Politics of God or Politics of Man? The Role of Religion and Deprivation in Predicting Support for Political Violence in Israel

Eran Zaidi, Daphna Canetti-Nisim, Ami Pedahzur

University of Haifa

This study examines the associations between religious affiliation and religiosity and support for political violence through a nationwide sample of Israeli Jews and Muslims. Based on structural equation modeling, the findings show that by and large Muslims are more supportive of political violence than Jews and more religious persons are less supportive of political violence. Deprivation, however, was found to mediate these relations, showing that the more deprived – whether Muslims or Jews, religious or non-religious persons – are more supportive of political violence. The explanatory strength of religion and deprivation combined in this manner was found to be stronger than any of these variables on their own. The findings cast doubt on negative stereotypes both of Islam and of religiosity as promoting political violence. They suggest that governments which want peace at home, in Israel as elsewhere, would do well to ensure that ethnic and religious differences are not translated into, and compounded by, wide socio-economic gaps.

For many years scholars have been searching for explanations of political violence. The abundant factors examined to date range from biological to psychological, cultural, social and political issues. Favored explanations have varied in accordance with both research findings and social and political trends. Still, the view that religion leads to political violence resurfaced in the 1980s, and gained prominence in the 1990s and early 2000s. This claim has been tendered with respect to several different, though related and non-exclusive, forms of political violence: localized violence driven by religious-based intolerance (Beatty and Walter, 1984; Hayes and McAllister, 2001; Hodson et al., 1994; Johansen, 1997; Karpov, 2002; Nunn et al., 1978; Piereson et al., 1980; Stouffer, 1955) or religious institutions (Fox, 1998); large scale ethno-nationalist violence within or between countries (Huntington, 1993; 1996; Marty, 1997); and terrorism (Hoffman, 1995; 1998; Juergensmeyer, 1993; 2001a; 2001b; Pape, 2003; Rapoport, 1984; Stern, 2003).

The view that religion is a major source of political violence is underpinned by the many historical occasions on which political violence was explicitly carried out in the name of religion or religious values, from the Muslim conquests and Christian Crusades in the Middle Ages; the Spanish Inquisition and Europe’s many religious wars from the Renaissance to the seventeenth century; to the more recent sectarian conflicts in Ireland and the Indian sub-continent and international terrorism explicitly carried out in the name of Islam.
Included in the list are also smaller-scale acts of political violence such as the Sarin gas attack in a crowded Japanese subway perpetrated by the obscure Aum Shinrikyo cult, the attacks by Christian fundamentalists in the United States on doctors and nurses involved in abortion work, and the regular stone throwing by religious Jews at motorists in Israel on the Sabbath (Beit-Hallahmi, 2001). As Mark Juergensmeyer (2001a) points out, violent interpretations have been the fate of all religions.

Yet the claim that the violence in these or other instances was motivated solely or even mainly by religion is still very much under debate. This article attempts to explore the relationship empirically. More specifically, it tries to determine: (a) whether support for political violence differs across religions (in this study only Jews and Muslims are compared); (b) whether support for political violence varies with the degree of religiosity; and (c) whether deprivation – objective and subjective – mediates the relationship between religion and support for political violence.

Political violence, in this study, is taken to mean the use (or threat) of force against individuals and institutions representing the state and its bodies. Political violence is thus an attempt to change a political situation by using violent means against political actors – mainly office holders (Feierabend et al., 1972; 1973, p. 393). The dependent variable measured in this study is not actual participation in acts of political violence, but rather the attitudinal support of such. Support for political violence is therefore taken to mean a willingness to participate in actions of political violence in predetermined circumstances. Although correlations between attitudes and behaviors are often far from absolute, research in the social sciences has come to rely on these specifically where the direct measurement of behavior is difficult or impossible (Ajzen, 2001; 2005; Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Wallace et al., 2005). In the study of political violence, attitudinal measures have previously been employed with relative success (Canache, 1996; Hayes and McAllister, 2001; Pedahzur et al., 2000).

**Religion and Political Violence**

For many decades now, social science has been aware of the existence of several relationships between religion and political activity (Norris and Inglehart, 2004). Kraig Beyerlein and Mark Chaves (2003) extensively review the literature deriving from empirical studies carried out in the United States, and present a multitude of empirically based studies showing that religious organizations, leaders and congregations encourage their members to participate in political activity. Their findings suggest that the political activities of religious congregations also include protest, and that distinctive religious traditions support protest in varying degrees (Beyerlein and Chaves, p. 237). Earlier studies support this argument (McVeigh and Smith, 1999; Verba et al., 1995) and show that people
who regularly participate in religious services are significantly more active in protests and demonstrations compared to those who do not participate in such services at all, or who do so less often.

Studies of domestic conflicts, civil wars and political turmoil have also found evidence of the influence of religion (Fox, 1997; 1999; 2000; 2004; Reynal-Querol, 2002; Roeder, 2003; Rummel, 1997), as have studies of international conflict (Henderson, 1997; 1998). Although these studies avoid the explicit statement that religion is the primary cause of conflict, they have all implicated it as affecting conflict in some way or another. Jonathan Fox (2004a; 2004b) concludes that although political and social scientists have often opted to ignore religion, it has nonetheless featured in much of the world’s politics and conflict throughout the twentieth century.

