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Much ado about religion: Religiosity, resource loss, and support for political violence

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Abstract

The association between religion and violence has raised much interest in both academic and public circles. Yet on the individual level, existing empirical accounts are both sparse and conflicting. Based on previous research which found that religion plays a role in the support of political violence only through the mediation of objective and perceived deprivations, the authors test Conservation of Resource (COR) theory as an individual level explanation for the association of religion, socio-economic deprivations, and support for political violence. COR theory predicts that when individuals' personal, social or economic resources are threatened, a response mechanism may include violence. Utilizing two distinct datasets, and relying on structural equation models analysis, the latter two stages of a three-stage study are reported here. In a follow-up to their previous article, the authors refine the use of socio-economic variables in examining the effects of deprivation as mediating between religion and political violence. Then, they analyze an independent sample of 545 Muslims and Jews, collected during August and September 2004, to test a psychological-based explanation based on COR theory. This study replaces measures of deprivation used in the previous stages with measures of economic and psychological resource loss. Findings show that the relationship between religion and support of political violence only holds true when mediated by deprivations and psychological resource loss. They also suggest that the typical tendency to focus on economic resource loss is over-simplistic as psychological, not economic, resources seem to mediate between religion and support of violence.

Keywords

deprivation; Jews; Muslims; political violence; religion; resources; terrorism

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Data replication

The dataset, codebook, and command files for the empirical analysis in this article can be found at <http://www.prio.no/jpr/datasets>.

Introduction

Historically, all major religions have played a role in the outbreak of political violence (Bar-Tal, 2000; Fox, 2003; Juergensmeyer, 2001). Yet, during most of the 20th century, academics and others have focused on non-religious explanations (for detail, see Victoroff, 2005; following are some examples). These include sociopolitical explanations, such as the social learning theory (Bandura, 1973; Crenshaw, 1992; Sageman, 2004; Taylor & Quayle, 1994), frustration-aggression theories (Davies, 1973; Laqueur, 1987; Merari & Friedland, 1985), relative deprivation theory (Gurr, 1970), and oppression theory (Fanon, 1965; Schmid, 1983; Whitaker, 1972). Psychological and psychopathological explanations include identity theory (Crenshaw, 1986; Olsson, 1988), narcissism theory (Crayton, 1983; Pearlstein, 1991; Shaw, 1986; Post, 1998, 2004), absolutist/apocalyptic theory (Lifton, 2000), and a variety of cognitive and group theories. An additional group consists of rationality or rational choice theories (Crenshaw, 1992; Sandler & Lapan, 1988; Sandler, Tschirhart & Cauley, 1983; Wilson, 2000).

In the last decade of the 20th century, however, the role of religion in explaining political violence has, once again, resurfaced (Hasenclever & Rittberger, 2000; Hoffman, 1998; Huntington, 1996; Juergensmeyer, 2001; Rapoport, 1984; Stern, 2003). Nonetheless, existing explanations are hardly satisfactory. In fact, while some academics argue that religion breeds violence, others argue the exact opposite (see, especially, Appleby, 2000; Philpott, 2007). Not surprisingly, empirical studies also provide conflicting results, with some studies showing a definite role for religious adherents, leaders and institutions in inflaming violence, and others finding that religious beliefs and institutions promote moderation. This duality has been termed the ‘ambivalence of the sacred’ (Appleby, 2000).

One commonality shared by both those who argue that religion breeds violence, and those who claim the opposite, is the difficulty in explaining this relationship on the individual level. In other words, why do some religious believers choose to act violently, while many others avoid such behavior? Typical arguments based on ideological commitment and/or social mobilization theories do not seem to present an adequate resolution of this problem.

This article is part of a multi-stage effort to resolve this paradox. In the first previously published stage (see Zaidise, Canetti-Nisim & Pedahzur, 2007), we suggested that relative deprivation theory might help explain the relationship between religion and violence through a process of mediation. It was largely supported by the data that people perceive economic and political deprivations in a subjective manner, based on social and religious group identities. It was also found that the effect of religion on support for political violence only holds true through this process of mediation, but not independently. These findings helped bridge a theoretical gap and seemed to account for several empirical inconsistencies previously published. They also seemed to fit in well with the circumstantial conditions of Israeli society and with those of other Western countries which faced growing concerns regarding ethnic minorities and immigrant communities. In Israel, Muslims were found to support political violence more than Jews, yet the strong role of socio-economic deprivations underscored that religion does not, in itself, engender violence.

We believe that these results advance our understanding of religious-based political violence. However, we are still in the dark as to ‘why’ deprivations mediate between religion and support for violence as they do. The answer to this is the ambitious aim of this article.

In the current study, we present a possible explanation taken from the realm of social psychology which centers on psychological compensation mechanisms. With the aid of the conservation of resources (COR) theory, we address a key theoretical question: Why do

socio-economic deprivations bring about support for political violence among religious individuals?

