually considered a good example of this model.

The second model is *absolute separation of religion and state*. This model requires that the state neither support nor restrict any religion (Esbeck 1988; Kuru 2009). Therefore this model bans legislation, regulation, and discrimination. The United States is often considered the prime example of this model.

The third model, *neutral political concern*, has a different conception of state neutrality toward religion. This model “requires that government action should not help or hinder any life-plan or way of life more than any other and that the consequences of government action should therefore be neutral” (Madeley 2003: 5–6). That is, all religions must be treated equally. This allows for regulation and legislation as long as they are applied equally to all religions; it does not allow for religious discrimination because, by definition, that constitutes unequal treatment of minority religions.

The fourth model, *exclusion of ideals*, has a conception similar to that of the neutral political concern model but focuses on intent rather than outcome. It mandates that “the state be precluded from justifying its actions on the basis of a preference for any particular way of life” (Madeley 2003: 6). Thus its influence is similar to that of the neutral political concern model, but some legislation or discrimination might be allowable if the intent of these actions is not to advantage or disadvantage any particular religion.

Some scholars, including Driessen (2010), Marquand and Nettler (2000), and Mazie (2004, 2006), argue that democracies can support a majority religion as long as religious minorities have the same religious freedoms as the majority religion and the majority religion is not made mandatory. According to this argument, regulation is allowed if it is applied equally and legislation is allowed as long as it does not make aspects of the majority religion mandatory, but discrimination is not permitted.

The sociological literature also considers these distinctions important. For example, Finke (1990, 1997) and Stark and Finke (2000) address the distinction between subsidies to religious majorities and suppression of minorities and their consequences for religious competition and religiosity. “The effects of suppression . . . reach far beyond the immediate repression of a few small and powerless religious groups. Suppression changes the incentives for all religions as well as the long-term growth of the religious economy” (Finke 1997: 49). Suppression reduces the incentives of the majority religion to undertake institutional change and represses the most likely sources of religious innovation. The influence of subsidy, beyond the obvious advantages to the subsidized religion, is more subtle. For example, subsidies make religious institutions and clergy less dependent on their congregations, lowering the incentives to serve those congregations. Subsidies also inflate the relative costs of joining nonsubsidized religions, making them less attractive. The terms *subsidies* and *suppression* are

akin to the terms *legislation* and *discrimination* as used here. However, the literature gives less attention to the issue of regulation.

Returning to our evaluation of previous datasets, we find that Price (1999, 2002) has a more sophisticated index of state support for religion but applies it to only forty-six states. This measure looks at the influence of religious laws on personal status, economics, social customs, crime and punishment, and governance. It restricts itself to the religious legislation and state support for religion category, so it measures the same type of state policy. Unfortunately, each of the component variables covers a broad spectrum of more specific laws, so the specificity of these variables is not nearly as exact as is feasible. However, the variables are more than sufficiently detailed to get meaningful results. The major limitation of this data collection is the small number of cases coded.

Grim and Finke (2006, 2011) have developed measures for government regulation of religion, government favoritism toward religion, and social regulation of religion. These variables are coded for 196 countries and cover 2000–2008. Each variable has five or six components. Many of these components have multiple values, so they can handle issues of severity. However, there are two problems with this data collection. First, it relies solely on the U.S. State Department International Religious Freedom (IRF) reports as a source. The creators of the dataset argue convincingly that this does not create a bias in the data because these reports are, in fact, not biased (Grim and Finke 2011), and they cross-validate the measures with other datasets (Grim and Wike 2010). However, relying on a single source has its issues, as is discussed in detail later in this article in the context of the Religion and State dataset. In addition, there are questions about the legitimacy of the IRF reports. I agree with the assessment that these reports are accurate, but as I discuss in more detail below, many researchers incorrectly perceive them to be biased because of their source. It is unlikely that any amount of proof of their accuracy will fully dispel these doubts.

Second, the Grim and Finke dataset has issues similar to those of the Chaves and Cann dataset in that some of the measures are unclear. It is difficult to tell whether several of the items on the government regulation of religion variable apply only to minority groups or to all religions. For example, “the government interferes with an individual’s right to worship” could easily apply just to minority groups, or it could apply to all religions. However, the other two indexes have no such problems. Also, it is important to note that the Grim and Finke dataset is the only one that includes a detailed composite index of limitations placed on minority religions by society rather than by government. This is particularly important because a large portion of religion’s influence on politics comes from places other than government policy, the focus of the RAS2 dataset. Nonstate actors, including clergy, congregations, other religious organizations, and political

parties as well as religious people acting both as individuals and in groups, are part of the religious economy and can have significant political influences.

In previous work (Fox 2002, 2004), I developed a dataset for religion and ethnic conflict that includes a variable for religious discrimination against ethnoreligious minorities. The variable includes the following components:

- Restrictions on the public observance of religious services, festivals, and/or holidays
- Restrictions on building, repairing, and/or maintaining places of worship
- Forced observance of religious laws of other group
- Restrictions on formal religious organizations
- Restrictions on the running of religious schools and/or religious education in general
- Restrictions on the observance of religious laws concerning personal status, including marriage and divorce
- Restrictions on the ordination of and/or access to clergy
- Restrictions on other types of observance of religious law

All of these component variables apply only to the treatment of a specific ethno-religious minority and are not coded if the majority religion is restricted in the same way. Furthermore, each was coded on a scale of 0 to 2 to account for severity. The only limitation on these variables is that they were coded only for ethnoreligious minorities that are found in the Minorities at Risk dataset (Gurr 1993, 2000), so they are not generally useful outside of this context. However, they did provide a core set of variables that I later expanded as described in more detail below.

The final data collection is the Religion and State round 1 (RAS1) dataset. Because my study uses the Religion and State round 2 (RAS2) dataset, RAS1 is discussed below in the context of the description of RAS2.

