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Terrorism Analysis: Does Oppressed Religious Liberty Cause an Uprising of Terror Attacks?

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ABSTRACT

The political community's research comes across as inconclusive in regard to the relationship between liberty and terrorism, given the differing opinions on what defines 'liberty' and 'terrorism.' Most research up to 2016 has been done on terrorist data after 2001 and until 2010 (in some cases 2012). My research expands to the year 2014 to analyze the connection between religious oppression by governments of varying countries and their effect on the number of terror attacks in the span of one year. My research does not support my hypothesis of a relationship between these two variables; however, other religious factors included as controls showed a surprising positive correlation with the number of terror attacks in the year of 2014. These surprising results are important to the international community as to the policies we implement in regard to religious group integration in specific countries.

Keywords: Religious Freedom; Liberty; Terrorism; Oppression

"King: Should I specify for the realm what religion will be acceptable in this Kingdom, as the Emperor in the East did?"

Titus: If you are of such sagacity, my Lord, that you know all the secrets of the Universe, you would be remiss if you did not specify the acceptable religion. But if you, too, are mortal, and your understanding is partial, I would think it arrogant to dictate to the people how they should approach Existence. Each has his own understanding, and each his own ability to understand."

— Vann Turner, *To Forestall the Darkness: A Novel of Ancient Rome*

Terrorism, a word that can invoke a reaction from people around the world, is an international phenomenon of political violence that has become a harrowing subject. Ironically, until the September 11, 2001 terror attacks on American soil by al-Qaeda affiliated operatives, there was scarce research on the field of international terrorism. A search on terrorism returns a figure of 2,900 articles published prior to

September 2001, and 25,000 articles since (Simpson 2014). In literature since this attack, there have been many studies on the causes of terrorism and the tactics that can be used to prevent terrorism by the international community. Because the attack on American soil that started a dramatic increase in scholarly interest was an attack by a self-declared religious terrorist group, my research will focus on the literature that tries to explain the causes of religious terrorism. It will also attempt to decipher how the many discussed causes of religious terrorism have an effect on the overall terror attacks that take place within a country in a given year.

Many researchers explain terrorist activity as being caused by numerous variables, and I have made an effort to include all of those variables along with the variable I see as a primary factor in the breeding ground of terrorism. I will build

upon previous research by researching the impact that oppressive regimes have upon terrorism, particularly authoritarian governments that repress religious liberty.

When one lives in a democratic country, there is a strong attachment to the word “liberty.” Nearly every American patriotic pledge or anthem encultures not only the word, but the concept, as being a fundamental idea in our nation’s foundation and in its survival. However, liberty is presumably only mentioned to the average person at sports events when listening to the national anthem, or in a setting in which citizens place their hands upon their hearts to recite the Pledge of Allegiance. We seem to be so immersed in our liberties and freedoms that we don’t question what it would be like if these liberties and freedoms were taken away from us. Nevertheless, there are many countries in the world that repress their citizens’ liberties and freedoms. One of the most specifically targeted liberties by authoritarian regimes is religious liberty.

Religious liberty is referred to by many religious and legal scholars as the “first freedom” (Saiya and Scime 2015). Religious liberty entitles the capability to think freely about the ultimate questions of one’s existence and the pursuit of meaning—whether God exists, the purpose of life, the path to ultimate flourishing—is an essential part of human nature and constitutes the most basic form of liberty of conscience (Saiya and Scime 2015). This literature also argues that if this “first freedom” is taken away, citizens of a state may not be or feel “free” in any other area.

The relationship between liberty and terrorism is regarded by the political community as inconclusive, given the differing opinions on what defines ‘liberty’

and ‘terrorism.’ Having stated that, this research tries to stick to the idea of religious liberty in regard to terrorism as defined by the Global Terrorism Database. Because there are significantly fewer religiously-based terror attacks compared to secular terroristic attacks, there is a possibility that the traits which characterize terrorism in general may not apply to religious terrorists (Saiya and Scime 2015). Religious terrorists are very different from secular terrorists in the fact that their faith is the primary inspiration for legitimizing attacks which results in a very different worldview than that of a secular terrorist. The belief that the terror attacks they operate are in support of the divine impact both the political demands they make and the level of violence that they inflict. In fact, past scholars have found that religious terrorists fight harder, longer, and cause more devastation than secular terrorists (Saiya and Scime).