Owing to considerations of space, scope and focus, we will not repeat the basic theoretical explanations found in the literature for religious-based violence, nor will we address the theoretical complexities of the relationship between deprivation and violence. These can be found in detail in our above-mentioned stage 1 study. We choose here to focus specifically on the contribution of COR theory in explaining the association of religion and violence mediated by socio-economic deprivations, thus adding a further level of explanation.

Religion, deprivation, violence, and the conservation of resources theory

A comprehensive theory of the root causes of *individual* support for acts of political violence is lacking (Victoroff, 2005). We choose to frame our argument within a general theory of stress and coping, emphasizing the intervening role played by actual and perceived discrimination in the allocation of socio-economic resources. Drawing on Glock & Stark (1965: 246), deprivation refers to 'any and all of the ways that an individual or group may be, or feel, disadvantaged, in comparison to other individuals or groups, or to an internalized set of standards'. The conservation of resources (COR) theory, which focuses on stress-motivation (Hobfoll, 1988, 1989, 1998), predicts – and research supports – that when individuals' personal (self-perception, self-value), social (friends, support networks), or economic (job, education, housing) resources are threatened, a response mechanism is triggered to defend against this loss of resources (Freedy et al., 1994; Norris & Kaniasty, 1996). With ongoing loss cycles, this defensive posture gains force and momentum, becoming a more central motivation for those who are threatened (Norris & Kaniasty, 1996). When individuals are threatened with major ongoing resource loss, as in the case of social discrimination in a prolonged conflict, they will find that circumstances outstrip their normal coping repertoires (Chemtob et al., 1994; Hobfoll, 1998). This relationship was demonstrated in the results of a national study of Israeli Jews and Muslims, which indicated that psychosocial resource loss predicted post-traumatic stress disorder and depression symptoms, as well as support for political violence and ethnocentrism (Hobfoll, Canetti-Nisim & Johnson, 2006).

When ongoing loss occurs and individual coping strategies are outstripped or inappropriate, according to COR theory people do not simply act helplessly. Rather, they turn to outside sources for information on problem-solving and coping. Phenomena such as terrorism and social conflict often exceed people's everyday coping repertoires. This is due to these issues' extreme complexity at an inter-group or even international level, and subsequently people look to external 'meaning makers'. These can be religious or political authorities who provide information and define how people should cope in these situations (Chemtob et al., 1994; Hobfoll, 1998). If political-religious authorities and doctrine suggest that violence is the best – or the only – means of coping with the undesired state of resource threat and loss, this path may be adopted. This is what may be termed a 'constructivist' approach to the understanding of religious violence (see Hasenclever & Rittberger, 2000).

These factors are particularly salient in the Middle East where political-religious authorities hold sway in the media and in the body politic, in such a way that these viewpoints become primary prisms in interpreting and acting in response to events (Beit-Hallahmi, 2001). Both Jewish and Muslim religious leaders have tended to assume militant viewpoints toward the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and have supported violence as a preferred means of achieving their desired political goals (Sprinzak, 1999). Some have even transformed the conflict – primarily revolving around issues of territory and political control – into a theological discourse, thus portraying it as a 'clash of civilizations' (Huntington, 1996). This has

contributed to the adaptation and legitimization of violent behaviors, making violence seem not only viable but even moral and holy.

Religious-based grievances in Israel

In Israel, and elsewhere, groups' ethnic and national characteristics often translate into social and political stratification. Being Muslim in Israel is generally linked to socio-economic and political discrimination, which are deeply rooted in the country's history and development. Generally speaking, Muslims have lower educational and economic levels than Jews (Ghanem & Ozacky-Lazer, 2001), and the animosity of the latter toward their Muslim counterparts has been widely documented (e.g. Bar-Tal, 1998; Canetti-Nisim & Pedahzur, 2003; Smootha, 1992). In the face of the recent cycle of violence between Jews and Muslims in Israel, inter-religious tensions prevail (Hobfoll, Canetti-Nisim & Johnson, 2006; Tessler, 1990).

While the differential socio-economic status of Israeli Muslims and Jews is widely supported by numbers and figures, the underlying cause or causes are debatable. Yet, when dealing with political mobilization and/or behavior, the 'actual cause' is less prominent than the way in which it is 'perceived'. Since the establishment of Israel, its Muslim population has undergone a rapid process of politicization (see Slone, 2003, for the effect of such trends on Israeli youth). While a full account of this process is not within the scope of this article, it is important to note that Muslims in Israel overwhelmingly view the Israeli polity as responsible for socio-economic discrepancies. Therefore, 'discrimination' by state and society in the Israeli case better relates to what is described elsewhere in the literature as 'deprivation'.