#### *THE RELIGION AND STATE ROUND 2 DATASET*

The RAS2 dataset is designed to code government religion policy. It includes yearly data for 1990–2008 for 177 countries, which include all countries with a population of 250,000 and a sampling of less populous countries. In cases in which countries became independent after 1990, the coding begins with the year in which the country became independent. Because a government is required for there to be a government religion policy, certain years were not coded in rare

cases such as Afghanistan until 1992 and Iraq in 2002, when there was effectively no government.<sup>6</sup>

### *Variable Listing and Construction*

The RAS2 dataset contains 151 variables, 110 of which are used in this study, which focuses on the RAS composite variables: those that combine multiple measures to form a more comprehensive index.<sup>7</sup>

RAS2 includes three composite variables. The first of these, *religious discrimination*, measures limitations that are placed on the religious practices or religious institutions of minority religions but not those of the majority religion. This index contains thirty components (listed in Table 2 below), expanded from sixteen in RAS1. Because the purpose of the RAS2 dataset is to measure state religion policy, this variable does not include restrictions that are not related to religion. For example, the Christian Coptic minority in Egypt suffered from a wide range of discrimination during the 1990–2008 period. Much of it fits the RAS definition of religious discrimination. This includes limits on the ability to build and repair places of worship and anti-Christian statements in the government media as well as several other types of limitations on religious practices and institutions that are coded in the RAS variables. The Copts also encounter significant discrimination in matters that are not directly related to religion, including restrictions on getting senior positions in the government and military and restricted access to higher education (Gauch 2005; Guindy 2006). These types of discrimination, while against a religious minority because of their religious identity, do not constitute limitations on the group's religious practices or institutions and are therefore not coded in the RAS2 dataset.

Although the presence of nonreligious types of discrimination is important for understanding the status of religious minorities, such as the Copts in Egypt, and is certainly an important topic of study, the focus of the RAS2 dataset is not the status of religious minorities. Rather, it focuses on government religion policy. To include elements that are not directly related to government religion policy would cause at least three problems. First, this would undermine the focus of the data collection by including elements that are not directly related to its core purpose. This would warp the dataset from one that measures government religion policy to one that measures the status of minorities. Second, a complete assessment of

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<sup>6</sup> I used a very broad definition for the presence of a government, so even in war-torn states such as Somalia for much of this period, the presence of even a nominal government that had control over some territory was deemed sufficient to code that government's policy. This allows researchers who wish to use these cases to do so and allows those who feel that using them is unwarranted to drop them from the study. The analyses presented here use all coded cases.

<sup>7</sup> For a full listing of all variables in RAS2, see the RAS website at [www.religionandstate.org](http://www.religionandstate.org).

the status of religious minorities across the world would require examination of a different set of sources than those described below. That is, sources that focus on religion policy and freedom within a state will likely include information on other aspects of the status of these minorities, but this information is unlikely to be complete. A considerable amount of additional work in locating and assimilating appropriate sources would be necessary to gain a full picture of all aspects of a religious minority's status. Third, a complete assessment of the status of religious minorities would require a comparison with nonreligious minorities. This would require even further research and an even broader set of sources. This additional work was simply not possible with the resources that were allotted for the collection of the RAS2 dataset.

It is also important to reiterate that the variable of religious discrimination includes only limitations that are placed on minority religions but not on the majority religion. Even though the types of actions that are taken against majority and minority religions may be similar, conceptually these two issues are very different. Restricting all religions can represent a general hostility to religion; restricting only minority religions represents hostility toward minority religions that does not exist toward the majority religion or religion in general. While North Korea and Saudi Arabia both limit religious freedom, North Korea limits all religions and Saudi Arabia limits all but the majority religion. This is a crucial distinction. Being a devout Christian, for example, in either state can have severe consequences, but the motivations behind the imposing of these restrictions by the governments of North Korea and Saudi Arabia are very different. If one wants to understand government religion policy, it is necessary to make this distinction.

Each component of this variable is coded on a scale of 0 to 3 to measure the severity of each type of restriction,<sup>8</sup> resulting in an index of 0 to 90.

The second composite variable, *religious restrictions*, measures restrictions that are placed on all religions or the majority religion. This index contains twenty-nine components (listed in Table 3 below), expanded from eleven in RAS1. This variable is intended to measure a government's attempts to limit and control religion in general. Each component is coded on a scale of 0 to 3 to measure the severity of each type of restriction,<sup>9</sup> resulting in an index of 0 to 87.

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<sup>8</sup> The scale is as follows: 0, The activity is not significantly restricted for any religion; 1, The activity is slightly restricted for some minorities; 2, The activity is slightly restricted for most or all minority religions or sharply restricted for some of them; 3, The activity is prohibited or sharply restricted for most or all minority religions.

<sup>9</sup> The scale is as follows: 0, No restrictions; 1, Slight restrictions including practical restrictions or the government engages in this activity rarely and on a small scale; 2, Significant restrictions including practical restrictions or the government engages in this activity occasionally and on a moderate scale; 3, The activity is illegal or the government engages in this activity often and on a large scale.

The third composite variable, *religious legislation*, measures the extent to which the government supports religion. This includes legislating and enforcing religious precepts as law, financially supporting religion, and otherwise giving preference or support to the majority religion. This index contains fifty-one components (listed in Table 4 below), expanded from thirty-three in RAS1. In Fox (2008), I demonstrate that this variable more accurately measures the extent to which a government supports religion than does the presence of an official religion, though official religions and religious legislation are correlated. Because many of the components involve simply the presence or absence of a type of law, the components for this index was not scaled. Thus the index ranges from 0 to 51.

These indexes were created as follows: In round 1 of the data collection (RAS1), the project developed a listing of components for each index based on what the project staff, in consultation with numerous colleagues,<sup>10</sup> expected to find. In the early stages of the RAS1 data collection process, variables were added as research assistants uncovered government behaviors that had not been anticipated. However, about one third of the way into the project, the code sheet was closed to changes because of the logistical difficulties of adding components, which involved redoing much of the coding work that had already been done. Nevertheless, as new information was uncovered, it was incorporated into a working code sheet for RAS2. Thus as RAS1 was completed, a new code sheet had already been developed for RAS2 that included all relevant government behaviors that are present in at least several states. The process for coding RAS2 revealed no additional codable behaviors that were present in a sufficient number of states to justify adding a variable to any of the indexes. Each index also includes at least one “other” variable for behaviors that are deemed important and relevant enough to be coded but also sufficiently rare or unique that they do not warrant a separate component variable. In each case, the coder provided a description of the unique behavior on the code sheet.