There is research, however, that can both support and challenge the relationship between religious oppression and religiously motivated terror attacks. Previous research has drawn a link between terrorism and many other factors. Other literature explores the relationship between globalization (Demir and Varlik 2015), economic sanctions (Choi and Luo 2013), poverty (Meierrieks 2012), corruption (Simpson 2014), and minority discrimination (Piazza 2012) in regard to terroristic activity. My argument, however, is that all of these factors can be supporting variables that coincide with religious oppression by authoritarian governments.

Relevant Literature

Globalization

One theory that has prevailed in regard to the uprising of international terrorism is the modern acceptance of

globalization. In countries that have a hard time with the modernization requirements of globalization, this environment can quickly turn into a breeding ground for terrorism. While the elites of the world are gaining from this globalization, nations of the world that are not as modernized are falling behind drastically in regards to stability and security. Failed states, minorities, and separatists use terrorism to counterbalance the power gap or to solidify their authority when globalization affects the stability of a state. The collapse of a secure environment and the impoverishment of the nation-state are consequences of the implementation of globalization leading to heightened instability (Demir and Varlik 2015).

As a result of this instability, terrorist groups gain power by taking advantage of the failures of globalization through gaining support from the frustrated population. The imbalance of power between terrorism and the state could result from either or both a dramatic impoverishment of the nation or an extraordinary power gain of terror groups, according to Demir and Varlik's research. This supports my hypothesis of religious oppression because globalization leads to a collision of different religious ideals that may affect countries that implement a certain religion, causing minority groups to feel justified in their terroristic tendencies after their freedom of religious practice is infringed upon.

In regard to globalization, there are certain pressures from foreign governments upon each other for many reasons, whether they be humanitarian breeches of international law or noncompliance with the elite powers of the United Nations. In a show of soft power, these pressures can result in economic sanctions. Although the main purpose of economic sanctions is to coerce rogue countries to conform to

international norms and laws, they can unintentionally produce a negative situation for the citizens of that country that could lead to terrorism. It is argued that sanctions intensify economic hardships on the poor within countries and this increases their level of grievance and makes them more likely to support or engage in international terrorism (Choi and Luo 2013). Ironically, the economic sanctions used to force the hand of rogue regimes do not hurt the government, but the citizens (mainly the oppressed poor). The observation that these oppressed, impoverished groups will riot and resort to terrorism is a theme addressed by many researchers.

Poverty

Some researchers argue that poverty in regards to the nation as a whole is too broad of a category to study when most terrorist attacks occur in urban cities. This observation has led researchers to study the effects of urban poverty on terrorist activity in a population. State institutions are weak in the cities of the developing world and fail to provide the urban poor with economic and public services, leading to economic and social insecurity. This sometimes forces the most impoverished groups to look towards power seeking terror groups which provide them with benefits such as identity, security, employment, education, and health services (Meierrieks 2012). These benefits create a culture of 'group think' that can be, at times, religious. Urban poverty fuels terrorism, given the opportunity is presented for groups to recruit and achieve popular support among the urban population that are dependent on and bound to these terror organizations. This gives these groups a following of completely dependent, frustrated citizens that will support and fight for their rise to power.

Corruption

Corruption is a theory that has been researched in recent years in relation to religious terrorism. In a corrupt, oppressive government, those who are supportive of the government get benefits as opposed to minority groups who disagree with the governmental system. Accordingly, one would expect to observe acts of terrorism conducted by individuals or groups as a result of frustration developed in a repressive political environment (Simpson 2014). Corruption is “the abuse of entrusted power for private gain” (Oxford Dictionary). This definition implies that there is a repressed group that is excluded from gaining from the government, which can quickly result in terrorism given the lack of political resources at the aggrieved party’s disposal. In many cases, this oppressed group is a religious group that does not conform to the dominant religion of those governing the state.

