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Religion and State Failure: An Examination of the Extent and Magnitude of Religious Conflict from 1950 to 1996

JONATHAN FOX

ABSTRACT. Although the role of religion in conflict has been gaining increasing attention in recent times, few cross-sectional studies have examined the extent to which internal conflict since World War II has been religious, and those that have done so are limited in either the type of conflict or time span they cover. Accordingly, this article uses the State Failure data set to assess whether the relative and absolute number of religious conflicts since World War II has increased, whether these conflicts are more intense than other conflicts, and whether any particular religions participate in conflict more often than others. The findings show that while occurring less often than other types of conflicts, religious conflicts have increased between 1950 and 1996, and are more intense than nonreligious conflicts. Also, Christian groups disproportionally participate in internal conflict, but most of those conflicts are with other Christian groups. This, along with other findings of the study, contradicts major elements of Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations" theory.

Keywords: • Clash of civilizations • Conflict • Religion • Samuel Huntington • State failure

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The role of religion in conflict has been gaining increasing attention in recent times. Yet not too long ago, the dominant paradigm in political science predicted the end of religion as an important political factor and sociologists continue to debate whether religion will be a relevant social factor. Despite this, few cross-sectional studies have examined the extent to which conflicts have been religious, and those that have done so have looked only at some types of conflicts or only at conflicts during a limited time period. Accordingly, this study uses data from the State Failure data set, which contains information on serious internal conflicts

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from 1950 to 1996, in order to examine the extent to which conflicts during this period can be characterized as religious, whether religious conflicts are more intense than other conflicts, and whether particular religions, especially Islam, are disproportionally involved in conflict.

Predictions of the Fall and Rise of Religion

During the 1950s and 1960s, the dominant theory in political science regarding the role of religion was modernization theory. This paradigm predicted that factors inherent in modernization, including economic development, urbanization, growing rates of literacy and education as well as advancements in science and technology, would inevitably lead to the demise of the role of religion in politics.[1] While most of the modernization literature dealt with the demise of ethnicity, its predictions were clearly also meant to apply to religion (Appleby, 1994: 7–8; Haynes, 1994: 21–3; Sahliyeh, 1990: 3–4). Currently, modernization theory is no longer the dominant theory in political science. The rise in ethnic conflict has resulted in numerous studies on the topic, such as those of Gurr (1993a, 1993b, 2000), among many others, and has also resulted in the founding of new journals on the topic, including *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict*, *Nations and Nationalism*, and *Ethnicities*. Similarly, the argument that religion is no longer relevant to politics has considerably fewer adherents. Perhaps the watershed event which caused this re-evaluation was the Iranian revolution, which clearly demonstrated that religion is still a vital political force in at least some parts of the world.[2] Since then, various other conflicts and events throughout the world have reinforced the view that religion continues to influence politics. These include, but are not limited to, the conflicts in Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, East Timor, Kashmir, and several states in the Middle East, the rise of religious fundamentalism as a political force, and the September 11, 2001, attacks on the USA.

Secularization theory, which similarly predicts the demise of religion as a relevant social force due to factors inherent in modernization, was the dominant theory in sociology and, perhaps, remains so. While in the past, this argument was rarely questioned by sociologists (Hadden, 1987b; Westhus, 1976: 314), many are beginning to question the theory's assumptions. However, many sociologists still believe in the validity of secularization theory. In fact, a recent volume of *Sociology of Religion* was devoted entirely to this debate. The debate centers around two questions. First, does secularization mean that people are becoming less religious or that the influence of religion on politics and society is waning and religion is moving from the public sphere to the private sphere? Second, are either of these versions of secularization occurring?

The participants in this debate have widely divergent answers to these questions and the debate, if nothing else, shows that the question of whether religion has an influence on politics and society is a question that continues to be asked by sociologists. Dobbelaere (1999) argues that religion, which was once the foundation of the social system, has become a subsystem within a larger secular system and, furthermore, that the religious subsystem is mostly within the private sphere and has little influence over public issues. Lambert (1999) similarly argues that modern factors, including reason, science, individualism, mass participation in politics, capitalism, and globalization, have changed both the nature of religion and its role in society. Religious knowledge is more accessible to individuals and placed in the context of knowledge from other sources. As a result, religion has

become both less important and has moved from the public to the private sphere. The result of this has been increased separation of church and state as well as increase in individual freedom of choice over religious issues. Beyer (1999) counters that the role of religion in society and politics has changed due to modernity, but its influence has not disappeared. Stark (1999) argues that if anything, people are becoming more religious, but Voye (1999) believes that religiosity is declining. Lastly, Swatos and Christiano (1999) argue that religiosity has not declined and religion still has an influence.[3]

Ironically, many of those who argue that religion continues to play a role in society and politics argue that rather than causing the demise of religion, modernity has contributed to its resurrection. That is, religion is experiencing a resurgence or revitalization due to a number of factors inherent in modernity. First, in many parts of the Third World, efforts at modernization have failed causing a religious backlash against the western secular ideologies which were the basis for the governments which were in charge of these unsuccessful efforts at modernization (Juergensmeyer, 1993; Thomas, 2000: 817–9). Second, modernization has undermined traditional lifestyles, community values, and morals, which are based in part on religion, thus contributing to this religious backlash against modernity (Sahliyeh, 1990: 9; Haynes, 1994: 34; Thomas, 2000: 816). Third, modernization has allowed both the state and religious institutions to increase their spheres of influence, thus resulting in more clashes between the two (Shupe, 1990: 23–6). Fourth, modern political systems allow for mass participation in politics, which has allowed the religious sectors of society a means to impose their views on others (Rubin, 1994: 22–3). Fifth, modern communications have allowed religious groups to export their views more easily and the international media has made religious groups aware of the activities of other religious groups, often inspiring similar actions (Shupe, 1990: 22). Sixth, a new trend in the sociology of religion, known as the rational choice or economic theory of religion, argues that the freedom of choice in many modern societies to select one's own religion has led to an increase in religiosity (Iannaccone, 1995a, 1995b).[4] Seventh, in many parts of the Third World, due to the processes of colonialism and cultural colonialism, western secular ideas are considered foreign and, therefore, illegitimate, leaving only religion as a basis for legitimacy (Juergensmeyer, 1993).