This means that the components that are included in the RAS2 indexes are not based on any theoretical assessment of what ought to be coded. Rather, they are based on a ground-up comparative project that uncovered all relevant practices and placed each of them in the appropriate index. As a result, these indexes include all known government actions regarding state religion policy taken by at

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<sup>10</sup> Although I did not keep precise records, I estimate that at least twenty-five colleagues were consulted. This includes fourteen who commented on the grant proposals for the research, another five who commented on articles submitted to journals describing the proposed format for the research, and at least six who were consulted on a less formal basis and were specifically asked whether they could think of any variables that should be included that were not on the list. This pool expanded considerably after the completion of round 1 to include referees for publications based on RAS1, audiences at presentations based on the data, and colleagues who showed an interest in the data collection.

least several governments anywhere in the world. No other data collection can make this claim.

### *Data Collection Procedures*

All 175 countries that were included in RAS1 are included in RAS2. Timor and Montenegro were added because they had recently gained independence, so 177 countries were included in RAS2.<sup>11</sup>

In RAS2, as was the case in RAS1, each country was assigned to a research assistant (RA) who wrote a report based on the country. These reports cover 2003–2008 and are meant to supplement and update the RAS1 reports, which cover 1990–2002. These reports used the following sources:

- Primary sources such as constitutions and the texts of legislation and government policy papers regarding religion. In cases in which laws were not available in a language that by the RA understood, Google Translate was used. A sampling of constitutions and laws that were available both in translation and in the original language were tested to see whether the Google Translate results matched the human translation. Although the texts were rarely identical, the Google Translate texts did not result in any inaccuracies that would have influenced the codings.
- News articles, mostly from a search of the Lexis-Nexis database but also obtained from other sources.
- Academic resources such as journal articles and books.
- Government and intergovernmental organization reports such as the U.S. State Department IRF reports and the United Nations Abortion Policies reports, among others.
- Reports by nongovernmental advocacy groups and academic organizations such as Human Rights without Frontiers and Amnesty International, among many others.

As project director, I vetted all RAS2 reports and often required several rounds of revisions. Each report used all available sources. While sources were more common for some countries than others, there was sufficient information to code all cases. In general, even among undeveloped peripheral countries, when general reports such as the U.S. State Department IRF reports indicated that there was significant religious discrimination, regulation, or legislation, there tended to be significant amounts of information in other primary, academic, media, and advocacy group sources. The research that was involved in writing the reports inadvertently revealed that religion is a sufficiently important topic that various organizations devote considerable resources to documenting governments that

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<sup>11</sup> This section is based on the RAS2 codebook, which is available online at the Religion and State project webpage at [www.religionandstate.org](http://www.religionandstate.org).



either support or restrict religion anywhere in the world. Thus there do not seem to be any informational backwaters when states either restrict or strongly support religion.

While this additional information provides considerable advantages over relying on a single source, some of the sources, such as nongovernmental organizations' human rights reports and press coverage, are published only sporadically. This raises the issue of whether the information that is available is partially determined by international attention. Although it is impossible to fully discount this issue, the advantages of multiple sources outweigh relying on a single source that consistently covers nearly all countries, such as the U.S. State Department IRF reports.<sup>12</sup> This is true for several reasons.

First, as has already been noted, additional sources brought in additional information that increases the accuracy of the data. I argue that this alone is sufficient to justify the practice.

Second, multiple sources allow for cross-checking for accuracy. There was a high level of consistency of information between sources and very few cases of contradicting sources. In cases of contradicting sources, the RAs sought additional sources and performed a reliability assessment of all of the sources in question.

Third, as was noted above, international attention seems to be highly correlated with the presence of government activity in the field of religion. In cases in which the general sources (those that prepared a report on all countries regardless of their policy) indicated large amounts of religious discrimination, regulation, and/or legislation, there tended to be considerably more information in the other sources than there was when the general sources indicated lower levels of religious legislation, discrimination, and regulation. That is, in cases that the general sources showed to be important, researchers were more likely to find more academic, media, and advocacy group sources. This demonstrates both a consistency in coverage among sources and that international attention tends to be attracted when governments take codable actions. This was true even of countries that would otherwise be considered peripheral and less likely to attract media and nongovernmental organizational attention. In other words, the squeaky wheels seem to be getting the grease. Because the project is seeking out squeaky wheels, this is arguably an advantage. The general sources provided a good description of a state's policy, but in most cases, the additional sources provided details that were not included in the general sources.

Fourth, the legitimacy of any single source can be challenged. As was noted above in the context of the discussion of the Grim and Finke data, this is the case with the U.S. State Department IRF reports. These reports prove to be accurate when tested (Grim and Wike 2010). My evaluation of the IRF reports confirms

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<sup>12</sup> The one country that is glaringly absent from the U.S. State Department reports is the United States itself.

this. I found almost no instances of inaccurate information. The few instances of inaccuracies involved failures to note a change in policy in a timely manner; that is, a government began or stopped taking some action, but the reports, which are produced yearly, failed to notice immediately. This occurred rarely, and the change was generally noted in a later report. I found no other instances of information that was demonstrably incorrect.

It is important to emphasize that the RAS project went over every word of every IRF report from 1999 (the year of the first report) onward. Given the wide range of sources we used for every case, in essence every IRF report was checked for accuracy. Although the original intention of the RAS project was not to assess the accuracy of each and every IRF report, in practice the project did exactly this. While the IRF reports are not perfect, they have a high standard of accuracy that, in my assessment, despite some limitations I note below, meets or exceeds the standards applied to refereed academic publications.

Nevertheless, the connection of the IRF reports to a political entity leaves them open to attack on the grounds of bias. Even if this type of criticism is unjustified, it can undermine the acceptance of a data collection within the academic community. I have experienced this and found that even when I explain why I believe the information in the IRF reports to be accurate, a significant portion of the academic community seems unwilling to accept any evidence, no matter how convincing, that any branch of the U.S. government can produce an unbiased report. Again, I believe, on the basis of my comparison between the IRF reports and other sources, that the reports meet high standards of accuracy and can provide the basis for a data collection, even one that is based solely on these reports. However, the legitimacy issue creates a situation in which any research that is based solely on these reports is unlikely to be accepted by a significant portion of the academic community. Even if this bias is not based on the facts, it is a significant drawback for any dataset.