Country Level Studies

Three states that have been extensively researched in regards to their own inner workings and how those lead to a high presence of terrorism are Pakistan, India, and Nigeria. The case of Pakistan shows that attempts by the state to protect civilians against terrorism may unintentionally lead to oppression, and this consequence may result in the possibility of further acts of terrorism by those oppressed citizens. Pakistan’s reputation is one that models as both a nation that fights international terrorism and at the same time experiences extreme amounts of domestic and is a suspected sponsor of international terror (Nizami 2014). India is an example of a self-declared secular nation that repeatedly discriminates and oppresses non-Hindu Indians. India has a government that is characteristically democratic, economically stable, and is in a region of the world that ranks slightly less than moderate in

perceptive corruption factors. By being religiously oppressive to minorities, this case is closely related to the principle of religious liberty in regards to religious terrorism when other factors are slightly less imminent (Majid 2015). The case of Nigeria, however, challenges the theory that democratic regimes are less likely to encounter terrorist activity within their borders. Lately, Nigeria has gained the reputation of being one of the world’s biggest breeding grounds for communal and religious terrorism, despite being a relatively new democracy (Bamidele 2014).

Religious Oppression

Although there are many different theories that can be linked to generalized terrorist activity, religious oppression is a theory that embodies an ideology that can be seen as a direct link to religious terrorism. In present global security, groups such as Boko Haram in Africa, al-Qaeda in the Middle East, and Islamic State’s influence in both regions are of growing concern. Not so coincidentally, these groups are all self-declared religiously motivated in their terrorist activity. Some research has been done specifically on minority religiously oppressed groups which could show further insight on how to look at religious terror groups.

Although religion is not a single, simple factor that causes terrorist violence, religious elements can often feature in their belief systems. This emphasis on religiosity can benefit in their recruitment tactics to appeal to those in areas with a religiously oppressed minority. Membership in a terrorist group fulfills certain emotional needs of an individual, while also providing an outlet for the emotions that can be prevalent in those oppressed by their nation’s government (Rogers 2007). According to Rogers’ research, no matter

how successful a terrorist group appears to be, terrorist groups represent a minority within their communities. The leaders of such terrorist groups rely on the concept of ethnocentrism, which is defined as ‘the view of things in which one’s own group is at the center of everything, and all others are scaled or rated with reference to it’ (Rogers 2007). This way of thinking allows members of the group to see their group as better than all others, and they are more likely to use violence in defense of their group (Rogers 2007).

The experience of discrimination by minority groups produces a sense of collective identity among them that they are outliers from the majority culture, which resonates a sense of alienation in one’s own country. For example, systematic unemployment, social welfare, and housing discrimination against Catholics in Northern Ireland through the 1960s and 1970s aided Irish Republican Army recruitment efforts and prompted higher levels of terrorist attacks (Piazza 2012). Along with this emotional alienation, if a political system denies its citizens the appropriate channels to challenge legislation, they are increasingly more likely to engage in political violence, as they see this as the only way to promote their cause.

An example of the before and after implementation of this theory could be the restrictions on Kurdish dress, celebration of traditional holidays, and the bans on the use of the Kurdish language in schools and media in Turkey. These were major grievances that caused the development of the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) terrorist movement in the 1980s and 1990s. In support of this theory, when more recent accommodation of Kurdish ethnic practice by succeeding Turkish governments were

implemented, there was a major decline in PKK activity (Al Jazeera).

Qualitative research suggests that discrimination against minority groups precipitates terrorism in countries (Piazza 2012). According to Piazza’s research linking ethnic, racial, and class discrimination in a society with violent terrorist activity, discrimination increases the likelihood that a country will experience terrorist attacks. Piazza used models with economic, political, cultural, linguistic, and religious discrimination. He found that economic discrimination was the most efficient factor in whether or not terrorist activity would occur, followed closely by political discrimination. While the study found a relatively low connection between religious discrimination and overall terroristic activity, more research has been done recently by Saiya and Scime which focuses on religious terrorism.

The coding of terror attacks from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) is used by the large majority of researchers. This source includes a database of terror incidents from 1970 to 2014. The results coded “Religious Incidents” are used by Saiya and Scime, whose research I will build upon. An attack is coded as religious terror if it includes all three following conditions “(1) it was carried out by a group or individual that conceives of itself as a predominantly religious actor; (2) that group frames its mission in religious terms, although it may have other goals as well; (3) the attacker, although perhaps involved in a communitarian conflict that politicizes religious symbols, holds a discernible religious ideology or motivation that serves to animate its strategies and goals apart from or in addition to the mere utilization of religious objects or rhetoric” (Saiya and Scime 2015). They found that states that

oppress religious freedom are more likely to experience a religious terror attack. These findings are so supported that when a country has a low level of religious oppression, the values of the other variables in the study had no effect whatsoever on terror attacks. This suggests that when a country is free to express their religion, religious inspired terror attacks occur at a lesser rate than in countries that have limited or no religious liberty.