Eighth, modern religious organizations contribute to political activity. On a general level, some form of organization is necessary for political mobilization. Religious institutions provide ready-made organizations for this purpose, which often have access to the media, considerable economic assets, and international communications networks. In fact, in many nondemocratic regimes, the protected status of religious institutions makes them the only format in which people are allowed to organize. People who are active in religious organizations tend to develop organizational and leadership skills that are also useful for political activities. They are also often exposed to mobilization efforts by their religious organizations as well as political messages and morality messages which, themselves, are not so different from political messages. Religious organizations also help to develop interpersonal networks which are useful for political mobilization. However, it should be noted that under many circumstances religious organizations are conservative and prefer to support the status quo (Fox, 1999a; Hadden, 1987a; Harris, 1994; Johnston and Figa, 1988; Verba et al., 1993).

The rise of religious fundamentalism in the late 20th century is also attributed to modernization. Many explanations for fundamentalism focus on the

dislocations caused by modernity's undermining of traditional society both on a personal and communal level. Thus, fundamentalism is concerned with defining, restoring, and reinforcing the basis of personal and communal identity that is being shaken or destroyed by modern dislocations and crises (Marty and Appleby, 1991: 602, 620; Esposito, 1998). In fact, in many ways, religious fundamentalism is an organized criticism and rejection of modernity. Fundamentalists reject the replacement of religious morality and explanations for the world in which we live with scientific and rational explanations and moral systems (Mendelsohn, 1993; Tehranian, 1993). In addition, fundamentalist movements often make use of modern communications, propaganda, and organizational techniques, and engage in the distinctly modern behavior of using political action, including the mobilization of women, in order to further their agenda (Eisenstadt, 2000: 601–3). Thus, even though religious fundamentalism is often perceived as a return to the past, it is, in fact, a very modern phenomenon.

There are also many who posit that religion contributes to conflict in the modern era. Many note that religion can provide legitimacy to both governments and those who oppose them (Lewy, 1974: 550–1; Gill, 1998; Lincoln, 1985). One example of this is liberation theology, a combination of Catholic theology and Marxism, which has contributed to opposition to governments in Latin America (Berryman, 1987; Dodson, 1986; Roelofs, 1988). Religion is often used as a justification for terrorism (Drake, 1998; Juergensmeyer, 1997; Hoffman, 1995; Martin, 1989; Rapoport, 1984). Many consider violence to be an intrinsic element of religion (Juergensmeyer, 1991; Rapoport, 1991; Girard, 1977; Zitrin, 1998). Whether or not this is true, it is clear that many religious groups see themselves at war with various enemies, be they secular or from another religion. This perception of being at war is crucial to explaining religious violence because "if the world is perceived as peaceful, violent acts appear as terrorism. If the world is thought to be at war, violent acts may be regarded as legitimate" (Laustsen and Waever, 2000: 725). Religion is also posited to contribute to discrimination (Little, 1991, 1996a, 1996b; Fox, 2000b), ethnic conflict (Fox, 1999c, 2000c, 2000d), international conflict (Henderson, 1997), international intervention (Fox, 2001c), conflict resolution (Abu-Nimer, 2001; Gopin, 2000; Weigel, 1992), and genocide (Fein, 1990: 49).

Religious conflicts also tend to be more intractable due to the non-bargainable nature of the motivations behind them. Wentz (1987) calls this phenomenon the "walls of religion." People build walls around their belief systems and defend them at all costs. This is because religion has to do with one's place in the world and the manner in which the world is meaningfully put together, and it is difficult, at best, to get someone to negotiate over issues that fall into this category. Laustsen and Waever (2000: 719) similarly argue that "religion deals with the constitution of being as such. Hence, one can not be pragmatic on concerns challenging this being." Thus, if your opponent is guided by faith and not power gains, he is considerably harder to deal with because faith is not something that is easily compromised. This is exponentially true if both sides are guided by faith. It is important to note that other types of motivations, particularly national and ethnic motivations, can also cause similar intractability (Carment and James, 1998: 68).

Not only do some posit that religion is a prominent cause of conflict, but some also predict that certain religious groups will be disproportionally involved in conflict. A prominent example of this is Huntington's (1993, 1996) "clash of civilizations" theory. While space will not allow for a thorough discussion of this

theory, there are two aspects of it which are particularly relevant to this study. First, Huntington predicts that, in the post-Cold War era, most conflicts will be between "civilizations" and that the Islamic "civilization" has particularly "bloody borders." While Huntington's theory refers to a concept he calls "civilizations," which are basically amalgamations of similar ethnic and cultural groups into larger cultural groupings, religion seems to be the most important defining trait of these civilizations, especially in the case of the Islamic civilization.[5] Thus, in effect, Huntington predicts that Islamic groups will be disproportionally involved in inter-religious conflict, especially since the end of the Cold War.

This prediction is hotly disputed. Some, such as Fuller and Lesser (1995), Pfaff (1997), Esposito (1995), and Halliday (1996), argue that Islam is not the threat many believe it to be. Others, including Beedham (1999), Kader (1998), and Monshipouri (1998), argue that conflicts occur more often within the Islamic civilization than between it and other civilizations. Esposito and Voll (2000) argue that in addition to the militant trends found among Muslims, there is also a strong movement toward dialogue and understanding with the West, as exemplified by leaders such as Anwar Ibrahim in Malaysia, Mohammad Khatami in Iran, and Abdurrahman Wahid in Indonesia. Also, Hunter (1998) adds that the rise in fundamentalism is not unique to the Islamic civilization and, furthermore, the enthusiasm for Islamic fundamentalism is waning. Lastly, many, such as Ajami (1993), Bartley (1993), Esposito (1995), Fuller and Lesser (1995), and Monshipouri (1998), argue that Huntington mistakenly believes that conflicts are caused by religion when they are really conflicts caused by economic, national, political, cultural, psychological, postcolonial, modernity, and strategic issues. On the other hand, even some of Huntington's critics, such as Halliday (2000), Hassner (1997), and Heilbrunn (1998), believe that there may be some truth to Huntington's arguments regarding clashes between the western and Islamic civilizations. The September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon have also convinced many of the truth of these arguments.