Even so, while there seems to be a consensus regarding the influence of religion itself, explanations addressing questions concerning the roles religion plays were harder to come by. Recently, Fox (1998; 2004a) and Andreas Hasenclever and Volker Rittberger (2000) divided the various explanations of how religion may induce political violence into three non-exclusive categories: primordial, instrumental and constructivist.

The primordial explanation holds that religions are totalistic, exclusive belief systems (Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle, 1997) which lead to violent conflict because of their inherent intractability and exclusivity, leaving little room for the negotiation of conflicts. This view is at the core of Samuel P. Huntington’s (1993; 1996) ‘clash of civilizations’ theory in which he argues that ‘religion is a central defining characteristic of civilizations’ (Huntington, 1996, p. 47) and that ‘the relations between states and groups from different civilizations will not be close and will often be antagonistic’ (Huntington, 1996, p. 183). Empirical support for the primordial explanation may be adduced from studies purporting to show that most international and national conflicts revolve around a cultural-religious axis (Hwang, 1997; Weinberg and Eubank, 1999).

The instrumental explanation maintains that religion may lead to political violence through exploitation by political elites. These elites may take advantage of religious institutions and personal bonds to form a coherent political community that can be mobilized into political action, of which violence may be an instrument (Juergensmeyer, 2001b; Fox, 1998; Fuller, 1995). Several scholars (e.g. Almond et al., 1995; Kunovich and Hodson, 1999) have pointed out that religion lends itself to such political exploitation because it provides a basis for group identification, with concomitant intolerance towards other groups. Some support for the instrumental explanation may be adduced from studies showing how political leaders mobilize religious institutions and ties for political ends (e.g. Haynes, 1994).

The constructivist explanation maintains that religion will not lead non-violent persons to commit violent acts, but may provide psychological legitimization for
political violence for persons who are, in any case, inclined to violence (Adler, 1997; Guzzini, 2000; Hasenclever and Rittberger, 2000). The claim is that religion may help such persons overcome the usual barriers to violence: by providing them with a belief in a higher authority that enables them to disregard the authority of the state; by promising them reward in eternity, which reduces their fear of punishment in this life; and by distinguishing between believers and non-believers in a way that enables the dehumanization and demonization of the victim and lowers the normative psychological inhibitions to violence. Some support for the constructivist explanation may be found in the religious justifications given by some perpetrators of political violence, including Christians who attack abortion clinics in the name of their religion (Beit-Hallahmi, 2001), the Jewish murderer of the late Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin (Sprinzak, 1999) and Muslim suicide bombers (Israeli, 2002; Stern, 2003).

Many writers (e.g. Deeb, 1992; Denoeux, 2002; Huntington, 1993; 1996; Layachi and Haireche, 1992; Mazrui, 1997; Piscatori, 1994) on political violence also suggest that, of all religions, Islam is particularly prone to this. Gabriel Ben-Dor and Ami Pedahzur trace the nature of ‘Islamic Fundamentalism’ to key attributes of Islam. They maintain that key Islamic concepts (e.g. jihad and istitihad) combined with modern social and circumstantial attributes of Islamic religion work together to make Islam more prone to violent interpretations. Still, they also clearly warn against an ‘automatic’ acceptance of Muslims as violent or fundamentalist, referring to social and political circumstances and forces as the primary reason behind Islamic fundamentalism (Ben-Dor and Pedahzur, 2003, p. 86). Similarly, Daniel Pipes (2002) and Pipes and Mimi Stillman (2002) also refer to the notion that radical Islamists are indeed a minority among all Muslims, but make the point that this is a very influential minority affecting many (less radical) Muslim believers.

Although circumstantial, it is easy to point to the active involvement of religious Muslims in the revolution in Iran, in murders and massacres in Algeria (Kalyvas, 1999), in terrorism in South-East Asia and in many other acts of political violence, including, of course, the attack on the Twin Towers. Some scholars (including, but not limited to Payne, 2003; Pipes 2003) maintain that these and other instances of political violence perpetrated by Muslims stem from the very nature of Islam, which contains within it the obligation of jihad – holy war – against the infidel (Ghadbian, 2000) and which is by nature a totalistic and politically oriented religion.

However, neither the general assumption that religion leads to political violence nor the specific claim that Islam is particularly prone to political violence has really received sufficient proof (Fox, 2004c). The evidence for both claims is often circumstantial – that is, based on historical data – making it extremely difficult to rule out the effect of other variables. Indeed, several observers have noted that in many conflicts, one may find other explanations, such as elite mobilization, struggles for resources, and/or the social structure (Fearon and Laitin, 2000;
Rusciano, 2001; Wieland, 2001). We must therefore ask what other factors may account for the support of religious believers for political violence. One prominent factor suggested over several decades of research is deprivation.