This analysis concludes that high regulation of religion corresponds to a greater percentage of religiously motivated attacks than countries with either moderate or low levels of religious restrictions. (Saiya and Scime 2015). While there are obviously exceptions to this rule, the majority of the data supports this theory. The findings also showed that, in contrast with the previous opinions that religious terrorism is linked to poverty, the level of a country's wealth had no relation to religious terrorism.

The idea that repressing religion in some states actually enhances the likelihood of religious based terror attacks could unsettle many countries who believe strongly in such a process. This study does not suggest that religiously free countries never experience religious terrorism or that religiously restrictive ones always do. The concluding idea is that efforts to repress religion do not always succeed in diminishing religion's influence, therefore, it cannot be used as a credible counterterrorism strategy. These states can actually serve as a sort of breeding ground for extremists. When these extremists are prevented from practicing their faith they are more likely to turn to violence, which they see as the only way to bring about change in a system designed against them. The results of this study could significantly contribute to this area of study by providing data that calls

upon policymakers to take religious freedom seriously. Because many countries see religious freedom as a threat to national security, the default response of many states is to restrict its expression. However, as this research has shown, religious liberty could be a vital weapon against terrorism and a sustainable security plan, making this issue about both human rights and national security.

While there are many theories that try to explain the rise of terrorism, the most prevalent subcategory of terror today is religious terrorism. As Saiya and Scime have concluded, there is an obvious relationship between countries that oppress religious liberty and terrorist activity within the borders of those nations. This research, however, is comparatively outdated in regard to Islamic State and Boko Haram, two terror cells that have become prevalent in modern media and international global security discussion. Most research up to 2016 has been done on terrorist data after 2001 until 2010 (in some cases 2012).

Hypotheses

In my research I found data for the years after Saiya and Scime's analysis to build upon their thesis. The rise of ISIS wasn't a threat to international security until approximately 2009, which was the year that data was concluded in this study. My data is concentrated on the year 2014 to see how the rise of ISIS and Boko Haram has impacted this data, especially considering their dominance in failed states with governmental oppression having minimal to no enforcement. While additional research is in support of other factors that result in terrorism in general terms, my research aimed to show that these factors are due to religious oppression. My research aims to prove that without the repression of religious

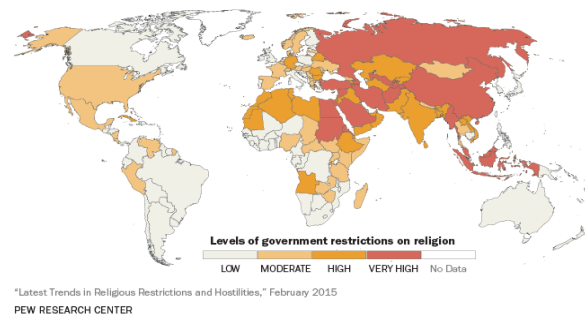
liberty, these factors are far less likely to result in religious terrorism. My research, however, included control factors to support my main hypothesis. I began with three hypotheses to test:

- Hypothesis 1: Religiously oppressive states are more likely to experience a higher number of overall terror attacks.
- Hypothesis 2: Countries with high levels of religious hostilities are more likely to experience a higher number of overall terror attacks.
- Hypothesis 3: Corruption is a contributing factor to the number of terror attacks in a country, while poverty, measured by low GDP per capita PPP, is a factor that does not contribute to terrorism.

Data and Methodology

I utilized the Global Terrorism Database, collapsing the data into a one-year sample size (2014) and grouping the terror attacks by country. I manually created a new dataset to include my independent and control variables and transferred the information for each of the forty-one countries I included in this research. For a smaller sample size, and to leave out bias in countries of choice, I used the top 10 countries in each category of religious oppression as researched by the PEW Research Center. The four categories are Low regulation, Moderate regulation, High regulation, and a Very High amount of regulation. In coding this, I numbered them 1-4 with 1 being Low and 4 being Very High. My dependent variable derived from each country's number of terror attacks, in total.