The second aspect of Huntington's theory relevant to this study is his prediction of a general rise in conflict in the post-Cold War era. The debate over this prediction is vigorous and voluminous. Critics argue that Huntington is wrong for a wide variety of reasons. First, many argue that civilizations will not be the basis for future conflict, but there is little agreement on what will, in fact, be the basis for conflict. Some believe that this basis will be subnational units such as the state or national and ethnic groups, and others posit that the world will unify into one unit. Second, many argue that Huntington ignores several post-Cold War trends that will influence the level of conflict. Third, many argue that Huntington made serious methodological errors in developing his theory.[6]

In all, various elements of the social sciences have made the opposite predictions that religion will become irrelevant as a political and social factor in the modern era and that religion will continue to be important in the modern era, perhaps precisely due to factors inherent in modernity. While most of these arguments apply to politics or society in general, it is fair to interpret them as also applying specifically to conflict. Accordingly, an examination of the extent to which conflicts in the modern era have been religious is appropriate.

If religion continues to be an important influence, we would expect the proportions of conflicts that are religious, as well as the absolute number of such conflicts, to remain steady over time and, perhaps, increase if modernity, in fact, causes a revitalization or resurgence of religion. Similarly, if religion is a factor that

exacerbates conflict, we would expect religious conflicts to be more intense than other conflicts. Also, if Huntington's arguments are correct, we would expect a disproportionate number of conflicts involving Islamic groups as well as a sharp and continuous rise in religious conflict during the 1990s. Conversely, if the predictions of religion's demise are correct, we would expect a steady drop in both the absolute number and proportion of religious conflicts over time as well as religious conflicts being less intense than other types of conflict.

Past Quantitative Studies of Religion and Conflict

A few previous studies have examined the extent to which conflict is religious. Henderson (1997) examines international conflict between 1820 and 1989 and finds that religious differences between states do contribute to such conflicts. Rummel (1997) finds that states with higher levels of religious diversity experience more internal conflict. However, neither of these studies focuses on religious conflict, nor do they examine whether the proportion of religious conflicts compared to other conflicts has changed over time. Reynal-Querol (2002) finds that religious polarization increases the incidence of civil war.

In a series of studies on the influence of religion on ethnic conflict, Fox (1997, 1999a, 1999b, 2000a, 2000b, 2000d, 2002b) examines both the proportion of ethnic conflicts during the 1990s that are religious and the extent to which religion influences these conflicts. These studies provide several findings relevant to the questions asked here, but these findings are limited to ethnic conflict during the 1990s. First, a minority of 105 out of 267 ethnic conflicts in the 1990s were between groups of different religions and religion was only a significant issue in 39 of those. Second, when religion is a significant issue, it strongly influences the dynamics of the conflict. Third, the fact that two ethnic groups are of different religions significantly influences the dynamics of an ethnic conflict, even if the issues in these conflicts are not particularly religious ones. Fourth, religion is disproportionally important in conflicts involving Islamic groups. Fifth, the presence of religious institutions influences the extent of mobilization for conflict by ethnic minorities. Sixth, religious legitimacy influences the nature and amount of grievances expressed by ethnic minorities. Seventh, religious factors influence the process that leads to discrimination against ethnic minorities.

There are also several studies that address Huntington's civilizations theory. They overwhelmingly contradict his predictions. Fox (2001a, 2001b, 2001c, 2002a) uses the Minorities at Risk data set to examine ethnic conflict from the mid-1980s through the late 1990s and finds that the data do not support Huntington's predictions of a rise in civilizational conflict nor his predictions of Islam's "bloody borders." Gurr (1994), also using the Minorities at Risk data, finds that serious ethnic conflicts do not conform to Huntington's predictions. Ellingsen (2000) found that there is no real change in the dynamics of ethnic conflict from the Cold War to the post-Cold War eras. Henderson and Singer (2000) show that political factors have a greater influence on civil wars than cultural ones. Russett et al. (2000) in their study of militarized interstate disputes from 1950 to 1992, found that civilizational conflicts decreased as the Cold War ended and that the Islam's "bloody borders" prediction was unfounded. Henderson and Tucker (2001) show that civilizational variables are not associated with international wars from 1946 to 1992.

In all, these findings result in an interesting duality. On one hand, the studies

that focus on religion indicate that religious conflicts are a significant minority of conflict and that religion seems to influence the nature of these conflicts. On the other hand, the studies that focus on Huntington's predictions overwhelmingly contradict his argument that his religious-based civilizations are responsible for a disproportionate amount of conflict. However, all of these studies are either limited in the type of conflict which they address or examine only a limited time period. None of them examine all serious domestic conflicts since World War II. Thus, an examination of the State Failure data set, which includes this kind of information, is warranted. The information in the data set allows a yearly examination of the extent of both religious and nonreligious conflict between 1950 and 1996, a comparison of the intensity of religious and nonreligious conflict, and an examination of the extent to which groups of specific religions participate in serious domestic conflict.

Research Design

As noted above, the goal of this study is to use the State Failure data set to examine the extent to which conflicts in the postwar era have been religious conflicts, whether religious conflicts are more intense than other conflicts, and whether conflicts involving specific religions are particularly common. The data set includes major episodes of "state failure," which "is a new label that encompasses a range of severe political conflicts and regime crises exemplified by events of the 1990s in Somalia, Bosnia, Liberia, Afghanistan, and Congo-Kinshasa" (Center for International Development and Conflict Management, 2003).[7] Thus, this article focuses only on the most intense of conflicts.

This article uses data from three sections of the State Failure data set: those concerning revolution, ethnic war, and genocide/politicide.[8] Revolutionary wars are defined as "episodes of violent conflict between governments and politically organized groups (political challengers) that seek to overthrow the central government, to replace its leaders, or to seize power in one region. Conflicts must include substantial use of violence by one or both parties to qualify as wars" (Gurr et al., 1997). Ethnic wars are defined as "episodes of violent conflict between governments and national, ethnic, religious, or other communal minorities (ethnic challengers) in which the challengers seek major changes in their status" (Gurr et al., 1997). Genocide/politicide is defined as "sustained policies by governing elites or their agents—or in the case of civil war, either of the contending authorities—that result in the deaths of a substantial portion of a communal group or politicized non-communal group [where] authorities physically exterminate enough (not necessarily all) members of a target group so that it can no longer pose any conceivable threat to their rule or interests" (Gurr et al., 1997).