With the underprivileged status of religious Muslims in mind, it seems necessary to explain why we would argue that religiosity increases perceived socio-economic discrimination for Jews as well. Religious Jews in Israel are a distinct minority within the Jewish population and are, on average, less well-off than secular Jews (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2002). Moreover, ultra-Orthodox Jews have often felt at odds with the secular institutions of modern Israel. Many do not serve in the military, have larger families, often live in segregated neighborhoods, and do not typically seek advanced secular education. In addition, many religious Jews work in unskilled positions or are unemployed (Levy, Levinsohn & Katz, 2002), report that employment status is an established source of widespread psychological distress (Fryer & Fagan, 2003), and consistently report lower levels of perceived well-being (Landau, Beit-Hallahmi & Levy, 1998). It is also important to note that in the Israeli multi-party system, voters for religious Orthodox and right-wing (many of which are also religious) parties have typically been more prone to support violent political participation than secular and left-wing voters (Yuchtman-Yaar & Herman, 1998).

General research design

In order to more comprehensively understand the effect of religion on support for political violence, the research design featured here was based on a three-stage model. Its innovation stems from the employment of individual-level survey data which previously has received little attention. It is also novel in its introduction of mediating variables, objective and subjective deprivations, and economic and psychological resource loss, in order to account for the inconsistencies of previous literature. Finally, COR theory is used to explain how and why mediation by deprivation induces support for violence among religious subjects.

Three stages of research were devised and implemented. In Study 1, we tested for the mediation effects of objective and subjective deprivations in the relationship between religion and support for political violence. The innovative findings of this stage (Zaidise,

Canetti-Nisim & Pedahzur, 2007) encouraged pursuit of the following stages. Study 2 advanced the study of deprivations as mediating variables through the breakdown and refinement of the mediating variables in order to more accurately pinpoint which forms of deprivations provide best explanations. In Study 3, we advanced the explanatory power of our model by incorporating a psychological explanation in the form of COR theory. To directly test the COR theory and its assumptions, we replaced measures of deprivation with measures of economic and psychological resource loss which were specifically designed for the testing of COR.

Data collection and sampling

Data for all three studies were collected by means of telephone interviews in the respondents' native language of Hebrew, Arabic or Russian, conducted by trained interviewers using computerized survey software. The sample used for Studies 1 and 2 was drawn in October 2001. The initial representative national sample included 1,002 individuals, yielding a final cooperation rate of 50% (American Association for Public Opinion Research, 2000). We limited our study to Israeli Jews (N=697) and Muslims (N=213), resulting in a final sample of 910 respondents.¹ The sample was representative of the Israeli public in terms of gender, income, and traditional voting patterns.

Data for Study 3 were collected in the last week of August and the first week of September 2004. Interview procedures were similar, and again, only Jews and Muslims were retained, resulting in a sample of 545 respondents. Jews (86.1%) and females (56.9%) are slightly overrepresented.

Measures

Dependent variable: support for political violence

In all three studies, support for political violence was examined using a three-item measure adopted from Pedahzur, Hasisi & Brichta (2000). Participants rated their agreement on a scale of 1–6, ranging from 'don't agree at all' to 'agree very much', in relation to the following statements: (1) Sending letters in order to threaten public figures is at times necessary in order to stop a dangerous policy; (2) In certain situations there are no other options but to use arms in order to prevent the government from carrying out its policy; (3) When a national disaster is at hand, and all other forms of civil protest have not been successful, it is forgivable to physically harm politicians. These statements were designed to avoid asking participants if they themselves would carry out violent acts, as well as to avoid criminal culpability and guarded responses. Prior use of the scale indicated a broad range of responses, including many endorsing support for such extreme measures (Pedahzur, Hasisi & Brichta, 2000). Cronbach's alpha for the scale in Studies 1 and 2 was .68, and .415 in Study 3. These values are reasonable for a three-item scale.²

¹Christians, who are mostly Arab, are few in number in Israel (about 10% of Israeli Arabs, who account for 20% of all Israelis). Additionally, Christians are not a dominant group and, according to official and academic data, typically differ from Israeli Muslims in social, cultural, and political aspects. Some preliminary analyses of the Christian group, as well as the above considerations, led us to the conclusion that their inclusion in the principal structural analysis might blur the results and distract attention from our primary research agenda.

²While we acknowledge that the last two measures are only fair indicators of the constructs they represent, this is often the case for two- and three-item measures (Krosnick & Fabrigar, 2001). In addition, because these scales were revised and adapted for the purposes of the study, their predictive validity was further examined and proved to be adequate. Over a period of more than a decade now, this scale has been used and re-evaluated by the authors and consistently found to be the strongest in terms of both internal and external validity.