Figure 1. Map of Governmental Restrictions



Note: This map shows the recorded governmental restrictions on religion around the world, as recorded by the PEW Research Center. (Benjamin Wormald 2015)

My control variables are poverty, which was measured by GDP Per Capita Purchasing Power Parity (PPP), corruption, and social religious oppression. Corruption is measured by the Corruption Perceptions Index 2014 put forth by Transparency International, in which corruption is measured by faith in a corrupt-free government on a scale from 0-100. The lower the score of a country, the more corrupt the country is ranked. Social religious oppression is a concept that shows a relationship between dominant religious sects within society in which one benefits from systematic injustice towards other sects. Social religious oppression is measured using the same database as my independent variable and is coded in the exact same fashion. The GDP per capita PPP was found on the World Bank website to rank poverty. Missing data was coded appropriately.

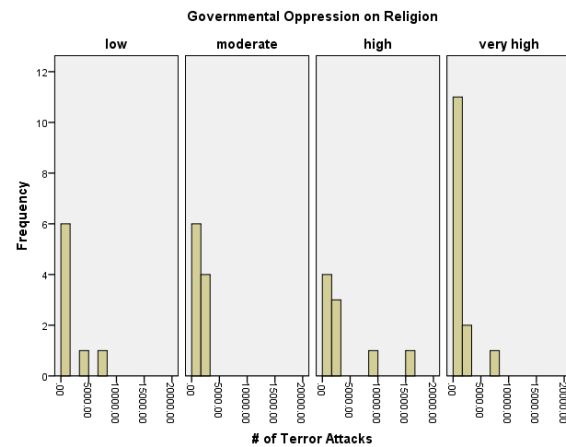
Countries included in this analysis are as follows: Afghanistan, Australia, Bahrain, Belarus, Belgium, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Canada, China, Colombia, Egypt, Eritrea, Finland, France, Greece, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kenya,

Lebanon, Malaysia, Moldova, Myanmar, Netherlands, Nigeria, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Thailand, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uganda, United Kingdom, United States, Uzbekistan, and Yemen (see Figure 1).

Results

After creating a scatterplot of both my independent and dependent variable, it appears that my proposed relationship is not linearly related. The results are grouped together along the different levels of governmental regulation of religion, so the data is pretty spread out. However, there seems to be a slight positive increase in the number of terror attacks in a country as government regulation of religion becomes more oppressive. After running a one-way ANOVA of my dependent variable against my independent variable, I found that the level of religious oppression had little significance in the number of terror attacks in a country in one year. The post hoc breakdown comparing mean differences in my dependent variable across various levels of my independent variable seem to be the same throughout. The *p* value is 0.392, which is greater than 0.05 and therefore not in the critical region where my null hypothesis would be rejected. The relationship between these different levels of

Figure 2. Effect of Religious Oppression on Number Terror Attacks



Note. This graph represents an inconsistent relationship in the frequency of terror attacks in regard to the multiple levels of governmental oppression on religion.

oppression cannot be considered significant because they are above the significance cutoff level of 0.05 (see Figure 2).

My linear regression equation is $y = B_0 1,830.375 + B_1 5.925 + E$. According to this equation, the governmental regulation of religion in a country does not account for a significant number of terror attacks. My R^2 value is 0.000005, which indicates that there is absolutely no linear relationship between my two variables. This compares with my earlier data finding because both results hint towards a failed hypothesis.

<i>Table 1. Predictors of Terror Attacks</i>				
	Unstandardized B	Standard Error	Standardized Beta	Signif. (p- value)
Government Repression on Religion	-793.014	605.800	-.272	.200
Social Hostility To Religion	1434.300	608.053	.435	.025
GDP Per Capita PPP	.063	.061	.312	.309
Corruption	-65.016	51.925	-.428	.220