Many of the other sources can be similarly criticized for being produced by organizations or individuals that have an agenda. Again, by this I mean that it is possible to make such an accusation, not that the accusations are necessarily justified. Nevertheless, such criticisms can gain acceptance among at least a portion of the academic community even if they are not accurate. Thus the issue in this case can often be one of perception rather than fact. Using multiple sources effectively neutralizes this issue by showing agreement among different sources that have no common agenda.

Fifth, a significant problem with the U.S. State Department IRF reports was missing or incomplete information. For example, in many cases, the IRF reports would note the presence of a law on religion and some general attributes of that law. In these cases, more often than not, a reading of the actual law provided more information that influenced the coding but was not included in the IRF report.

This is true of many activities that are reported in the IRF reports: The reports provided a basic summary of an event, policy, action, or law, and other sources provided additional details that influenced codings. Because of this, when preparing the RAS2 reports, RAs were often instructed to seek out additional details of events that were reported in the IRF reports and copies of laws that were mentioned in the IRF reports. Also, in many cases, the IRF reports simply missed significant activities. In most cases, these were low-level (with respect to the codings) activities in peripheral regions of a country. Thus while I found no instances of incorrect information in the reports, there were many instances of incomplete information.

This does not appear to reflect any ideological or political bias; rather, in my estimation, it is the result of less than perfect research by the IRF reports' authors. However, this bias is problematic in that it is not a consistent one. That is, there is no standard threshold across the country reports such that events or details that do not meet the threshold for importance are not included. Rather, some reports appear to have been the result of more industrious work. When compared to other sources, the information in some IRF reports is more complete than that in others. To put it bluntly, if the RAS researchers using open sources can find information, there is no reason why someone with the resources available to the U.S. State Department cannot find the same information.

This means that while the information in the reports is almost never inaccurate, the reports are inconsistent in their thoroughness. Nevertheless, in my assessment, these issues, while worthy of note, are not sufficient to undermine the validity of studies that rely on the U.S. State Department reports. Even with their imperfections, they are high-quality pieces of research and are, in my estimation, the most complete, detailed, and accurate individual source available if one wants to use a single source for research on government religion policy. This type of inconsistency is present in most of the sources used by the RAS project that cover multiple states and demonstrates that using multiple sources is not only the best way to get the most complete information possible, it is the only way.<sup>13</sup>

The RAS2 report, along with the RAS1 report (which was collected by using the same methodology), provided the basis for filling out the code sheets. I reviewed all code sheets to ensure that the code sheets were filled out accurately and that all RAs were using the same interpretation of the code sheet. No matter how specifically worded, items on the code sheet can be subject to multiple interpretations. This policy of a single individual reviewing all code sheets is, among other things, intended to reduce the influence of differing interpretations

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<sup>13</sup> My assessment of the U.S. State Department reports is based on a comparison with other sources, discussions with colleagues, and my experiences with referee reports that touch on the issue. For another perspective and a discussion of the genesis of the U.S. State Department IRF reports as well as a review of the literature surrounding it, see Moore (2011).

on the codings. Differences between countries in codings need to be based on real differences rather than on differences in interpretations of similar actions by different coders. Overall, fourteen RAs worked on the project, and they coded between one and forty-two cases each.

This system had an additional advantage. In many cases, I questioned specific codings and received an illuminating reply from the RA. That is, the RA would give an answer that revealed information that was not clear in the report. In these cases, the RA was instructed to clarify the report; the result was a more accurate report. This also emphasizes the reason behind the project policy that the RA who wrote the report is the one to fill out the code sheet. The one who invested tens of hours in researching a case will have more insight into the details of the case than will someone who only reads the report.

The variables were coded according to the following rules:

1. "If there was a relevant national law. In cases where this law was on the books but rarely enforced (a relatively rare occurrence) this was taken into account in the scaling of the variable when possible but always coded unless there is clear and positive information that the law has not been enforced at all for at least several decades."
2. "If there was a relevant national policy. For example if there was no law against proselytizing, yet by official or unofficial policy those who proselytize were arrested or otherwise harassed this would have been coded."
3. "If there is no national policy or law but a significant plurality of local or regional governments had such policies or laws the relevant variable was coded. In such cases the proportion of the country's population which was under the rule of these regional or local governments was taken into account both with regard to whether the variable was coded and, when relevant, how high a coding on the scale was assigned."
4. "The project codes only actions taken by government and their representatives. Societal actions are not coded. This is not because societal attitudes and actions are unworthy of study. It is simply not within the purview of the RAS project. As a result the RAs are not searching for information on religion on society in the reports which means that any codings based on the RAS reports that focus on religion in society may be based on incomplete information."<sup>14</sup>
5. Courts with effective judicial review powers are part of the legislation and policymaking process. Accordingly, laws, policies, or activities that were overturned or banned by a country's court system were not coded from the point at which they were overturned unless the government ignored the court's ruling and continued engaging in the codable action or policy. In cases in which the action, policy, or law was overturned (and the court's ruling was enforced) shortly after the action was taken or the law or policy came into force, it was not coded at all.

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<sup>14</sup> The first four rules are taken directly from the RAS2 codebook.

The reasoning behind coding both laws and policies is as follows: The purpose of the project is to code state religion policy. This can take the form of laws, policies that have some format other than a law, and actual practice. Take, for example, limits on proselytizing. If one were to code only laws, states with such laws on the books that are enforced weakly would be coded while a state that has no such law but in practice arrests and deports all foreign missionaries would not be coded. Thus ignoring policies, both official and unofficial, would lead to a less accurate coding of the true religion policy of a government. Laws are not the only way in which states make policy; to ignore this would be to provide a less accurate representation of a state's true policy.

Similarly, it can be argued that laws that are not enforced should not be coded. While this is a valid point, laws that have not been repealed still have import if only because repealing them might be politically difficult. However, the coding rules are clear that if there is positive and reliable information that a law has not been enforced at all for decades, it is not coded. Cases of laws discovered by the RAs that met this standard for lack of enforcement were rare. I speculate that there might be more such laws on the books but that the lack of enforcement has resulted in their not being recorded in any of the sources uncovered by the RAs.