**Deprivation: Objective and Subjective**

In the social sciences, the concept of deprivation is based on the Freudian theory of ‘frustration-aggression’, which views frustration as the primary cause of aggressive behavior (Freud, 1962). While the Freudian theory applies to individuals, Ted R. Gurr (1968; 1970; 2000) and others (e.g. Davis, 1962; Geschwender, 1964; Runciman, 1966) developed the concept of relative deprivation to explain both individual and mass support for political violence and participation in violent revolutions, turmoil and civil wars (Gurr, 1970, p. 11). According to Gurr (1970, p. 13), the sense of (relative) deprivation is the outcome of a perceived discrepancy between persons’ expectations, on the one hand, and their capabilities and just deserts, on the other. Political violence, he claims, is bred by the frustration resulting from this discrepancy. Defined more simply, the term relative deprivation describes ‘discontent stemming from the belief that one is getting less than one is entitled to’ (De La Rey and Raju, 1996, p. 579).

A vast amount of study has been devoted to testing Gurr’s claims. Judging from several literature reviews, most of these studies proceeded by examining correlations between aggregate-level socio-economic data and one or another form of actual political violence across countries (Brown and Boswell, 1997; Gurr, 1970; 1996; 2000; Muller, 1972; Rule, 1988; Sigelman and Simpson, 1977; Weede, 1986). That is, countries exhibiting substantial gaps between social groups in such matters as income distribution and political power were thought to have had more violent occurrences than those with lesser gaps. However, the actual empirical evidence is highly controversial. While most theorists still agree as to the importance of the relative deprivation theory and its modern counterparts (Lichbach, 1989), empirical studies have shown inconsistencies, and many have not been able to support the theory (Brush, 1996; Horowitz, 1985; Rule, 1988).

In a critical review of the literature, Stephen G. Brush (1996) points out that other variables, notably low political trust and the belief that violence will breed results, have been found to overshadow the contribution of deprivation in explaining violence. Gurr himself (2000) has excluded economic variables from his analysis based on the statistical insignificance of these. Fox (2004b) has also concluded that relative deprivation does not by itself explain conflict and insurgency.

Nonetheless, it seems that the relative deprivation theory and the variables it includes are reluctant to fade from the literature. T. Y. Wang et al. (1993, p. 991), who analyzed the relationship between violent occurrences and deprivation variables, concluded that they were even more confident than before that ‘high levels of income inequality promote high levels of political violence’. A recent
study found similar associations at the neighborhood level, with residents’ support for the use of political violence increasing with the inequality of the distribution of income and goods (Canache, 1996).

The great bulk of the studies testing deprivation theories have defined deprivation in measurable, objective terms, such as income, education, place of residence and other socio-economic variables (Canache, 1996; Maro and Moore, 1990). Gurr’s (1970) central theory, however, refers to subjective perceptions as much as objective realities. Even though he himself employed objective measures for deprivation, he pointed out that not all persons of relatively low socio-economic status necessarily feel deprived, while some in seemingly relatively good socio-economic positions do.

Thus, a small number of scholars have investigated what they term ‘subjective deprivation’. Their studies, which are generally smaller in scale and employ questionnaire data, also show a significant association between (subjective) feelings of deprivation and political violence. Bernard N. Grofman and Edward N. Muller’s (1973) classic study of a sample of 503 residents of a small town in Iowa found that it was not the objective discrepancy between expectations and achievements that accounted for support for political violence, but rather subjective perceptions. Similarly, Joanne Martin et al. (1984) found that subjective deprivation was a better predictor of participation in political protest activities than objective deprivation. There is also some indication that persons can feel subjectively deprived and respond accordingly, not only as individuals but also as members of a group. Thus, in a study conducted in South Africa, Cheryl De La Rey and Patricia Raju (1996) found that the feeling that the racial group to which one belonged was deprived was a stronger predictor of support for political violence than the individual’s sense of subjective deprivation in relation to other members of their own racial group. This is particularly supportive of the ‘subjective’ concept of deprivation, as it involves a gap between individual and group status. Further, while both religion and deprivation variables have been independently used as predictors of political violence, there are probably many occurrences in which both factors are involved (Hasenclever and Rittberger, 2000).

The controversial evidence for relative deprivation theory, and for the effect of socio-economic grievances on the tendency for political violence, have taken their toll on the current study of political violence. Research addressing the phenomenon of political violence seems to take one of two forms. Some scholars believe that economic explanations for the outbreak of violence should simply be ignored, as they have been unsuccessful in the past. Others continue to use these explanations, combining them with numerous other variables in an attempt to find specific conditions which may explain why the relative deprivation explanation is successful at times but unsuccessful at others. This present study is an example of the latter group. Relative deprivation is suggested as a mediator between religious variables and support for political violence, and is tested in two forms: objective and subjective.
The Study and Its Rationale

This study examines the association between religion and deprivation and political violence. Specifically, it examines the associations between religious affiliation and degree of religiosity, on the one hand, and support for political violence, on the other, and whether the relationship (if any) is direct or mediated by objective and/or subjective deprivation.

The study was carried out among Israeli Jews and Muslims. Jews and Muslims in Israel are highly distinct from one another, differing, among other ways, in language, culture, myths and national aspirations (Pedahzur et al., 2000; Rabinowitz, 2001; Saouli, 2001). Although contact between the two groups exists in public places (e.g. beaches, universities, hospitals, public transportation, etc.), both groups live and, to a large extent, work apart; social commingling is rare and marital unions even rarer. In both communities, religion is a primary identification, often much stronger than nationality. At the same time, neither community is monolithic in its degree of religiosity (Koperlowitz, 2001; Sharot, 1990). The internal variations in both groups permit us to examine their degree of religiosity.