The unit of analysis for the State Failure data set is a conflict year. Each year during which a particular type of conflict was occurring in a particular state is coded separately, including partial years in which the conflict began or ended.

In addition to the additional variables coded for the purposes of this study, which are discussed below, two types of modification were made to the data. First, there are several cases where conflicts by several groups against the state were coded together in the source data set. This study separates them into separate cases.[9] Second, many of the cases in the three categories overlap. As a result, for the tests performed on the entire data set, the overlapping cases were removed

from the study.[10] As a result, 774 years of ethnic war, 265 years of genocide/politicide, and 359 years of revolutionary war were coded. Taking overlapping cases into account, this totals 1135 conflict years between 1950 and 1996.

There are five variables from the State Failure data set used here to measure the intensity of conflicts, all of which are coded on a yearly basis. These variables are ordinal variables due to the difficulty of obtaining accurate and non-contradicting information on conflicts. The first four apply to ethnic and revolutionary wars. The first variable measures the number of combatants involved in the conflict on the following scale.

0 Less than 100 combatants or activists.
1 100–1000 combatants or activists.
2 1000–5000 combatants or activists.
3 5000–15,000 combatants or activists.
4 More than 15,000 combatants or activists.

The second measures the number of deaths due to the conflict on the following scale.

0 Less than 100 fatalities.
1 100–1000 fatalities.
2 1000–5000 fatalities.
3 5000–10,000 fatalities.
4 More than 10,000 fatalities.

The third measures the portion of the country affected by the fighting on the following scale.

0 Less than one-tenth of the country and no significant cities are directly or indirectly affected.
1 One-tenth of the country (one province or state) or one or several provincial cities are directly or indirectly affected.
2 More than one-tenth and up to one-quarter of the country (several provinces or states) or the capital city are directly or indirectly affected.
3 From one-quarter to one-half of the country or most major urban areas are directly or indirectly affected.
4 More than one-half of the country is directly or indirectly affected.

The fourth variable is the average of the previous three.[11] The final variable was coded only for cases of genocide/politicide and measures the number of annual deaths on the following scale.

0.0 Less than 300.
0.5 300–1000.
1.0 1000–2000.
1.5 2000–4000.
2.0 4000–8000.
2.5 8000–16,000.
3.0 16,000–32,000.
3.5 32,000–64,000.
4.0 64,000–128,000.
4.5 128,000–256,000.
5.0 More than 256,000.

An additional four variables were coded for the purposes of this article. The first measures whether a conflict is religious. This variable codes a conflict as religious if the two groups involved are of different religions or if the description of the conflict provided with the State Failure data set describes the conflict as being between religious and secular elements in a state. The second and third variables measure the specific religions of the two groups involved in each conflict, dividing them into the following categories: Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Animist, or "other or undetermined."[12] While there are clearly major divisions within both Christianity and Islam, not to mention many of the different religions within the "other" category, these more general categories have been selected so that each category has a sufficient number of cases for meaningful statistical analysis. In addition, with the exception of the "other" category, these categories do accurately represent common religious traditions which allow for diversity amid unity. The fourth variable measures the duration of conflicts in years. For this variable only, the unit of analysis is a conflict rather than a conflict-year.

Several types of tests are performed in order to examine the extent to which conflict since World War II has been religious. First, the number of religious and nonreligious conflicts that occurred, or continued, during every year from 1950 to 1996 are assessed both for the entire data set as well as individually for ethnic wars, revolutionary wars, and genocides/politicides. This is to examine whether a substantial portion of postwar conflicts have been religious and whether this has changed over time. Second the magnitude of religious conflicts are compared to the magnitude of nonreligious conflicts. This is to examine whether religious conflicts are more intense than other conflicts. Third, the number of conflicts between each potential pair of specific religions is assessed. This is to test whether any particular religion is more conflict prone than other religions. Fourth, for each religion, the percentage of all conflicts and the percentage of conflicts which are intra-religious are assessed, in order to examine both which specific religions are most involved in conflict and which specific religions are most prone to inter-religious conflict. In this test only, the unit of analysis is not a year of conflict, but, rather, a year of conflict for each side. That is, the number of cases are doubled because for each year of conflict, there are two sides. For example, a conflict between a Christian group and an Islamic group would be coded twice for this portion of the study, once for the Christian group and once for the Islamic group. Similarly, a conflict between two groups of the same religion would also be coded twice. Lastly, the previous two tests are repeated for the 1990–96 period only in order to assess whether Huntington's (1993, 1996) predictions regarding changes in the nature of conflict after the Cold War are correct.

It is important to note that the State Failure data set only contains information on when conflicts of particular types occurred and the intensity of these conflicts. The additional data collected for this article only adds some information on whether the conflict is religious and the specific religions of the groups involved. Thus, the tests here can only reveal whether religious conflicts are more common and more intense than other conflicts as well as whether specific religions participate more or less often in conflict. There is no data that allows the study to control for other factors or test for causality. Nor does the fact that a conflict is between groups of different religions necessarily mean that the conflict is because of these differences. As a result, any conclusions regarding causality can only be based upon implication.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Figure 1a shows the number of religious and nonreligious state failures that occurred each year between 1950 and 1996. The results show that from 1950 to 1959, religious conflicts were as or more common than other conflicts, but from 1960 onward, nonreligious conflicts were more common. This is not because of a drop in the number of religious conflicts. The number of religious conflicts increased steadily from 1960 to 1967, remained at about the same level until 1985, increased again until 1993, and then began to drop. This pattern is similar to the pattern for nonreligious conflicts, which increased steadily until 1993 then began to drop. Thus, until 1993 religious conflicts did not decrease, rather they did not increase as quickly as nonreligious conflicts, and when they did decrease, this decrease coincided with a similar decrease in nonreligious conflicts. Throughout the 1960–96 period, religious conflicts constituted between about 33 percent and 47 percent of all conflicts. Furthermore, that religious conflicts were as or more common than nonreligious conflicts during the 1950s is misleading because the State Failure data set does not include independence conflicts against western colonial rulers.