Independent variables: religious affiliation and degree of religiosity

Respondents were asked: 'Are you: 0. Jewish; 1. Muslim; 2. Christian; 3. Druze?' Following procedures employed in previous Israeli studies (e.g. Friedlander et al., 1985; Mansbach & Greenbaum, 1999), *degree of religiosity* was determined according to the respondents' self-definition. Respondents defined themselves as: 1 = secular (having no or few religious beliefs or behaviors); 2 = traditional (moderately religious); 3 = religious; and 4 = very religious. This item has been asserted to be the best single measure of personal piety (Stark & Glock, 1968) and is often used as a parsimonious measure of religious devoutness (e.g. Cohen, Siegel & Rozin, 2003). In Israel this item is widely used (Levy, Levinsohn & Katz, 2002). Further, it was found (Canetti-Nisim, 2004) to be in high agreement with Ben-Meir and Kedem's (1979) Jewish religiosity indices. Similar single-item measures are acceptable for measuring religiosity among Muslims (e.g. Amara & Schnell, 2004; Azaiza, 2005; Moore & Awiess, 2002). Following these authors, particularly those who study Muslims, we dichotomized the measure into secular vs. religious in the analyses, re-coding all of the following – 'traditional/moderately religious', 'religious', or 'very religious' – as 'religious'.

Mediators

For a description of the mediators employed in Study 1, *objective deprivation* and *subjective deprivation*, please refer to Zaidise, Canetti-Nisim & Pedahzur (2007).

In Study 2, deprivation mediators included *level of education* (elementary school = 1; high school = 2; post-high school = 3; or academic education = 4); *income* (based on the assumption that the average Israeli household income is NIS 7,500, approximately \$1,600, participants were asked to indicate whether the average income for their household was 1 = much lower than the average; 2 = a little below average; 3 = average; 4 = a little above average; 5 = much above average);³ and *place of residence* (respondents were asked to respond to an open-ended question regarding their place of residence). Responses were grouped according to ten clusters based on the socio-economic status assigned to them by the Central Bureau Statistics (2002).

Perceived discrimination was measured by a two-item scale adopted from Gurr (1970). Participants rated their agreement on a scale of 1–6, ranging from 'don't agree at all' to 'agree very much', in relation to the following: (1) To what degree have you personally felt discriminated against on the basis of ethnicity? (2) To what degree have you personally felt discriminated against on the basis of nationality? In the Israeli context, the term 'nationality' more often refers to the dichotomy between Jewish and non-Jewish citizens. Jewish citizens are labeled 'Jewish' in the 'nationality' box on Israeli identity cards. Ethnicity usually refers to the distinction between Jews of 'Ashkenazi' or 'Mizrachi' descent, and is still considered one of the country's major social cleavages. This measure's construct validity has been previously demonstrated by its relation to nationality, religiosity, and support of political violence (Pedahzur, Hasisi & Brichta, 2000). Although based on just two items, it should be considered a general indicator of discrimination and not a true scale.⁴

In Study 3, deprivations were replaced with measures of economic and psychological loss. Income was also used as a mediator and measured as described above. We assessed the loss of resources related to the intifada employing a 7-item scale that was used in previous post-terrorism contexts, e.g. 'Have you suffered economically as a result of terrorism and war since the intifada began?'; 'There is at least one person whom you know that you like less

³This estimate of perceived income is most often used in Israel by social scientists, as people seldom know their actual annual income because of the fluctuations and complexities of the economy, and they are reluctant to report exact earnings.

⁴Since this measure consists of two items only, reliability was not assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Correlation between the items was moderately high ($r = .432, p < .001$).

than you used to because of things that occurred between the both of you since the intifada began' (Hobfoll, Canetti-Nisim & Johnson 2006; Hobfoll & Lilly, 1993; Norris, 2001). Two summative scores were calculated – one for the loss of economic/work resources and one for the loss of psychosocial resources. The three items for economic loss were given responses of no (0) or yes (1) and then summed. The scale was coded into three categories (0, 1, or 2 or more).

General analysis strategy

In order to test the hypothesis that actual and perceived socioeconomic discrimination (in Studies 1 and 2) or economic and psychological resource loss⁵ (in Study 3) mediate between religion and religiosity, on the one hand, and support for political violence, on the other, we devised a two-step analytic strategy.

First, we tested for the main and interaction effects of the independent variables. We advanced a series of variance analyses testing for differences between Jews and Muslims, and secular and religious respondents in the total sample, and secular and religious in each of the groups under investigation. We also tested for bivariate correlations among all study variables.

Second, we followed the criteria proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986) regarding the use of structural equation models (SEM) in order to test the mediation hypotheses. Although mediation can be estimated with the use of OLS regression models, cases with multiple mediators and/or latent variables are often better handled by SEM (Iacobucci, Saldanha & Deng, 2007). SEM have been successfully employed by political scientists studying a diverse range of phenomena, including (but not limited to): political violence (Zaidise, Canetti-Nisim & Pedahzur, 2007), religion and democratic values (Canetti-Nisim, 2004); tolerance (Marquart-Pyatt & Paxton, 2007), political attitudes and voting behavior (Halperin, Canetti-Nisim & Pedahzur, 2007; Mughan & Paxton, 2006; Paxton & Mughan, 2006; Paxton & Kunovich, 2003), social capital (Brehm & Rahn, 1997), and political participation and efficacy (Finkel, 1985).