Jews are the more powerful group in the country (Swirsky and Konor-Atias, 2003). They make up 80.5 per cent of Israel’s citizen body, whereas Muslims comprise 14.5 per cent and Christians and Druze the remainder (Statistical Abstracts, 2002). Legally, Israel is defined as a Jewish state, with no separation between state and religion (Beit-Hallahmi, 1992). Thus, while Muslims enjoy autonomy with regard to religious affairs, virtually every other aspect of public life in Israel is Jewish (e.g. state symbols, public holidays, public discourse, etc.).

Muslims are represented in the Israeli parliament but only at about a half of their proportion in the population (9 out of 120 MPs), and their political status is weak. No Muslim party has ever been included in any of Israel’s coalition governments (Bricha, 2001). Partly out of concerns about dual loyalty, Muslims are excluded from many key posts in government, the public service and industry. In addition, state resources are differentially allocated to Jewish and non-Jewish populations (Gerbi and Levi, 2000; Ghanem and Ozacky-Lazer, 2001, p. 21). With these deprivations accompanied by political socialization in the values of equality and democracy, the Muslims in Israel gradually developed a growing consciousness of their secondary status (Ghanem, 2001; Smooha, 1989; 1997).

A sense of deprivation may also exist within the Jewish population, with large income gaps and deep social and political cleavages. Income of the highest deciles is more than twelve times that of the lowest and infant mortality is up to four times higher in poor Jewish communities than in wealthy ones (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2003; Liebman, 1995; Swirsky and Konor-Atias, 2003). Secular and religious Jews both feel that their lifestyle and values are not respected by the other group, and are even threatened by it (Edelman, 2000; Kimmerling, 1989).

Indeed, political violence in Israel has been perpetrated by both Muslims and Jews. In the first two decades of statehood, Muslim political violence consisted of
sporadic murders of Jews carried out by individuals, presumably in protest against the existence of the state. Beginning in the mid-1970s, the violence became more organized and received greater support in the community. Concentrated during the largely peaceful annual Land Day demonstrations, it consisted mainly of the occasional throwing of stones and incendiary devices, the erection of road blocks and clashes with police. With the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa Intifada in 2000, this violence escalated to the provision of logistic and intelligence support and transportation for Palestinian suicide bombers (Dudkevitch, 2004). Jewish political violence similarly took a variety of forms. In the early years of statehood, the remnants of various pre-state Jewish militias threatened and attacked government members and offices. Over the following decades, a variety of Jewish groups mounted violent protests over the issue of concessions for peace. Along somewhat different lines, labor unions have destroyed property as part of their struggle over working conditions and wages, while the Black Panther movement mounted violent protests against ethnic discrimination toward Jews of Eastern origin. Jewish religious groups regularly block roads and throw stones at persons driving on the Sabbath (an offense against religious law). The 1994 massacre of 29 Palestinians as they were praying and the 1995 assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin are examples of political violence on the part of individuals (Sprinzak, 1999).

Based on the theoretical literature and the relative deprivation of Muslims in Israel, three hypotheses can be offered:

Hypothesis 1. Muslims will show more support for political violence than Jews.

Hypothesis 2. The more religious the individual, the greater their support for political violence will be.

Hypothesis 3. Socio-cultural deprivations will mediate the relationship between religion (e.g. Muslim/Jewish) and religiosity on the one hand, and support for political violence on the other.

Although all three hypotheses are rooted in theoretical literature, we would like to raise two important points. First, relating to our first hypothesis (H1), the expectation that Israeli Muslims support political violence more strongly than Israeli Jews is rooted not only in the literature on Islamic fundamentalism and on past studies of Islamic violence, but also relates to the specific socio-political circumstances of Israeli Muslims. Important in this respect is the combination of religious and national identity coupled with social and political grievances as discussed above. Whether one looks at religious, national, economic, social or political conditions, it seems that Israeli Muslims have more reason for discontent than their Jewish counterparts.

Second, relating to our third hypothesis (H3), we believe some explanation is in order to address our choice of independent and mediating variables. While deprivation in and of itself has been suggested as a stand-alone explanation for
political violence, we hope that its combination with other variables will provide some ‘relief’ to the inconsistencies in previous empirical findings. The question of whether to use deprivation as a mediator or as an independent variable is not at all simple. Technically, of course, one can try out one or the other. However, there are several theoretical problems involved. Hasenclever and Rittberger (2000) may be read to suggest that religion is the mediator. However, the setting of this current study and the statistical modeling involved raise a paradox if religion is to be treated as the mediator. Like linear regression, structural equation modeling (SEM) assumes some degree of causal relationship between the constructs.\(^2\) Although dealing with causality in the social sciences is ‘tricky business’, statistical models often suggest a certain timeline which is the foundation of all causal assumptions. Scholars of religion maintain that religion is a deeply rooted phenomenon, usually exceeding social, political and economic circumstances and almost always preceding them when a time frame is concerned. We therefore find it more likely to assume that religion comes before deprivation. Most people are born into their religion and acquire their level of religiosity through basic socialization in the family. Although one may also be born into poverty, we suggest that the mobility between socio-economic conditions remains more flexible than that between religious identities. Thus, if the relationship between the constructs is to be explored using SEM we suggest that the relationship between the variables be as described by H3.