Figure 1b shows the number of religious and nonreligious ethnic conflicts between 1950 and 1996. The results show that both religious and nonreligious ethnic conflicts increased between 1950 and the early 1990s, when they both began to drop. Religious ethnic conflicts outnumber or are nearly equal to the number of nonreligious ones most years through to 1980, when nonreligious conflicts begin to outnumber the religious ones. Figure 1c provides similar information for mass killings. The results show that religious mass killings increase through to 1992 then begin to drop and nonreligious mass killings increase through to 1989 and then begin to drop. However, between 1963 and 1991 nonreligious mass killings considerably outnumber the religious ones before and after this period religious mass killings are, overall, rarer and outnumber the nonreligious ones. Figure 1d shows the number of revolutionary wars between 1955 and 1996. The results show that nonreligious revolutionary wars increase through to 1989, after which they drop and religious revolutionary wars are considerably rarer, but increase slightly during the 1977–83 and 1986–96 periods.

In all, the examination of the yearly number of state failures between 1950 and 1996 reveals several findings. First, in general, conflict increased from 1950

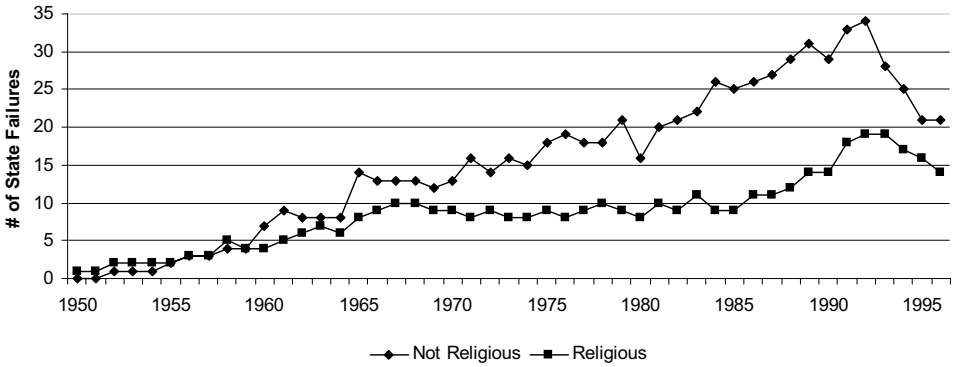

FIGURE 1a. *Religious vs. Nonreligious Conflicts, 1950–96: All Conflicts*

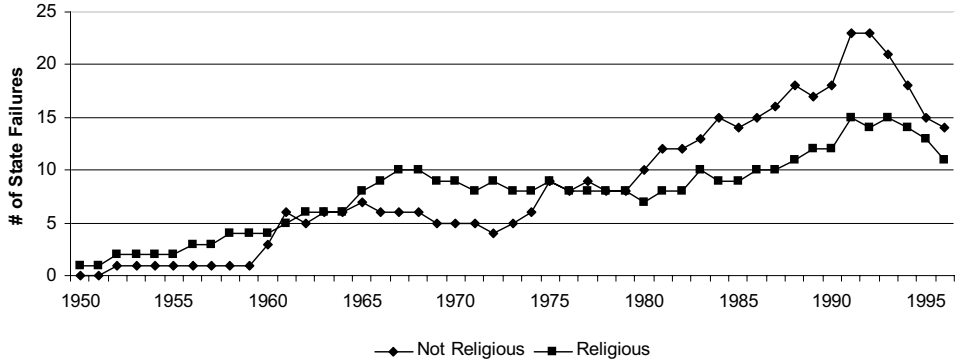

FIGURE 1b. *Religious vs. Nonreligious Ethnic Wars, 1950–96*

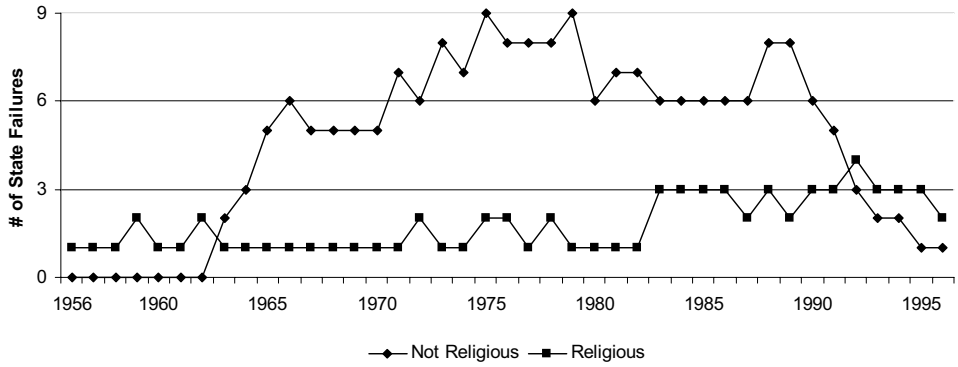

FIGURE 1c. *Relgious vs. Nonreligious Mass Killings, 1956–96**
*There are no cases of mass killings coded in the State Failure dataset before 1956

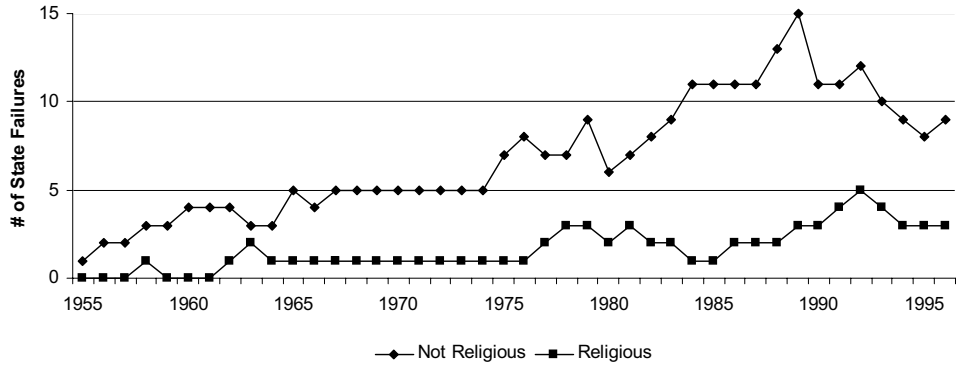

FIGURE 1d. *Religious vs. Nonreligious Revolutionary Wars, 1955–96**
*There are no cases of revolutionary war coded in the State Failure dataset before 1955