### *Data Reliability*

All cases were coded a second time by a backup coder. The backup coders were two senior RAs on the project, one senior coder from RAS1, and a colleague associated with the project. These coders used the RAS1 and RAS2 reports as the basis for filling out the code sheets. I did not review the backup code sheets, since I had taken part in the primary codings. All of the senior coders were responsible for collecting the primary data on at least twenty-five cases for either RAS1 or RAS2, which gave them sufficient experience and knowledge of the coding scheme to code cases unsupervised. The colleague, Yasemin Akbaba, has been involved in aspects of the RAS project and its coding for several years. Comparing backup codings to the primary codings is a standard method for assessing data reliability, known as intercoder reliability. The correlations between the primary and backup codings are presented in Table 1.

All of the correlations are 0.973 and higher. Generally, a score of 0.800 is acceptable, and a score above 0.900 is preferable. These results clearly meet this standard.

For an extra reliability test, I correlated the RAS2 variables with relevant previous collections that had variables for most or all states in RAS2. First, I correlated the religious discrimination variable—in this case, only for 2005 rather than the average score for 1990 to 2008—with the Grim and Finke variable for

2005, which is the most recent available for download.<sup>15</sup> They correlate at 0.806 for the 174 overlapping cases. This demonstrates that the variable is strongly related to another variable on the same topic but also sufficiently different to support the assertion that the RAS2 variables add value.

**Table 1: Intercoder Reliability Tests**

<b>Correlations Between Primary and Backup Codings for:</b>			
<b>Year</b>	<b>Religious Discrimination</b>	<b>Religious Regulation</b>	<b>Religious Legislation</b>
1990	0.986	0.989	0.986
1991	0.986	0.977	0.987
1992	0.985	0.973	0.987
1993	0.983	0.973	0.988
1994	0.984	0.973	0.988
1995	0.983	0.973	0.988
1996	0.982	0.973	0.989
1997	0.982	0.973	0.989
1998	0.982	0.974	0.989
1999	0.983	0.975	0.989
2000	0.985	0.975	0.990
2001	0.986	0.982	0.990
2002	0.988	0.983	0.980
2003	0.988	0.983	0.982
2004	0.988	0.984	0.990
2005	0.987	0.984	0.990
2006	0.988	0.980	0.990
2007	0.988	0.980	0.990
2008	0.988	0.976	0.989

All correlations in the table have a significance of  $p < 0.001$ .

Second, I correlated the RAS2 variables for 2002 with the RAS1 variables for 2002. I selected 2002 because this is the most recent year available in RAS1. The correlations for religious discrimination, regulation, and legislation are 0.914, 0.788, and 0.855, respectively. While these correlations are high, they demonstrate that RAS1 and RAS2 are by no means identical. This is an optimal result because it demonstrates both that the RAS1 and RAS2 indexes are measuring the same thing and that the RAS2 indexes are sufficiently different to suggest that adding more measures to an index increases its accuracy. That the correlations are

<sup>15</sup> Downloaded on May 27, 2011, from the Association of Religious Data Archives at <http://www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Descriptions/IRFAGG.asp>.

lowest for the religious regulation index, which is the only one of the three indexes whose items more than doubled, supports this argument.

### *BUILDING RELIGION AND STATE INDEXES*

There are essentially three ways to create an index based on these component variables. The first is to simply add them, as is the methodology for both the RAS1 and RAS2 datasets. All the other indexes from other projects and studies described above use the same methodology, so it is clear that additive indexes are currently the accepted standard in the field. The other methods involve weighting each component. The argument for weighting each component is to take into account that some items on the lists of component variables are simply more important or have a larger impact than others. How much impact they have can be determined by one of two methodologies, which constitute the second and third ways to create an index.

The second method uses factor analysis or some other statistical technique to weight the variables. For example, Grim and Finke (2006) used statistical methodology to build alternative versions of their indexes and found the results to be nearly identical to their additive indexes. The third method uses expert assessments; that is, experts on the issue are asked to use their expertise to weight each item in the index. In a previous discussion of the RAS1 indexes, I argued that this is impractical because

there is no agreement as to which variables should be singled out in this manner. In other words when I present this data to colleagues, I usually get suggestions [to weight variables] . . . but the . . . variable I am asked to single out is rarely the same. Based on this I conclude that it is not feasible to achieve agreement over which of the RAS[1] variables should be weighted . . . and that giving all of them equal weight is likely the most transparent and least controversial option available (Fox 2008: 56).

If there is truly no agreement among experts, then to weight variables on this basis would be to weight them on the basis of personal bias. This would clearly be unacceptable.

Nevertheless, arguments in favor of both types of weighting are present in the literature to a small extent (e.g., Pinkus and Meyer 2008; Spickard 2010). Discussions with the creators of several of the datasets discussed above revealed that such comments are also often raised by reviewers when manuscripts based on the datasets are submitted for publication. Accordingly, in this section, I compare two weighted versions of each index to indexes that were created by simply adding the component variables to form an index (the unweighted index). The first weighted index is based on expert assessment; the second is based on factor analysis.

All three indexes that were used for the analysis in this study are based on average scores for 1990–2008. Because the codings differed from year to year, this methodology allows for an assessment of averages for this entire period that arguably represents the true presence and impact of each component variable over time better than would data for any single year. This is especially important for the factor analysis because changes in the codings can result in changes in the weightings. The Cronbach's scores for the discrimination, regulation, and legislation unweighted indexes are 0.993, 0.881, and 0.903, respectively. Because a score above 0.700 is considered to demonstrate a substantial relationship between variables, this is sufficiently high that there is no methodological reason not to combine the variables included in the indexes.

### *The Expert Weighting Index*

To create the expert weighting index, I asked approximately forty colleagues to help me weight the variables, and I received full responses from seventeen. These colleagues are all political scientists or sociologists with expertise and a publishing record in religion. Each was asked to weight the components of each index on the basis of the following instructions:

A policy with a high importance/impact/severity/significance is defined as one which would meet one or both of the following criteria (a) the presence of such a policy demonstrates a stronger connection between the government and religion than do most of the other policies in the same category; (b) the policy with have a significantly greater influence on people's lives than most other policies in the same category.

The importance/impact/severity/significance of policies should be compared only to others in the same category of the three categories: restrictions on minorities, regulation of all religions or the majority religion, and religious legislation.