**Method**

**Sampling and Procedure**

Data were gathered by phone interviews with a nationwide sample \((N = 1,002)\) over a two-week period in October 2001. Participants were randomly selected from a computerized telephone directory. The interviews were carried out in Hebrew, Arabic and Russian. Following translation, questionnaires were tested for validity and appropriateness to ensure they accurately reflected the original Hebrew version. Nine hundred and ten respondents remained after those who were neither Muslim nor Jewish were excluded. The final sample thus included only Jewish and Muslim citizens of Israel, living within the ‘Green Line’ or in the West Bank and Gaza settlements. Palestinians who are not citizens of the state (i.e. residents of the Palestinian Authority) were not included in this sample. With regard to the religious affiliation, sex, education and voting patterns, the sample proved representative of the general population (Statistical Abstracts, 2001).\(^3,4\)

**Measures**

Table 1 lists the research measures, the items queried and, where applicable, the measure’s reliability and source. Support for political violence was tapped by three questions adopted from Pedahzur *et al.*’s (2000) scale. This scale, based on
Table 1: The Research Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Composition of variable</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Support for political violence (PV)</td>
<td>Participants were asked to indicate their agreement on a scale of 1–6 with 1 = completely disagree and 6 = completely agree: 1. Sending threatening letters to public figures is sometimes necessary to stop dangerous policies. 2. In certain situations, there is no option but to use arms to prevent the government from implementing its policies; 3. When national disaster is near and all other forms of civil protest have failed, physically injuring politicians is permissible. Scale reliability: $\alpha = 0.68^a$</td>
<td>Pedahzur et al. (2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Objective deprivation (OD)</td>
<td>Education: 1. elementary; 2. high school; 3. non-academic higher education; 4. academic. Income level: Based on NIS 7,500 (about $1,600) as the average monthly income per Israeli household, participants were asked whether their household income was 1. much below average; 2. somewhat below average; 3. average; 4. somewhat above average; 5. high above average. Place of residence: The city in which the respondents reside was coded, and assigned a value according to a ranking by the Central Bureau of Statistics (Statistical Abstracts, 1999, pp. 15–25). Values range from 1–203.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Subjective deprivation (SD)</td>
<td>Participants were asked to reply on a scale of 1–6, with 1 = not at all and 6 = to a great extent: 1. To what degree have you personally experienced discrimination because of your ethnicity? 2. To what degree have you personally experienced discrimination because of your nationality? Scale reliability: $\alpha = 0.60^a$</td>
<td>Gurr (1970)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Religious affiliation (RA)</td>
<td>0. Jewish; 1. Muslim</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:  

* Such scales with two or three items typically produce lower alphas (Krosnick and Fabrigar, 2001).  

Because these scales were revised and adapted for the purpose of the study and their reliabilities may be considered low, the scales’ external validity was examined and proved to be adequate.  

To simplify the interpretation of the findings, objective deprivation measures were reversed, namely the higher the value, the higher the objective deprivation.
Lee Ephraim Yuchtman-Yaar and Tamar Hermann’s (1998) study of Israelis’ attitudes toward protest, was constructed and tested in two studies in Israel, and was found valid. The three items used in the present study pertain, respectively, to sending threatening letters, using arms, and physically injuring politicians in pursuit of political ends. Respondents were requested to rank their support for such actions on a scale of 1–6 (with 1 being total lack of support and 6 being full support). The political violence (PV) scale was compiled by the mean of the combined items. Specific phrasing of each item is provided in Table 1.

Two religion variables were queried. The first relates to the respondent’s religious affiliation (i.e. Muslim or Jewish) and the second to self-reported level of religiosity (secular, traditional, religious or very religious). Two deprivation variables, objective and subjective deprivation, were measured. Following suggestions by Ellina Maro and Will H. Moore (1990) and Lee Sigelman and Miles Simpson (1977), objective deprivation was measured using both individual-level (education, income) and aggregate-level (socio-economic ranking of respondent’s place of residence) variables. Subjective deprivation was ascertained by asking the respondents whether they had ever felt that they were discriminated against on grounds of their ethnicity or nationality. This measure, adapted for Israel, was derived from the ‘ethnic dominance’ theory outlined by Juha Auvinen (1997).

Data Analysis
Preliminary analysis of the data consisted of descriptive statistics including testing for average means, standard deviations, analysis of variance and Pearson’s r correlations. Next, we conducted several regression analyses breaking down the independent variable, support for political violence, and examined the effects on its various constructs. Finally, our primary analysis is based on structural equations with latent variables, using version 4.01 of the AMOS program, with the full information maximum likelihood procedure (Arbuckle and Wothke, 1999). Structural equation modeling (SEM) often serves similar purposes to multiple regressions, but is commonly perceived as providing better control for several known shortcomings associated with the regression method. Specific to this study, our choice of SEM took into consideration several commonly perceived advantages: the ability to create more flexible assumptions (particularly allowing interpretation even in the face of multicollinearity), use of confirmatory factor analysis to reduce measurement error, the ability to test coefficients across multiple between-subjects groups and, most importantly, a better ability to model mediating variables (the following references, together with others, might serve as a good introduction to the use and benefits of SEM: Bentler and Chou, 1988; Bollen, 1989; Diamantopoulos, 1994; Mueller, 1996; 1997).