through to the late 1980s or early 1990s, depending on the type of conflict in question, then began to drop. Second, except for the 1950s when the number of conflicts were relatively low, religious conflicts were outnumbered by nonreligious conflicts, except in the case of ethnic conflicts, where nonreligious conflicts did not begin to outnumber the religious conflicts until 1980. Third, the fact that religious conflicts occur less often is not because they decreased, but, rather, because nonreligious conflicts increased faster. Fourth, the drop in religious conflict since the early 1990s is concurrent with a similar drop in nonreligious conflict.

These results have some interesting implications. It is possible to interpret the fact that nonreligious conflicts began to outnumber religious ones during this period as meaning that religion is becoming less important in modern times. However, it is argued here that this is not the correct interpretation. If religion were becoming less important, we would expect to see a steady drop in the proportion of all conflicts that are religious *and* a drop in the absolute number of conflicts that are religious. This does not occur between 1950 and 1996. For most of this period, the overall number of religious conflicts remains at about the same level or increases. The number of religious conflicts only begins to drop at about the same time as nonreligious conflicts experience a similar drop. Furthermore, nonreligious conflicts experience much wider fluctuations in the number of conflicts than do religious ones. This can be interpreted as meaning that the causes of religious conflicts are more constant than the causes of nonreligious conflicts.

Another important aspect of the results is that it is ethnic conflicts that are most likely to be religious. Overall, 47.6 percent of ethnic conflict years in the State Failure data set are religious conflicts as opposed to 25.5 percent and 19.5 percent, respectively, for mass killings and revolutions. This implies that the primary violent challenge that religion has posed to states has been in the form of conflicts between groups of different religions. This contradicts the notion that the primary religious challenge in the current era is fundamentalists challenging a state that is ruled by a secular government that is run by people who are nominally the same religion as the fundamentalist challengers. That ethnic conflicts are the most common conflicts in the State Failure data set only reinforces these results.

Another interesting implication of the results is that they apparently contradict parts of Huntington's (1993, 1996) "clash of civilizations" argument. Huntington expects a rise in conflicts with the end of the Cold War, yet conflict in general as well as all three specific types of conflict decrease shortly after the Cold War ended. Furthermore, since there is an overlap between Huntington's civilizations and religion, that religious conflicts are in the minority and drop along with nonreligious conflicts contradicts his predictions that civilizational conflicts will be more common in the post-Cold War era.

Table 1 examines whether religious conflicts are more intense than nonreligious conflicts. Ethno-religious conflicts last longer and involve more fatalities than other ethnic conflicts, but affect a smaller area of the state, with all of these results being statistically significant.[13] There are no statistically significant differences between religious and nonreligious mass killings, but both measures are higher for religious mass killings. Lastly, religious revolutions are more intense on the measures for which the differences are statistically significant (combatants, area, and average, as well as for fatalities), but religious revolutions are shorter than nonreligious ones. In all, religious conflicts are

TABLE 1. *Intensity of Religious vs. Nonreligious Conflict*

			Religious Differences	
Conflict Type	Variable	N	Not Religious	Different Religion or Religious Revolution
Ethnic	Combatants	758	3.07	3.00
	Fatalities	721	1.36	1.64**
	Area	774	2.04	1.52**
	Average	705	2.17	2.04*
	Duration in Years	66	9.38	15.26*
Genocide or Politicide	Deaths	263	2.29	2.34
	Duration in Years	36	6.04	7.33
Revolution	Combatants	345	2.96	3.46**
	Fatalities	320	1.78	1.96
	Area	359	2.56	3.24**
	Average	306	2.43	3.03**
	Duration in Years	49	6.78	4.83

* T-test between this mean and the one for "not religious", sig <= .05
** T-test between this mean and the one for "not religious", sig <= .001

more intense on five out of seven measures which are statistically significant and eight out of 12 measures overall.

While these results are by no means conclusive, it is fair to say that they tend to support the argument that religious conflicts are more intense than other conflicts. These results also imply that the intensity of revolutionary wars is most influenced by religion. On all three significant measures and on four out of five measures overall, religious revolutions are more intense than other revolutions. For genocides, both measures show religious genocides as being more intense, but these differences are not statistically significant. Among ethnic conflicts, ethno-religious conflicts are more intense than other ethnic conflicts on only two out of four statistically significant measures and two out of five measures overall. However, the scores for the nonsignificant measure (number of combatants) are very close and one of the significant measures is an average of other measures. Also, the difference between the duration of religious and nonreligious ethnic conflicts is considerable. Thus, perhaps ethno-religious conflicts are slightly more intense than other ethnic conflicts, but this difference in intensity is clearly less than the differences that exist for other types of conflict. In all, religious revolutions and to a lesser extent religious genocides are more intense than nonreligious conflicts, but religiously based ethnic conflicts are at most only slightly more intense than other ethnic conflicts.

Table 2 examines the number of conflicts between and within specific religions. By far, the most common type of conflict is conflict between two Christian groups. This type of conflict is nearly 70 percent more common than the next most common type of conflict, those between two Muslim groups. The results from Table 2 are supplemented by the results from Table 3 (which are derived from Table 2) showing the participation of each religion in conflict and the extent to which that conflict is inter-religious. The results show that Christian groups are the most involved in conflict, constituting 41.54 percent of groups involved in conflict, which is considerably higher than the next highest type of group, that is, Islamic

TABLE 2. *Number of Conflicts between Specific Religions*

	Religion				
Religion	Christian	Muslim	Buddhist	Other or Undetermined	Total
Christian	360				583
Muslim	146	214			460
Buddhist	0	21	19		164
Animist	0	32	37	0	69
Other or Undetermined	77	47	87	95	306

TABLE 3. *Data on Specific Religions in Conflict Years for Both Sides of the Conflict*

Religion	Total Conflict Years	% of All Conflict Years	No. of Conflict Years Within Religion	% of Conflict Years Within Religion
Christian	943	41.54	720	76.60
Muslim	674	29.69	428	63.50
Buddhist	183	8.06	38	20.77
Animist	69	3.04	0	0.00
Other or Undetermined	401	17.67	–	–
Total	2270	100.00	1186	52.25

groups, which constitute 29.69 percent of the groups that are involved in conflicts. While for both Christian and Islamic groups the majority of conflicts are with groups of the same religion, a higher percentage of Islamic groups engage in inter-religious conflict. In fact, although Christian groups engage in more conflicts overall, Islamic groups engage in more inter-religious conflicts than do Christian groups.