For each stage, multiple models were advanced including (Model 1) direct and indirect paths, (Model 2) indirect paths alone, and (Model 3) direct paths alone. Keeping in mind the previously discussed large number of religious Muslims, we also specified the relationship between religion and religiosity. These specifications enabled two comparisons of nested models (2 and 3 are nested in 1).⁶ The models did not assume causality, but attempted to explore the relationship between the constructs in a controlled manner. Owing to considerations of space and scope, only the best-fit models are discussed here in detail.

Following is a description of the individual findings of each study. The discussion of Study 1, which has been previously published (Zaidise, Canetti-Nisim & Pedahzur, 2007), is kept to a minimum.

⁵Economic loss pertains to the loss of income, property, and wealth. Psychological loss pertains to increased pessimism, loss of control over one's life, and the loss of friendships and support networks.

⁶The quality of the models was evaluated using four criteria. The first, following Raykov, Tomer, and Nesselroade (1991), consists of fit measures. The chi-square (χ^2) test is the most basic; however, it is sensitive to sample size and is considered stable and reliable only in samples of 200–400 (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1994). Additional measures of fit (NFI, TLI, CFI) and misfit (RMSEA) were employed (Boomsma, 2000; Browne & Cudeck, 1993). The second criterion calculates the difference in the usual χ^2 estimators for restricted and unrestricted nested models, with the degrees of freedom equal to the difference in the degrees of freedom of the two (Bollen, 1989). This test is conducted on the restricted and unrestricted forms of the base model. Hence, the third set of criteria consists of the magnitude and direction of the path coefficients (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1994). The last criterion is a high percentage of explained variance.

Study 1: The mediating role of deprivation in religious-based violence

Study 1 was designed to examine the mediating role of objective and subjective deprivation in the relationship between religion and support for political violence.

Main findings and discussion

Preliminary analyses showed a significant difference in the support for political violence between Jews and Muslims, and between seculars and religious within each group. Muslims and religious respondents were found to support political violence more than Jewish and secular respondents. However, subsequent analyses employing SEM and testing for the mediation of objective and subjective deprivations introduced more complexity into this relationship. Direct and indirect paths show ostensibly inverse patterns. In the direct paths, Jews were more supportive of political violence than Muslims, and less religious respondents were more supportive than more religious respondents. In the indirect paths, mediated by deprivation (more strongly by objective deprivation than subjective), Muslims were more supportive of political violence, and religious respondents were more supportive than their less religious counterparts. These findings are consistent with the greater deprivation of Muslims and religious respondents prevalent in the Israeli setting.

Study 2: Refining the mediation through deprivation argument

Study 2 served as an intermediate stage between the former and later studies, refining the understanding of how deprivations mediate the relationship between religion and support for political violence. The empirical data for this study was based on the same survey sample used for Study 1, yet the construction of the variables differs and with it, our understanding of the role they play. Contrary to the grouping of economic deprivations into a unitary variable, we now break down these deprivations in order to enable a more detailed analysis of their effect.

Results

On average, support for political violence was fairly low but yielded sufficient variance ($M=1.68$, $SD=1.14$). The mean level of perceived discrimination fell below the middle of the scale ($M=2.00$, $SD=1.40$) with almost identical scores for both items.

Analyses of variance showed significant differences between Jews and Muslims in all study variables. Muslims were more religious and more supportive of political violence, and perceive themselves to be subject to more discrimination in comparison to Jews. Muslims also showed lower levels of educational attainment and lower wages, and live in lower-rated residential areas. Significant differences were also found between secular and religious respondents in all study variables. The religious are more supportive of political violence and perceive themselves to be more discriminated against than secular respondents. However, when different levels of religiosity were analyzed separately in terms of support for political violence, findings suggest that the relationship may not be strictly linear. At a moderate level of religiosity, support for political violence is at its highest, while the very religious seem less supportive. Religious respondents showed lower levels of education, lower wages, and lower-rated residential areas. Among Jews, there were significant differences between levels of religiosity in all variables, excluding political violence. Among Muslims, there were significant differences between levels of religiosity only in education and income.

Two additional trends require mention. Jews are divided almost equally between 'secular' and 'religious' (with a slight advantage to the latter), while only one out of six Muslims consider themselves 'secular'. Second, it seems that there is an almost geographical division

between secular and religious Jews, with groups residing in separate (economically differentiated) municipalities. No such trend seems to exist among Muslims.