In each section I ask you to mark all policies which are clearly above average in importance/impact/severity/significance . . . and all those which are clearly below average in importance/impact/severity/significance. . . . I ask you to limit these codings to only the most clearly below and above average codings and in any case no more than 15% of any category as above average and 15% as below average. For the first two categories (restrictions on minorities and regulation of all groups or the majority group) 15% is 5 items and for the last category (religious legislation) 15% is 8. It is perfectly acceptable to mark less than 15% as above or below average, the 15% is simply an upper limit.

I weighted the results as follows: Variables that were coded as above average were given a score of 1.5; variables that were coded as average were given a score of 1.0; and variables that were coded as below average were given a score of 0.5.



I averaged all seventeen scores to create a weighting based on the combined expertise of the experts who participated in the weighting process. The number of experts who coded each component as above or below average and the final expert weighting are presented in Tables 2, 3, and 4.

**Table 2: Factor and Expert Weightings for Religious Discrimination Components**

Component Variable	Expert Weighting			Factor Weighting
	Weight	Low	High	
Restrictions on public observance of religious services, festivals and/or holidays, including the Sabbath	1.118	0	4	0.817
Restrictions on the private observance of religious services, festivals and/or holidays, including the Sabbath	1.294	0	9	0.612
Restrictions on building, leasing, repairing, and/or maintaining places of worship	1.000	1	1	0.726
Restrictions on access to existing places of worship	1.088	0	3	0.580
Forced observance of religious laws of another group	1.382	0	13	0.464
Restrictions on formal religious organizations	0.971	1	0	0.558
Restrictions on the running of religious schools and/or religious education in general	0.912	2	5	0.641
Restrictions on the ability to make and/or obtain materials necessary for religious rites, customs, and/or ceremonies	1.000	0	0	0.529
Mandatory education in the majority religion	1.176	1	7	0.524
Arrest/detention/official harassment of religious figures, officials, and/or members of religious parties for activities other than proselytizing	1.382	0	13	0.749
State surveillance of minority religious activities not placed on the activities of the majority	1.000	0	0	0.586
Restrictions on the ability to write, publish, or disseminate religious publications	1.118	0	2	0.781
Restrictions on the ability to import religious publications	0.853	5	0	0.782
Restrictions on access to religious publications for personal use	1.029	1	2	0.600

Restrictions on the observance religious laws concerning personal status, including marriage, divorce, and burial	1.000	2	1	0.556
Restrictions: wearing of religious symbols/clothing. Includes presence/absence of facial hair but not weapons or face covering.	0.941	3	1	0.542
Restrictions on the ordination of and/or access to clergy	0.941	2	0	0.544
Restrictions on conversion to minority religions	1.000	1	1	0.629
Forced renunciation of faith by recent converts to minority religions	1.118	0	3	0.515
Forced conversions of people who were never members of the majority religion	1.176	0	6	0.323
Efforts or campaigns to convert members of minority religions to the majority religion which fall short of using force	1.000	0	0	0.609
Restrictions on proselytizing by permanent residents of state to members of the majority religion	1.000	2	2	0.786
Restrictions on proselytizing by permanent residents of state to members of minority religions	1.000	1	1	0.524
Restrictions on proselytizing by foreign clergy or missionaries	0.824	5	0	0.774
Requirement for minority religions (as opposed to all religions) to register in order to be legal or receive special tax status	0.971	4	2	0.238
Custody of children granted to members of majority group solely or in part on the basis of religious affiliation or beliefs	1.029	0	1	0.546
Restricted access of minority clergy to hospitals/jails/military bases/other places in comparison to chaplains of the majority religion	0.941	2	0	0.459
There is a legal provision or policy of declaring some minority religions dangerous or extremist sects	1.029	1	2	0.527
Antireligious propaganda in official or semi-official government publications.	1.059	0	2	0.595
Restrictions on other types of observance of religious law. Specify:	0.971	1	0	0.695

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**Table 3: Factor and Expert Weightings for Religious Regulation Components**

Component Variable	Expert Weighting			Factor Weighting
	Weight	Low	High	
Restrictions on religious political parties	1.000	2	2	0.299
Restrictions on trade associations or other civil associations being affiliated with a religion	0.941	2	0	0.293
Restrictions on clergy holding political office	0.912	3	0	0.355
Arrest, continued detention, or severe official harassment of religious figures, officials, and/or members of religious parties	1.324	0	11	0.715
Government restricts/harasses members of majority religion who operate outside of the state sponsored/recognized ecclesiastical framework	1.118	0	4	0.613
Restrictions on formal religious organizations other than political parties	1.000	1	1	0.747
Restrictions on the public observance of religious practices, including religious holidays and the Sabbath	1.118	0	4	0.661
Restrictions on religious activities outside of recognized religious facilities	1.000	0	0	0.670
Restrictions on public religious speech	1.118	1	5	0.781
Restrictions or monitoring of sermons by clergy	1.029	1	2	0.660
Restrictions on public political speech or propaganda or on political activity by clergy/religious organizations	0.971	1	0	0.457
Restrictions on religious-based hate speech	0.882	4	0	-0.045
Restrictions on access to places of worship	1.088	1	3	0.718
Restrictions on the publication or dissemination of written religious material	1.000	1	1	0.773
People are arrested for religious activities	1.294	0	10	0.707
Restrictions on religious public gatherings that are not placed on other types of public gathering.	1.059	0	2	0.484
Restrictions on the public display by private persons/organizations of religious symbols, including dress, presence/absence of facial hair, etc.	1.088	0	2	0.615

Restrictions on or regulation of religious education in public schools (Represents direct government control, not bans on religious education)	0.941	3	1	0.410
Restrictions on or regulation of religious education outside of public schools or general government control of religious education	1.029	1	2	0.702
Restrictions on or regulation of religious education at the university level	0.912	4	1	0.619
Foreign religious organizations are required to have a local sponsor or affiliation	0.824	6	0	0.227
Heads of religious organizations (e.g., Bishops) must be citizens of the state	0.824	5	0	0.313
All practicing clergy must be citizens of the state	0.853	5	0	0.303
The government appoints, or must approve, clerical appointments or somehow takes part in the appointment process	1.147	0	5	0.651
Other than appointments, the government legislates/officially influences internal workings/organization of religious institutions/organizations	1.088	0	3	0.631
Laws governing the state religion are passed by the government or need the government's approval before being put into effect	0.971	3	1	0.399
State ownership of some religious property or buildings	0.882	5	1	0.416
Conscientious objectors to military service are not given other options for national service and are prosecuted	1.059	1	3	0.271
Other religious restrictions. Specify:	1.000	0	0	0.376