Another interesting finding is that very few Buddhist groups and no Animist groups engage in conflict with groups of their own religion. Furthermore, none of the Buddhist versus Buddhist conflicts are ethnic conflicts—they are all civil wars that take place in Buddhist states. This is not surprising in the case of Animist groups, since these groups are almost exclusively indigenous minorities and very few states are ruled by majorities that are Animist. That few Buddhist groups engage in conflict with each other cannot be explained by demographics. According to the Minorities at Risk data set,[14] six out of 13 Buddhist ethnic minorities that were politically active in the 1990s live in Buddhist states. It also cannot be explained by arguing that Buddhists are pacifists because, as shown in Table 3, they are involved in 183 conflict years. However, perhaps this lack of intra-Buddhist conflicts is due to the pacifist doctrines of Buddhism being enough to prevent major conflicts between separate Buddhist groups, but not between Buddhist groups and non-Buddhist groups or within a single Buddhist group.

These results regarding the breakdown of conflicts between groups of specific religions tend to contradict Huntington's argument that Islam has "bloody borders." While inter-religious conflicts constitute a higher percentage of the conflict years involving Islamic groups, Christian groups engage in nearly as many and Buddhist groups engage mostly in inter-religious conflict. Furthermore, the

TABLE 4. *Number of Conflicts Between Specific Religions, 1990–96 Only*

	Religion				
Religion	Christian	Muslim	Buddhist	Other or Undetermined	Total
Christian	118				173
Muslim	46	68			146
Buddhist	0	4	0		18
Animist	0	7	0	0	7
Other or Undetermined	9	21	14	23	67

Christian groups are by far more "bloody," in that Christian groups are more often involved in conflicts than any other type of group.

However, it is possible to argue that these results do not apply to Huntington's arguments because they cover 1950–96 and Huntington's arguments are meant to apply only to post-Cold War conflicts. Accordingly, Tables 4 and 5 perform the same analyses comparing the Cold War period of 1950–89 to the post-Cold War period of 1990–96. The post-Cold War results are similar to those in Tables 2 and 3. Christian groups are by far the most involved in conflict. Most of these conflicts are with other Christian groups. Also, the percentage of Christian groups involved in conflicts with other Christian groups rose in the post-Cold War era from 74.23 percent to 81.10 percent and the percentage of conflicts between Islamic groups also rose slightly from 63.35 percent to 63.55 percent. In addition, the overall amount of conflict within religions increased from 49.04 percent to 60.98 percent. Thus, the end of the Cold War saw a drop in the proportion of inter-religious conflict, thus providing further evidence which contradicts Huntington's theories.

TABLE 5. *Data on Specific Religions in Conflict Years for Both Sides of the Conflict, Comparing Cold War and Post-Cold War Eras*

	Religion	Total Conflict Years	% of All Conflict Years	No. of Conflict Years Within Religion	% of Conflict Years Within Religion
Post-Cold War: 1990–96	Christian	291	47.70	236	81.10
	Muslim	214	35.08	136	63.55
	Buddhist	18	2.95	0	0.00
	Animist	7	1.15	0	0.00
	Other or Undetermined	90	14.75	–	–
	Total	610	100.00	372	60.98
Cold War 1950–89	Christian	652	39.28	484	74.23
	Muslim	460	27.71	292	63.35
	Buddhist	165	9.94	38	23.03
	Animist	62	3.73	0	0.00
	Other or Undetermined	311	18.73	–	–
	Total	1660	100.00	814	49.04

Conclusions

In all, the evidence clearly shows that many conflicts continue to be religious. Since 1950 the number of both religious and nonreligious conflicts have increased, though religious conflicts have increased slightly less. Thus, while religion remains an important factor in conflict, it is clear that other factors, or at least a combination of other factors, are also important. One factor that seems to have influenced the rise of nonreligious conflict is the Cold War. During the Cold War, nonreligious conflicts became more common than religious conflicts for all conflict types, but after the Cold War all conflict dropped, with nonreligious conflicts dropping more than religious conflicts. If this trend continues, religious conflict will be about as common as other types of conflicts. In any case, it is clear that religious conflicts are still a significant percentage of all conflicts.

Similarly, overall, religious conflicts tend to be more intense than nonreligious ones. This is especially true for revolutionary wars, but less so for mass killings and unclear for ethnic wars. This is particularly interesting in that it is ethnic conflicts that are most likely to be religious and revolutionary wars that are least likely to be religious. Given this, it can be said that religion is more likely to be involved in ethnic wars, but religious revolutionary wars are likely to be more intense. This also shows that wars between different religions are far more common than fundamentalist challenges to more secular states.

Be that as it may, while it is clear that a majority of internal conflicts are not religious, religious differences, as well as other religious factors, have been consistently involved in serious internal conflicts between 1950 and 1996. Thus, the predictions that modernity will cause religious influence in politics and society to decline are clearly contradicted by the evidence, at least with regard to serious internal conflicts between 1950 and 1996. Furthermore, the overall increase in the absolute amount of religious conflict during this period provides some support for those that argue that modernity will increase the influence of religion. Lastly, additional support is provided by the fact that these results are also consistent with the findings of Fox (1997, 1999a, 1999b, 2000a, 2000b, 2000d). These studies show that a significant minority of ethnic conflicts are religious and the dynamics of ethno-religious conflicts differ from those of other ethnic conflicts. They are also consistent with the findings of Rummel (1997), which show that religious diversity in a state makes ethnic conflicts there more intense.