To test whether differences between religions and levels of religiosity were significant, we performed a 2 (religion) $\times$ 2 (religiosity) analysis of variance. There were significant differences between Jews and Muslims in support for political violence ($F(1,901) = 28.12, p < .001$). Muslims supported greater violence at every level of religiosity. Differences between levels of religiosity were marginally significant ($F(1,901) = 2.59, p < .10$), but the interaction of religion and religiosity was not significant ($F(1,901) = .84, p < .35$). Zero order correlations of both religion ($r = .25, p < .001$) and religiosity ($r = .10, p < .001$) were also significantly related to support for political violence. Significant correlations were found between socio-economic status and discrimination, between religion/religiosity and support for political violence, and between discrimination and political violence. However, within individual subsamples of each religion (Jewish or Muslim), no significant correlations were found between religiosity and support for political violence, or, among Muslims, between support for political violence and discrimination.⁷ This suggests that it is the differences between, and not within, the two subsamples (i.e. between Jews and Muslims) that account for the total sample correlation. To further understand this relationship, a regression model was tested employing an interaction variable between respondents' religion and religiosity. This analysis yielded a non-significant result for the interaction, as well as for religiosity, further indicating that religious affiliation is more closely related to support for political violence than religiosity.

In order to analyze the extent to which actual and perceived discriminations mediate the impact of religion and religiosity on support for political violence, we advanced structural models which were based on a measurement model that showed excellent fit to the data.⁸ Of the three primary models advanced, one (Model 2) demonstrated the best-fit indices, and although similar in chi-squared differences to another model, it was preferred due to parsimoniousness. Although the two models showed similar explained variance in the support for political violence, the direct effects were not significant in the other model. Examining the models against theoretical criteria, path coefficients in the chosen model adhere to the theoretical framework. Thus, this model (Figure 1) fulfills the criterion of plausibility (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1994).

In terms of structural coefficients, low education, low income, lower-rated area of residence, and high levels of perceived discrimination were found to significantly increase support for political violence. Although religion and religiosity were significantly related to all four indicators of discrimination, there were important differences in the effects of religiosity versus religion. Religion was predominantly related to the indicator of the socio-economic rating of one's place of residence, while religiosity was particularly related to income level. Although the effect of religion on religiosity is plausible and was found to be significant, religiosity does not serve as a successful mediator between religion and socio-economic discrimination. In other words, individuals' religious affiliation has a direct effect on actual and perceived discrimination, regardless of their degree of religiosity.⁹

Although we did not predict moderation, the original model may beg the question of whether it holds equally for both Jews and Muslims. Based on the selected model, slope differences between Jews and Muslims in the structural paths were tested. We advanced multigroup models, testing whether the structural path between religiosity and support for

⁷This indicates the relative homogeneity of the Muslim subsample, in terms of both religiosity and discrimination.

⁸ $\chi^2(2, N=910) = 21.95, p = .08$; NFI = .99; NNFI = .99; CFI = .99; RMSEA = .025. Note that the model includes only one latent variable – support for political violence – with three indicators that showed high and similar loadings, and six observed variables.

political violence differed depending on religion. One submodel allowed the structural paths to vary across religious groups, while the other constrained all structural paths to be equal between the groups.

A chi-squared comparison (Bollen, 1989) showed no significant differences between these models. Fit measures of both models were almost identical, but the first was less favorable since it had more parameters and fewer degrees of freedom. Explained variance was quite minimal for all endogenous variables in both groups, excluding that of the support for political violence. In both models there were significant path coefficients for Muslims and Jews. Further, the direction and magnitude of the coefficients for Muslims in both models were the same as they were for Jews. Put differently, people in one religious group were basically indistinguishable in their relationships between religiosity, socio-economic status, discrimination, and inclinations to political violence, whether they were constrained to behave the same (as in the second submodel) or not (as in the first). We further argue that the multigroup models were not substantially superior to the main model presented (Figure 1) in terms of fit measures and path coefficients.

Discussion

This stage advances our understanding of the way religion affects the inclination to support political violence in several important ways. First, it shows that when deprivations are controlled for, neither religious affiliation nor level of religiosity directly predicts support for political violence. Direct paths were not significant, thus indicating that the mediating role of deprivations is almost exclusively responsible for correlative relationships. Moreover, it appears that of the two religious variables, religious affiliation is a stronger predictor of both deprivations and support for political violence. This implies that indeed Muslims, at all levels of religiosity, tend to support political violence more than Jews, but since the level of religiosity plays only a marginal role, it is not Islamic belief that is the ‘culprit’ here but inter-group feelings which are directly related to socio-economic status. Muslims in Israel differ from Jews, not only in putatively objective socio-economic measures, but in the effects of these differences on group perceptions. Put simply, among Muslims, low socio-economic status is more likely to be translated into a feeling of being subject to discrimination than it is among Jews.

Yet, why should this translate into support for violence? Study 3 tries to answer this question.

Study 3: Testing for a psychological explanation

COR theory suggests that one’s reaction to resource loss is what in fact explains support for political violence. Thus, the mediating role of resource loss is tested in Study 3.