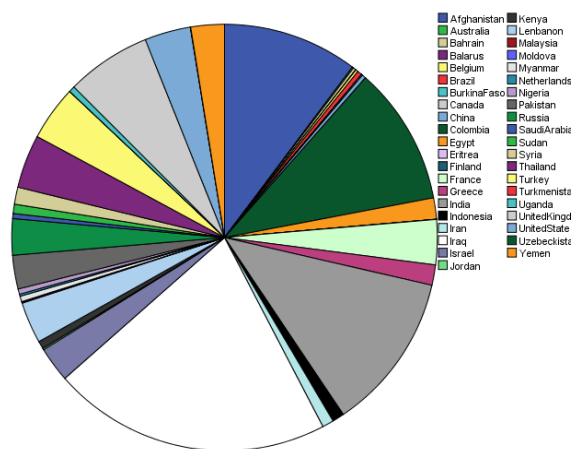
My multiple regression analysis includes a test run on my independent variable along with my dependent variable and three controls: Social Hostilities towards Religion, Corruption, and GDP per capita PPP. This analysis produces an equation of $y = B_0 + B_1x_1 + B_2x_2 + B_3x_3 + E$ (see Table 1). Adding control variables changed my R^2 to 0.207, which is a considerable increase in model fit compared to my linear regression. This means that with the addition of corruption, social hostilities towards religion, and GDP per capita PPP we can create a model that more accurately identifies a relationship to the number of terror attacks that occur in a country in one year. The variable with the most effect on the number of terror attacks in a country is the variable regarding social hostilities in regards to religion. Overall, my IV is the least significant variable in regard to predicting the number of terror attacks in a country. This means that my hypothesis is unsupported by the data and that governmental regulation and oppression towards religious expression has very little effect on the number of terror attacks that a country will experience.

Discussion

While my results did not support my primary hypothesis, one variable tested, social hostilities towards religion, showed a very strong relationship with the total number of terrorist attacks in each country tested (see Figure 3). This supports my second hypothesis and the idea that religious oppression does in fact lead to a high number of terrorist attacks. Turkmenistan represents an example of a country with a high governmental oppression of religion, a \$15,474 GDP per capita PPP, and high corruption perception (17), but scored Low in social hostilities towards religion. This country only experienced two terrorist

attacks in 2014. This is one example of how sizable the relationship between social hostilities towards religion impacts the number of terror attacks a country is likely to experience. All other factors in the case of Turkmenistan seem to not affect the number of terror attacks so long as the social hostilities toward religion are relatively low.

The country with the largest amount of terror attacks in 2014, Iraq, reported 16,023 terror attacks in 2014 alone. Iraq had *Figure 3. Pie Chart Representing Percentage of Terror Attacks in Regard to Whole*



Note. This pie chart shows the distribution of terrorist attacks in the countries chosen for this research within 2014.

a '3' level of governmental repression on religion, which is high but not so repressive to be considered Very High (4). Social Hostilities in Iraq were measured at a rate of Very High. Iraq's GDP per capita PPP amounted to \$15,057 and scored a 16 in governmental corruption. The similarities of Iraq and Turkmenistan are almost identical on paper, however; the social hostilities towards religion are opposite of each other, which explains the number of terrorist attacks in each country according to this research.

Another interesting country case study is the United Kingdom, where 4,881 terrorist attacks were recorded in 2014. The UK has a Low repression of religion, however; social hostilities towards religion are recorded as High (3). The GDP per capita PPP is \$39,762 and the corruption perception is exceptionally high (78). This is interesting in regards to the fact that every variable besides social hostilities toward religion would suggest a low number of terror attacks in the UK per year, yet the recorded number of terror attacks is extremely high.

This information is important to notice in the international community because it shows a direct relationship between attitudes towards religion and the number of terror attacks a country will experience. My further questions after this research are in reference to what can be done to soften the hostilities against religion that are plaguing the world and, according to this research, increasing the number of vicious terror attacks. If I were to further this research, I would conduct a test on the different variables that have been researched to help eliminate or ease prejudices against religion. While this may be impossible to implement on a personal level, maybe there are steps governments could take or policies that could be implemented in order to bring the hostilities to a more peaceful coexistence. What do countries that experience low levels of hostilities towards religion such as Canada, Eritrea, Finland, Belarus, and Turkmenistan do that allow their populations to experience an environment that is less prone to terror attacks?

Terrorism is a phenomenon that is becoming more and more prevalent in everyday life of the twenty first century (Piazza 2012). Not only are there more

attacks recorded, but more casualties (Piazza 2012). In the case of religious terrorism, previous literature has noted that more casualties are to be expected in religious attacks than in secular terror incidents due to the belief in a divine purpose. This should provide a significant motive to take action in putting an end to terrorism. Perhaps this research could be a step forward in finding solutions to prevent terrorist groups from forming, if they feel their religious beliefs are not under scrutiny or active attack. Realistically, this is an idealistic goal – the human race has argued over the meaning of existence for centuries. However, these tensions seem to have risen in recent years, perhaps due to globalization, and any plan to ease these hostilities could be a step forward in preventing terrorist attacks, or at least reducing them.

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