The results presented here also contradict major elements of Huntington's "clash of civilizations" theory. Religious conflicts drop after the end of the Cold War, as do nonreligious conflicts, while Huntington's theory would have them rise. Religious conflicts are a minority of conflicts, both during and after the Cold War, while Huntington's theory would have them the majority. Lastly, Huntington predicts that conflicts involving Islamic groups will be the most common, whereas conflicts involving Christian groups are far more common.

These findings are consistent with the findings of the other quantitative studies that test Huntington's "clash of civilizations" theory. In fact, the overall results of this study confirm the general findings of previous quantitative studies, which can be summed up as follows: religious conflicts continue to be a significant proportion of all conflict and religious factors influence the dynamics of conflicts, but the more specific predictions found in Huntington's "clash of civilizations" theory are not an accurate description of religious conflict nor of conflict in general.

However, to be fair, the evidence provided here is not a direct test of Huntington's theory because the evidence examines conflicts between different religions, not between different civilizations as Huntington defines them, though there is considerable overlap between the two (Fox, 2001e). Also, the evidence provided here examines only internal conflicts and Huntington's theory also applies to international conflicts. Lastly, Huntington's theory is a long-term theory and it is possible that in a decade or two domestic conflict will conform to his predictions, though there is no indication from the data presented here that this is likely to occur.

Also, it is important to reiterate that the results provided here simply measure whether religious conflicts are more common and more intense than other types of conflict. The limited amount of data in the State Failure data set does not allow this study to control for other factors. Nor does it allow this study to assess causality. This means that any conclusions that religion causes any of the conflicts in the data set or causes these conflicts to be more intense are based on inference. Nevertheless, this does not detract from the fact that conflicts involving religious differences have been common throughout the period covered in this study and that this study is consistent with the findings of previous studies using other data sets. Given this, any conclusions that religion has lost political influence are clearly premature.

Notes

1. For a survey of the literature on modernization theory, see, among others, Almond (1960), Apter (1965), Deutsch (1953), and Smith (1970). For a more detailed discussion of modernization theory and why religion was ignored by the social sciences, see Fox (2001d, 2002b).
2. For more on the impact of the Iranian revolution on the study of politics, see Tibi (2000).
3. These sociologists are not the first to argue that religion is still relevant. Others, including Arjomand (1993: 13, 37), Weigel (1992: 174), McNeill (1993: 561–6), Greenwalt (1988: 30–37), and Barnhart (1990: 28), also put forward various forms of the argument that religion is still influential in society and politics.
4. For some criticisms of this theory, see Ellison (1995), Demerath (1995), and Williams (1994: 788–9).
5. Many, including Eisenstadt (2000: 591), Esposito and Voll (2000: 616), Fox (2000a, 2001a, 2001e), Laustsen and Waever (2000: 705), Smith (2000: 791), and Tibi (2000: 844), similarly interpret Huntington's concept of civilizations as being primarily based on religion. It should be noted that Huntington's concept of civilizations and religion do not fully coincide, but it does fully coincide with regard to Islam (Fox, 2001e).
6. For a more detailed discussion of Huntington's "clash of civilizations" theory and the debate surrounding it, see Fox (2001a, 2001b, 2002a).
7. It is important to note that this article uses an earlier version of the State Failure data set (Center for International Development and Conflict Management, 2003) than is currently posed on the website, so attempts at replication will result in approximately, but not exactly, the same results.
8. While abrupt regime transitions are included in the data set, they are not included in this article because they generally represent changes in regimes, not major conflicts. Wars of independence against western colonial masters are not included in the data set.
9. There are episodes of conflict which were broken up. First, the joint Serb and Croat war against the Bosnian government from 1992 to 1995 was broken up into two separate cases, one for Serbs and one for Croats. As a result, four conflict years were added. Second,

the Abkhaz and South Ossetian rebellion from 1991 to 1993 in Georgia was broken up into two separate cases, one for Abkhaz and one for South Ossetians. As a result, three conflict years were added. Third, the original codings for India combine all local rebellions by the Nagas, Mizos, Tripuras, Bodos, and others in Assam (1952 onward), Sikhs in Punjab (1982 onward), and Muslims in Kashmir (1989 onward). This article has separated this into four categories: the Nagas, Mizos, and Tripuras, who are all mostly Christian indigenous peoples; the Bodos and Assamese, who are Muslim minorities; the Sikhs; and the Kashmiris. As a result, 68 cases were added. Fourth, in the original data set, Lebanon from 1965 to 1992 was coded together. This article has coded 1965–74 as Palestinians against the Christian Maronite authorities and 1975–92 as a civil war between general Muslims and Christians. Fifth, in the original data set, conflicts by the governments of Georgia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and the Baltic republics were coded together (1986–91). This article has separated them into two cases, one for Muslim Azerbaijanis and Kazakhs, and one for Georgia and the Baltic republic governments. As a result, six cases were added.

10. There are 84 cases of revolutionary wars which overlap with ethnic wars, 39 cases of genocide/politicide which overlap with ethnic wars, and 43 cases in which instances of ethnic war overlap with both revolutionary wars and genocides.
11. In cases where data were missing for one of the variables, the remaining two were averaged.
12. This category contains all other religions and groups that are of mixed religions.
13. It is important to note that since the data used here constitutes the entire universe of cases, statistical significance is only a measure of the strength of the relationship. That is, since the data presented here are all the cases that exist, rather than a sample of all cases, any differences found are real differences.
14. For details on the Minorities at Risk data set as well as a copy of the data set itself, see the Minorities at Risk web page at www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/mar.

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Biographical Note

JONATHAN FOX received his Ph.D. in Government and Politics from the University of Maryland in 1997 and is currently a Lecturer in the Political Studies Department of Bar-Ilan University (Ramat-Gan, Israel). His research interests include the role of religion in conflict, international relations, and politics, as well as issues of separation of religion and state. He has published numerous articles on these topics in journals as well as his recent book *Ethnoreligious Conflict in the Late Twentieth Century*. ADDRESS: Department of Political Studies, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan, Israel [email: foxjon@mail.biu.ac.il].

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