⁹We advanced several other models that did not prove accommodating and hence were not incorporated in the final results. *First*, although we cannot test for causality in a cross-section design, given claims that deprivation may lead to religiosity (e.g. Glock & Stark, 1965), we specified a reversed model in which discrimination affects religiosity, which in turn affects support for political violence. While many of the overall fit measures were similar, the effects of perceived discrimination on religiosity, religiosity on political violence, and religion on religiosity were all found to be insignificant. *Second*, to address the plausible role of authoritarianism in affecting either religiosity or violence, we specified another model including an item of authoritarianism (‘The way things are going in this country, it’s going to take a lot of “strong medicine” to straighten out the troublemakers, criminals, and perverts.’). The overall fit measures were not adequate, the path coefficients were meager, and by and large the other specified relationships were untouched. *Third*, in principle, gender may serve as another predictor of political violence. In a model incorporating gender, its effect on political violence was only marginally significant, and the overall fit was unchanged.

Results

Mean support for political violence was slightly lower among respondents in the sample of Study 3 ($M = 1.42$, $SD = .798$) compared to those of the previous sample. Support for political violence was again greater among Muslims ($M = 1.70$, $SD = .965$) in comparison to Jews ($M = 1.37$, $SD = .758$). The lowest support for political violence was found among secular respondents ($M = 1.36$, $SD = .764$), but very religious respondents ($M = 1.49$, $SD = .803$) tended to support political violence less than moderately religious ones ($M = 1.56$, $SD = .935$).

Analyses of variance showed the differences between Jews and Muslims to be significant for all study variables. Yet, the differences between secular and religious respondents were only significant in support for political violence and loss of psychological resources – but not for loss of economic resources.

Significant correlations (Table I) were found between political violence and religious affiliation, religiosity, loss of psychological resources, and income. Economic and psychological losses, as well as income, were correlated to each other, and all three were correlated to religious affiliation. Out of the three, only income was correlated with religiosity.

Structural models, based on a measurement model that showed good fit to the data, were once again employed to test for mediation. Choice of the final model was in accord with fit indices, chi-squared differences, and model parsimoniousness. The model is displayed in Figure 2.

In terms of structural coefficients, low income and loss of psychological resources were both found to increase political violence. Loss of psychological resources had, by far, the greatest impact on support for political violence. Loss of economic resources had none. Religious affiliation was found to affect all three mediators. Muslims were found to suffer greater psychological loss, greater economic loss, and lower income. Once again, the association with loss of psychological resources was by far the strongest. Level of religiosity was found to have no impact on psychological or economic loss, but higher levels of religiosity were found to result in lower incomes, as anticipated.

It is also important to note the relationships among the mediators. All three mediators (loss of psychological resources, loss of economic resources, and level of income) were intercorrelated. The strongest association was found between psychological and economic resource loss. Yet, economic loss does not independently predict support for political violence, while psychological loss does, to a large extent. Also related were low income and psychological loss, and as one might expect, lower income was associated with higher psychological loss. Finally, it is interesting to note that lower income was associated with greater economic loss, indicating that it is the lower echelons of society that suffer greater loss both in terms of actual economic loss, and in terms of psychological loss.

General discussion

The results of this multi-study effort support the notion that certain attributes related to religion somehow lead to positive attitudes towards the use of political violence. However, they cast doubt on simple popular claims such as that one religion is simply more violent than others, or that religious people are more prone to support extreme politics. By and large, they help refute the accusation that more religious persons are inherently more violent. Although Muslim Israelis were found to support political violence more than their Jewish counterparts, this study suggests that the explanation for this is to be found not in the nature

of Islam, but in contextual reality and psychological stress reactions. The extent to which people suffer socio-economic inequality and perceived discrimination was pivotal in determining whether religiosity and religious affiliation induce support for political violence. It is likely that the extent to which people suffer resource loss, predominantly psychological resource loss, explains support for political violence. These findings seem to coincide with those of other scholars (Brush, 1996; Nachtwey & Tessler, 2002; Tessler 2002, 2003; Thompson, 1989) who have indicated that religion, Islamic religion, and economic deprivations alone cannot fully explain political attitudes related to violence and strife.

Perhaps the most visible conclusion to emerge from this study is that the effect of religion and religiosity on support for political violence is not straightforward. Religion is obviously associated somehow with support for political violence, but not in and of itself, and not necessarily in every setting. Furthermore, group differences between religions seem to matter more than differences between levels of religiosity within the same religion. In one combined sample of both Muslims and Jews (Study 2), religiosity seemed to be related to support for political violence. However, when the sample was split between Muslims and Jews, it seemed religiosity had lost its effect. In another sample (Study 3), religiosity had almost no effect from the very start. If group identity is important (adhering to one religion or another, on even the lowest level of religiosity) but intergroup differences hardly matter, then it is less likely that the crucial factor is indeed belief. One might also have expected secular members of all religions to be comparable; however, this does not seem to be the case. Furthermore, the similarity of responses between religious and seculars belonging to the same religion might also suggest that religion is more important in the sense of social organization than in the sense of belief or content, where political violence is concerned.