Along with the research model outlined above, we also tested a variety of other models, in case any were better. Of all the models, the present research model (see Figure 1) showed the best configuration of goodness of fit, explained variance and direction and magnitude of the path coefficients.
Results

Descriptive Overview

In terms of support for political violence, analyses of variance showed significant differences between Jews and Muslims at all levels of religiosity. Means, standard deviations and t-test analysis are portrayed in Table 2. As a general trend, Muslims endorsed greater support for political violence than Jews. This is visible across all levels of religiosity, whether respondents were secular, traditional, religious or very religious. Despite the preliminary nature of such analysis and without relating at all to the question of causality, these findings provide initial support for our first hypothesis, that in the Israeli setting Muslims seem more supportive of political violence than Jews.

Analyses of variance showed no significant differences in support for political violence among Muslims of different levels of religiosity ($F[3,207] = 0.63$, $p < 0.59$). In contrast, among Jews, a significant difference was found only between religious and traditional Jews ($F[3,687] = 3.21$, $p < 0.02$), with traditional Jews more supportive of political violence than religious ones. As illustrated earlier, among Jews the major difference in support for political violence was between traditional and religious, while among Muslims, these groups showed almost identical support. These preliminary findings seem to differ from our second hypothesis, that greater religiosity is associated with greater support for political violence. Intercorrelations among the research variables are presented in Table 3.

As seen in the table, Muslims tended to be less educated, earn less and live in lower ranked municipalities than Jews. They generally felt more deprived, and showed
greater support for political violence. More religious respondents, too, were generally less educated, earned lower incomes and resided in municipalities of lower socio-economic rating. However, they showed less support for political violence than their less religious counterparts. Yet, as a group, respondents who were less educated, had lower income, resided in weaker municipalities and felt more subjectively deprived were more supportive of political violence than their less objectively and subjectively deprived counterparts.

Table 2: Support for Political Violence (Combined Variable) among Jews and Muslims (Mean, Standard Deviation and t-test Analysis)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t-test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secular</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jews</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>−2.24*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jews</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>−3.61***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jews</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>4.89***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Religious</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jews</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>−1.29  (ns)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *p < 0.05; ***p < 0.001.

Table 3: Intercorrelations among the Research Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research variables</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2a</th>
<th>2b</th>
<th>2c</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Support for political violence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Objective deprivation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a. Education</td>
<td>0.24***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b. Income</td>
<td>0.23***</td>
<td>0.32***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2c. Place of residence</td>
<td>0.26***</td>
<td>0.18***</td>
<td>0.32***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Subjective deprivation</td>
<td>0.22***</td>
<td>0.09**</td>
<td>0.15***</td>
<td>0.26***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Religiosity</td>
<td>−14***</td>
<td>0.07*</td>
<td>0.22***</td>
<td>0.20***</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Religious affiliation</td>
<td>0.25***</td>
<td>0.27***</td>
<td>0.29***</td>
<td>0.63***</td>
<td>0.29***</td>
<td>0.07*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = 910; *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.
Before analysis of our primary research model, we asked whether our independent and mediating variables have similar effects on all three constructs of the dependent variable. To this cause we advance three linear regressions, in all of which a single item of the ‘support for political violence’ scale constituted the dependent variable in the analysis. When ‘Sending threatening letters to public figures is sometimes necessary to stop dangerous policies’ was chosen as the dependent variable, the analysis accounted for 7 per cent of the explained variance ($R^2 = 0.07$). The major predictors found were the respondents’ level of education and place of residence. With ‘In certain situations, there is no option but to use arms to prevent the government from implementing its policies’ serving as the dependent variable, 9 per cent of the explained variance was accounted for ($R^2 = 0.09$), and the major predictors found were subjective deprivation, level of education and family income. In all three regressions socio-economic variables provide the major explanations for support for political violence.

**Assessment of the Primary Research Model**

Figure 1 presents the research model, portraying the paths between religious affiliation (RA) or level of religiosity (RG) with objective and subjective deprivation and with political violence. As such, this model accounts for both direct paths between the religious variables and political violence, and the indirect paths in which this relationship is mediated by either objective or subjective deprivation.

Both the measurement model ($\chi^2$ (27, $N = 910$) = 117.508, $p = 0.0001$; NFI = 0.99; TLI = 0.99; CFI = 0.99; RMSEA = 0.06) and the structural model ($\chi^2$ (28, $N = 910$) = 122.189, $p < 0.001$; NFI = 0.99, TLI = 0.98, CFI = 0.99, and RMSEA = 0.06.) showed good fit to the data. The model explained 73 per cent of the variance in objective deprivation, 15 per cent of the variance in subjective deprivation and 37 per cent of the variance in support for political violence.