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**Table 4: Factor and Expert Weightings for Religious Legislation Components**

Component Variable	Expert Weighting			Factor Weighting
	Weight	Low	High	
Dietary laws (restrictions on the production, import, selling, or consumption of specific foods)	1.029	1	2	0.690
Restrictions or prohibitions on the sale of alcoholic beverages	1.000	1	2	0.854
Personal status defined by religion or clergy (i.e., marriage, divorce, and/or burial can only occur under religious auspices)	1.118	0	4	0.729
Marriages performed by clergy of at least some religions are given automatic civil recognition, even in the absence of a state license	1.029	1	2	0.224
Restrictions on interfaith marriages (includes when marriages are performed only by clergy which effectively restricts interfaith marriages)	1.176	0	6	0.833
Laws of inheritance defined by religion	1.000	1	1	0.789
Religious precepts used to define/set punishment for crimes (Refers to general criminal acts such as theft, rape, murder, etc.)	1.118	0	3	0.702
The charging of interest is illegal or significantly restricted	1.029	0	1	0.457
Women may not go out in public unescorted	1.294	0	9	0.439
Restrictions on the public dress of women other than the common restrictions on public nudity (Required dress, not banning of religious dress)	1.088	0	3	0.623
General restrictions on public dress or appearance other than those included in the above category (This category is only for required behavior)	1.000	1	1	0.507
Restrictions on intimate interactions between unmarried heterosexual couples	1.088	0	3	0.706
Laws which specifically make it illegal to be a homosexual or engage in homosexual intimate interactions	1.206	0	7	0.349

Restrictions on conversions away from the dominant religion	1.235	0	8	0.758
Blasphemy laws or any other restriction on speech about majority religion or religious figures	1.029	1	2	0.706
Blasphemy laws protecting minority religions or religious figures	0.941	3	1	0.305
Censorship of press or other publications on grounds of being antireligious.	1.088	0	3	0.809
Significant restrictions on public music or dancing other than the usual zoning restrictions	0.971	1	0	0.578
Mandatory closing of some or all businesses during religious holidays, including the Sabbath or its equivalent	0.971	2	1	0.361
Other restrictions on activities during religious holidays including the Sabbath or its equivalent ("blue laws"). Specify:	0.912	3	0	0.493
Religious education is present in public schools.	0.882	5	1	0.340
Presence of official prayer sessions in public schools	1.029	0	1	0.132
Government funding of religious primary or secondary schools or religious educational programs in non-public schools	0.941	2	0	0.097
Government funding of seminary schools	0.971	1	0	0.384
Government funding of religious education in colleges or universities	0.912	4	1	0.368
Public schools are segregated by religion or separate public schools exist for members of some religions	1.029	0	1	0.261
Government funding of religious charitable organizations including hospitals.	0.941	2	0	0.174
Government collects taxes on behalf of religious organizations (religious taxes)	1.059	0	2	0.290
Official government positions, salaries, or other funding for clergy other than salaries for teachers of religious courses	0.971	1	0	0.336
Direct general grants to religious organizations (this does not include the religious taxes or religious charitable organization categories above)	1.000	1	1	0.157
Funding for building, maintaining, or repairing religious sites	0.912	3	0	0.335

Free air time on television or radio is provided to religious organizations on government channels or by government decree	0.912	3	0	0.176
Funding or other government support for religious pilgrimages such as the Hajj	1.000	0	0	0.421
Funding for religious organizations or activities other than those listed above. Specify:	1.000	0	0	-0.014
Some religious leaders are given diplomatic status, diplomatic passports, or immunity from prosecution by virtue of their religious office	0.971	1	0	-0.094
Presence of an official government ministry or department dealing with religious affairs	0.971	2	1	0.361
Presence of a police force or other government agency which exists solely to enforce religious laws	1.176	0	6	0.568
Certain government officials are also given an official position in the state church by virtue of their political office	1.000	0	0	0.333
Certain religious officials become government officials by virtue of their religious position (as in Iran)	1.088	0	3	0.292
Some/all government officials must meet religious requirements to hold office (Excludes religious positions such as head of state church)	1.118	0	4	0.665
Presence of religious courts which have jurisdiction over matters of family law and inheritance	1.147	0	5	0.651
Presence of religious courts which have jurisdiction over some matters of law other than family law and matters of inheritance	1.029	0	1	0.595
Female testimony in government court is given less weight than male testimony	1.118	0	4	0.803
Seats in Legislative branch and/or Cabinet are by law or custom granted, at least in part, along religious lines	1.000	0	0	0.307
Prohibitive restrictions on abortion	1.088	2	5	0.265
Restrictions on access to birth control	1.088	1	4	0.235
The presence of religious symbols on the state's flag	0.941	2	0	0.382

Religion listed on state identity cards or other government documents that most citizens must possess or fill out	1.000	1	1	0.572
A registration process for religious organizations exists which is different from the registration process for other nonprofit organizations	0.971	1	0	-0.301
Restrictions on women other than those listed above. ( i.e. restrictions on education, or jobs that they can hold)	1.029	0	1	0.705
Other religious prohibitions or practices that are mandatory. Specify:	1.000	0	0	0.400

Before the expert-weighted indexes are compared to the unweighted indexes, the results of the expert codings, in and of themselves, validate my argument that there is no agreement among experts (Fox 2008: 56). All but three of the thirty components of the religious discrimination index were weighted by at least one expert, and all but five were weighted by two or more experts. In addition, eleven components (36.7%) were coded as above average and as below average by different experts. The same is generally true for the other indexes. On the religious regulation index, all but one of twenty-nine items were weighted by two or more experts, and eleven components (37.9%) were coded as above average and below average by different experts. Similarly, on the religious legislation index, all but five of fifty-one components were weighted by at least one expert, and all but ten were weighted by at least two experts, fifteen (29.4%) being weighted in both directions. So overall, nearly all of the components were weighted by at least one expert, and about one third of them had experts weighting them in both directions.