Alternatively, religious group identification is closely related to both sociopolitical status and the psychological distress assumed to be linked to this status. In various variants of these models (in Studies 2 and 3), both religion and religiosity were found to have no direct effect on political violence. Both religious affiliation and religiosity, however, were found to have significant relationships with socio-economic status and perceived discrimination, and these with the loss of psychological resources, and these, in turn, were found to be significantly associated with support for political violence. Interestingly, loss of economic resources was not found to be associated with support for political violence. This may shed light on previous empirical inconsistencies regarding the relationship between violence and socio-economic status, and may support a claim that psychological distress factors are an important link between religion and violent support and action.

Our findings lend support to the framework of COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 1998), but also help pinpoint the specifics of COR and support of violence. COR theory suggests that resource loss is the motivation behind attempts to cope with stressful situations. However, as numerous previous studies have shown, even acute economic deprivation can hardly explain the tendency of certain individuals to support violence while others remain peaceful. This suggests that the typical tendency to focus on economic resource loss is over-simplistic. It is the loss of psychological, not economic, resources that mediates the relationship between religion and support of violence. Psychological resources relate to an individual's self-assessment of his or her ability to cope with situations. These perceptions are, in part, internally-based, but also rely strongly on external relationships. Simply put, networks of family and friends provide us with the capacity to deal with the uncertainties of life. This should not come as a surprise, as recent studies of terrorist violence show that social networks are an important feature in terrorist recruitment and the individual's motivation to commit terrorism (Sageman, 2008; Pedahzur & Perliger, 2006). Religious identification and

religious communities act as important social networks, and their leaders are often authority figures who help their followers deal with life's uncertainties.

For both Jews and Muslims, support for violence is the result of the breakdown of social and political support. Under such conditions, ingroup–outgroup distinctions become more defined, and the willingness to use aggression against the out-group increases as a means of dealing with fear and threat (McGregor et al., 1998). This suggests that our findings may be generalized to other contexts of social erosion. Further, the findings also support the COR theory principle that both lack and loss are related to these kinds of defensive coping attempts to protect the self, family, and social group (Hobfoll, 1998; Hobfoll, Canetti-Nisim & Johnson, 2006).

One must, of course, consider other explanations, such as Anderson and Bushman's (2002) frustration-aggression model. However, public opinion data in Israel (Smootha, 2004) suggests that frustration is high among both Jews and Muslims and despite good reason to believe that frustration is greater among Muslims, this does not seem to be a sufficient individual level explanation in the Israeli case. Future research that administers many more psychological measures and conducts more in-depth debriefing of smaller samples may shed light on which theories best explain the relationships revealed in our study.

Like all work of this kind, our study has limitations. Our findings may still be specific to the historical-cultural context in which they were assessed. The fact that our model was derived from a more general motivational stress theory encourages comparison and strengthens generalization; yet only further empirical examination can provide the base for true generalization.

The fact that major constructs of our study were self-reported raises a potential source of bias. It is likely that respondents with violent attitudes are more circumspect in offering their opinions, and this may reduce the magnitude of our findings and suggest that they might actually be an underestimation of the strength of the hypothesized relationships. Telephone interviews may also cause common method error and mood-related bias. However, the use of indicators of both socio-economic discrimination and multivariate analysis, which considers the simultaneous effects of all variables, limits the extent of these problems somewhat, as do the two independent samples. Furthermore, since the self-reports of religion and even religiosity are less vulnerable to self-report bias than support for political violence – to the extent that any of these groups are more prone to this bias – controlling the unbiased variables partials out this self-report bias. So while the caveat that there still may be some bias is appropriate, the multivariate model limits this possible bias. We additionally are aware that Jews and Muslims could be further differentiated into a variety of subgroups, but these distinctions (e.g. country of origin, immigrant status) are beyond the scope of the present study. Additionally, we did not directly measure coping, but implied that supporting violence is a way of coping with the threats and frustrations respondents are experiencing. We believe that this more socio-cultural interpretation of coping is particularly consistent with a community psychology approach. Finally, religious belief too is measured indirectly through religious affiliation. Future research directly measuring beliefs and their relation to violence can better explain this relationship.

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Figure 1.

Structural equation model of the effects of religion, religiosity and socio-economic discrimination on the support for political violence

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. Entries above arrows represent significant maximum likelihood standardized coefficients, and R^2 's represent explained variance in the endogenous variables. Correlations among the mediating variables were also assumed.

Figure 2.
Structural equation model of the effects of religion, religiosity, and loss of psychological and economic resources on the support for political violence (Study 3)
*** $p < .001$.

Table 1

Intercorrelations among the research variables in Study 3

Research variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Religious affiliation					
2. Degree of religiosity	.221**				
3. Economic loss	.103*	-.017			
4. Psychological loss	.220**	.044	.198**		
5. Income	-.261**	-.202**	-.099*	-.199**	
6. Political violence	.237**	.117**	.046	.160**	-.192**

**
 $p < 0.01$;*
 $p < 0.05$.