As our structural model includes direct and indirect paths, it allows comparison between the direct effects of religious affiliation and religiosity in support for political violence and the effects mediated by deprivation. Both direct effects, leading from either religious affiliation or religiosity and political violence, were significant. In keeping with the descriptive statistics, the path between religious affiliation and political violence was stronger than that between religiosity and political violence. In contrast to the preliminary statistics, however, when the two types of deprivation were controlled for, Jews were shown to espouse greater support for political violence than Muslims. The significance and magnitude of
the association between religiosity and support for political violence indicates that the more religious the participants, the less their support for political violence.

Turning to the indirect paths, as in the preliminary statistics, Muslims were found to be more deprived, both objectively and subjectively, than Jews. However, although religious affiliation was significantly associated with both types of deprivation, its association with objective deprivation was the stronger of the two. Religiosity was associated only with objective deprivation: the more religious respondents tended to be more objectively deprived. With regard to the associations between deprivation and support for political violence, the paths show that the more deprived the respondents, whether objectively or subjectively, the greater their support for political violence. However, the association between objective deprivation and support for political violence was stronger than that between subjective deprivation and support for political violence.

The direct and indirect paths show ostensibly opposite patterns. In the direct path, Jews are more supportive of political violence than Muslims and less religious respondents are more supportive than more religious respondents. In the indirect paths, mediated by deprivation, and more strongly by objective deprivation than subjective, Muslims are more supportive of political violence than Jews, and more religious respondents are more supportive than their less religious counterparts. In other words, the mediated findings are consistent with the greater deprivation of Muslims than Jews and of more religious respondents than less religious respondents than were found in the preliminary statistics.

Further calculations were made to compare the relative strengths of the various paths. With regard to religious affiliation, the calculations show that the indirect path between religious affiliation (Muslims) and support for political violence via objective deprivation \((0.82 \times 0.93 = 0.76)\) is stronger than the direct path \((-0.49)\) and very much stronger than the indirect path via subjective deprivation \((0.38 \times 0.13 = 0.04)\). With regard to religiosity, the calculations show that the direct path between religiosity and support for political violence \((-0.25)\) and the indirect path via objective deprivation \((0.25 \times 0.93 = 0.23)\) were of almost identical magnitude; but, once again, the indirect effect via subjective deprivation was minute \((0.02 \times 0.13 = 0.00)\). The structural analyses greatly support the third hypothesis, that the relationships between religion and religiosity are mediated by deprivations.

In summation, our analyses showed that by and large Muslims are more supportive of political violence than Jews. Still, these results may very well be attributed to deprivations more than to religious affiliation. It is important to note, in this respect, that in Israel Muslims tend to suffer more from both objective and subjective deprivations, and that indeed our findings, too, showed that controlling for these deprivations resulted in Jews showing greater support for violence than Muslims. In contrast with our expectations, people who were more religious tended to show less support for political violence. We also found that deprivations,
particularly objective ones, mediate the effect of both religious affiliation and religiosity on support for political violence. Even so, we can cautiously infer that the mediation may be considered as more effective for Muslims than it is for Jews.

Discussion and Conclusions

Ostensibly, the study findings support the first and third hypotheses: that Muslims in Israel are more supportive of political violence than Jews; and that support for political violence is greatly mediated by deprivation. The second hypothesis is for the most part refuted as more religious persons are less supportive of political violence.

Generally speaking, Israeli Muslims seem to support political violence more than Israeli Jews. This is reflected across all levels of religiosity and with regard to all aspects of support for political violence. So much so, that the most unsupportive religious group in the Muslim population (i.e. Muslims describing themselves as ‘very religious’) showed greater support for political violence when compared to the most supportive group in this regard among the Jewish population (i.e. Jews describing themselves as ‘traditional’). However, our findings also suggest that Muslim support for political violence is not to be understood simply as a matter of religious affiliation. Support for political violence among Israeli Muslims is more likely a result of contextual circumstances than it is of religious convictions or cultural predisposition. The strong mediating role of deprivation may help to explain why Muslims would be more supportive of political violence in Israel than Jews, even though the Israeli authorities generally treat political violence by Muslims more harshly than political violence by Jews (Hasisi and Pedahzur, 2000; Korn, 2000; Lehman-Wilzig and Goldberg, 1985). Israeli Muslims show greater support for violence chiefly because they are more deprived than Jews in Israel. If deprivation is controlled for, Israeli Muslims show less support for political violence than Israeli Jews, disputing the various explanations to the more violent nature of Islam.

Our findings also show that more religious respondents were more deprived than their less religious peers, yet the translation of this into support for violence is far less clear than that of religious affiliation. These findings undercut stereotypic notions of Islamic religion-induced violence, at least in Israel (Schwarzwald and Tur-Kaspa, 1997). Indeed, the findings show that when deprivation was accounted for, more religious respondents – whether Muslims or Jews – were more inclined to support political violence than their less religious peers, and, moreover, that religiosity itself actually played a negligible role in attitudes towards political violence.