This can be described as a relatively catastrophic failure of experts to agree. Accordingly, it is no surprise that the correlations between the unweighted indexes and the expert weighted indexes, presented in Table 5, are very high, at 0.999 for all three indexes. The weighted indexes were calculated by multiplying the score for each component by the expert weighting for this component, and the results were added. Thus despite the fact that there are significant differences in some of the weightings, the expert-weighted indexes are mathematically nearly identical to the unweighted indexes.



**Table 5: Correlations Between Standard and Weighted Variables  
for Average Scores: 1990–2008<sup>a</sup>**

Type of Index Correlated	Index		
	Religious Discrimination	Religious Regulation	Religious Legislation
Equal and expert weighted	0.999	0.999	0.999
Equal and factor weighted	0.997	0.986	0.968
Expert and factor weighted	0.997	0.990	0.976

All correlations in the table have a significance of  $p < 0.001$ .

<sup>a</sup> In cases in which the country was not coded for 1990, the first available year was used.

### *The Factor-Weighted Indexes*

The factor-weighted indexes are presented in Tables 2, 3, and 4. The correlations between these indexes and the unweighted indexes, shown in Table 5, are very high, though not as high as is the case with the expert-weighted index. Nevertheless, these correlations of 0.997, 0.986, and 0.968 for discrimination, regulation, and legislation, respectively, are more than sufficiently high to dispel the argument that mathematical weighting will create an index that is substantially different from the unweighted index. In fact, the difference between these two indexes is about the same as the agreement between coders in the intercoder reliability tests presented earlier.

In addition, the correlations between the expert-weighted and factor-weighted indexes are high. In fact, the three indexes—the unweighted, expert-weighted, and factor-weighted indexes—are so statistically similar as to be interchangeable. It would be unlikely that any statistical tests using these indexes as either independent or dependent variables would be substantially different depending on which weighting scheme was used. This supports my long-standing argument that the simpler and more transparent unweighted additive indexes are preferable (Fox 2008: 56).

It is interesting to note that Grim and Finke (2006), when performing similar tests on their variables, obtained similar results. Despite using structural equation models and confirmatory factor analysis, they found little difference between the unweighted additive index and the indexes that were constructed by using statistically based weighting. This analysis is the only one of which I am aware, other than the one presented here, that compares statistical weighting schemes to additive indexes of religion. Their analysis, combined with the results from this study, seriously undermines the argument that indexes of religious factors should be weighted.

## CONCLUSIONS

This data collection is an improvement on previous data collections for at least six reasons. First, it contains more components than previous collections did, and each of these components can be examined individually. Second, the nineteen-year time frame of yearly codings that were included in the dataset is longer than the time frame of any other collection, allowing for more sophisticated time-series studies. Third, I believe that there is no question that the variables are combined properly. There are certainly no glaring issues of combining variables in the wrong category, as there are with several of the previous datasets. Also, the above analysis demonstrates that the additive indexes that are used here are unlikely to be improved by any likely weighting scheme. Fourth, unlike all previous collections, including RAS1, the indexes include all government behavior in each category that we were able to identify on the basis of a full evaluation of the policies of all governments. Fifth, the data collection is based on a wider variety of sources than most previous data collections used. Sixth, on most of the indexes, the components themselves are scaled, allowing for an accounting of the strength and severity of the policies being measured. While previous datasets have some of these six advantages, several are unique to RAS2, and the others are not present in all cross-country data collections of state religion policy which include indexes.

This dataset not only constitutes a rich new source of data with more nuanced indexes than have been available; it also provides a wealth of information for more narrowly focuses studies. Each of the 110 components in these indexes can be examined individually or in any combination. Thus, for example, someone who is interested in studying the financing of religion could use the ten components of the religious legislation index that focus on funding.

Grim and Finke (2006: 15), in evaluating their own indexes, cite three methods for evaluating the data. The first is the characteristics of the judges. They argue that intercoder reliability of 0.9 or higher and the formal evaluation process of their codings meets this standard. The RAS2 coders meet and exceed this standard.

Grim and Finke's second method is evaluating the information available to the judges. The RAS2 project has invested between ten and seventy hours in collecting information for each of the 177 countries included in the dataset, for a total of approximately 8,000 hours of RA time as well as hundreds of hours of my time devoted to collecting and coding information. This time investment does not include the similar amount of time that was invested in the RAS1 reports, which were also used as a basis for the codings. As was described above, the RAS2 project cast a very wide net in collecting information. Arguably, this is a significantly wider net than any other project coding data on state religion policy.

The final criterion in Grim and Finke's methods of evaluation is the characteristics of the scaling process. As was noted above, the scales include all government activities that are known to occur, and rescaling using expert assessments and mathematical techniques does not substantially change the indexes. Furthermore, the combination of the variables into scales is done according to a strict categorization of variables based on the type of government action and what religious groups it influences. Thus the scaling process has high validity.

On the basis of the research generated by the RAS1 data, it is fair to expect the RAS2 data to be useful in determining the interactions between state religion policy and a wide variety of social, political, and economic phenomena. These include the interaction of state religion policy with economic success, personal religiosity, democracy, conflict, corruption, social capital, civil society, general (nonreligious) freedom and human rights, political parties, and religious leaders. In addition, an examination of the causes and trends in the factors measured by the indexes can shed light on important social science debates such as the debate over secularization theory.<sup>16</sup>

However, it is important to emphasize that despite the utility of the RAS2 dataset, it is limited to government religion policy. This is only one aspect of religion's political influence. As was noted above, other datasets exist that measure the impact of religious human rights organizations (Bush 2010), religious political parties (Fink 2008), religious leaders (Kratochwil 2005), and religion on the societal level (Grim and Finke 2011). Furthermore, the interaction between religion and politics is only one aspect of the larger political economy. For example, RAS2 does not address or measure the power and impact of religion on the societal level. The RAS2 dataset was never intended to be a complete measure of religion's impact on politics, much less a complete measure of all of religion's potential social influences. Rather, it is intended to be a measure of government religion policy that is as complete and accurate as possible. Arguably, the RAS project has achieved this goal.

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<sup>16</sup> For a listing of publications that have used the RAS dataset, see the project website at [www.religionandstate.org](http://www.religionandstate.org).

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