The findings are consistent with the constructivist and instrumental approaches (Hasenclever and Rittberger, 2000), which posit that religion contributes to political violence only in conjunction with other factors, much as it contributes to political intolerance mainly in conjunction with social and economic variables.
(Ellison and Musick, 1993; Shamir and Sullivan, 1985). They cast doubt on the primordial perspective, which explains the role of religion in political violence through its essential intractability and exclusivity. They suggest that where religion is associated with political violence, the link may be the relative deprivation of the violent religious group, rather than the tendency of dogmatic world views to translate into extreme and violent actions.

Of the two types of deprivation, the findings show that objective deprivation, as measured by income, education and place of residence, made a substantially stronger contribution to support for political violence than subjective deprivation, assessed in this study by feelings of deprivation on the grounds of ethnicity or nationality. Indeed, subjective deprivation made a negligible contribution to support for political violence. These findings differ from those of Grofman and Muller (1973) and Martin et al. (1984), who found subjective deprivation to be more closely associated with political violence than socio-economic measures. The difference may be attributed to the fact that our study measured attitudes while those studies measured behavior. Alternatively, our findings may actually indicate that their large objective deprivation is the key to Muslim support for political violence in Israel, and not Islam, nationalism or identification with the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, as many Israeli Jews tend to believe (Schwarzwald and Tur-Kaspa, 1997; Yuchtman-Yaar and Hermann, 1998).

The study has several limitations. Carried out in Israel, the study queries support for political violence in a specific context, which may be different from that elsewhere in the world and possibly unique in many respects. It queried degrees of religiosity, but not the content of the religious beliefs. Among other things, this means that the study may explain violence driven by extreme interpretations of religion, whether Islam or Judaism. A different conceptualization of subjective deprivation may possibly be desirable.

Further research is recommended both to determine the generalizability of the findings and to refine them. Such research should examine people of other religions, using a variety of measures of religiosity and more nuanced measures of subjective deprivation. Efforts should also be made to identify the full gamut of factors (e.g. personal, ideological and institutional features) that would help understand the underpinnings of political violence.

All in all, this study contributes to our understanding of political violence. It shows that support for political violence is a complex phenomenon that cannot be explained by religious affiliation or religiosity alone. By demonstrating the mediating role of deprivation, the findings counter the negative stereotypes both of Islam as a particularly violent religion and of religiosity as promoting violence. Practically, they suggest that governments which want peace at home would do well to ensure that ethnic, national and religious differences are not translated into and compounded by wide socio-economic gaps.

(Accepted: 24 March 2006)
About the Authors

Eran Zaidise, School of Political Sciences, University of Haifa, Haifa 31905, Israel; email: zaidise@poli.haifa.ac.il

Daphna Canetti-Nisim, School of Political Sciences, University of Haifa, Haifa 31905, Israel; email: dcanetti@poli.haifa.ac.il

Ami Pedahzur, Department of Government, The University of Texas at Austin, Burdine 536, 1 University Station A1800, TX 78712-0119, USA; email: ap2976@mail.utexas.edu

Notes

1. Christians and Druze were not included because of their comparatively small numbers in the country’s population.

2. For further reading on the causality in Structural Equation Models, please refer to Kenny (1979); Mulaik and James (1995); Pearl (2000); Sobel (1994).

3. Sixty-nine per cent were Jewish and 21.2 per cent were Muslim (76.6 per cent and 15.7 per cent, respectively in the general population); and 52.2 per cent were female (51 per cent in the population). Over a half (55.1 per cent) reported having formally studied beyond their high school education (38.5 per cent in the population), 39.9 per cent reported high school education (47.2 per cent in the population) and the remainder, primary education or lower. Voting patterns were queried with respect to the February 2001 election for prime minister. The 2001 elections were unique in that they were elections only for prime minister, produced a low percentage of participation (62.3 per cent as compared with an average of 77 per cent) and a relatively high percentage of blank slips. To compare this study to the general elections, one should look only into Sharon’s and Barak’s votes; i.e. 66.2 per cent voted for Sharon and 33.8 per cent voted for Barak in this study as compared with 62.3 per cent votes for Sharon and 37.6 per cent for Barak in the general elections. The difference is minor, considering the fact that only Jews and Muslims were included in this study.

4. Because our sample was not significantly different from the census on any key variables of interest (e.g. sex, religion, income, voting) we did not reweigh scores. Areas of non-significant difference (e.g. sex, Jew vs. Muslim) would make an insignificant difference in the prevalence rates. Further details on the sample are available upon request.

5. Following Bollen (1989), we advanced a multi-group model, testing whether the structural path between religiosity and support for political violence differed depending on religion. The first model allowed the structural paths to vary across religious groups, and the second constrained all structural paths to be equal between groups. Chi-squared difference tests showed the models generally held for both groups. We also examined reduced forms of the research model: a model with only religion effect, a model with only deprivation effects and models which alternatively examined the mediation of objective and subjective deprivation. Lastly, we tested a few models with exogenous demographics, but they were both over-complex and their results did not differ from those of the current model.

6. Although very religious Muslims were found to be more supportive of political violence than very religious Jews, the difference between the groups was not significant. We assume this is the result of the uneven size of the groups (there were 109 Jews and 9 Muslims).

References


© 2007 The Authors. Journal compilation © 2007 Political Studies Association

POLITICAL STUDIES: 2007, 55(3)


