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Liberalism and Religion: Amplifiers of War between Democratic and Non-Democratic States?

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ABSTRACT

This study tests the association between liberalism and religion on militarized disputes in the politically and religiously similar and mixed state dyads. The analysis (1980–2001) integrates the Correlates of War and World Religion Datasets. The findings suggest that while religious makeup of state dyads does not vitiate the impact of democracy, religious similarity amplifies the impact of liberalism. The results also suggest that Christian–Muslim dyads, especially Christian–Sunni and Christian–Muslim other than Shia and Sunni dyads, are more likely to engage in militarized disputes, and regime differences increase the chances of conflict in the joint Muslim dyads.

KEYWORDS

Liberal democracy; religion; militarized dispute

Liberal democratic states do not fight each other. The chances of conflict are significantly reduced in the relations of liberal democracies than among non-democratic or mixed pairs of states. This robust empirical association, known as the democratic peace thesis, has fundamentally affected international relations scholarship, introducing several methodological innovations within the field and profoundly influencing US foreign policy. The two strands of explanations of the democratic peace phenomenon—the normative and institutional accounts—implicitly recognize the importance of knowledge and perceptions of a foreign country's regime type. When a democratic citizenry and policymakers view a foreign country as a fellow democracy sharing similar institutional mechanisms and democratic norms, they will be less likely to support the use of military force against this state.[1]

Other theoretical frameworks drawing on the psychological and constructivist assumptions offer a countervailing argument that perceptions of ideological, cultural, or identity-based affinity are more important drivers of states' conduct than regime type.[2] During the Cold War, the division of states into "free" versus "communist" by the US foreign policymakers tainted their decisions about the use of overt and clandestine force against democratic and non-democratic states alike. Psychological studies of interstate conflict have shown how various images of foreign countries have shaped

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strategic decisions and contributed to an interventionist foreign policy orientation of democratic states.[3] In the post-9/11 context, the discourse of religious, cultural, and civilizational fault lines of interstate conflict have rivaled rhetorical commitment to democracy, as the studies of the US foreign policy demonstrate.[4] Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis,[5] based on the premise that religious identities cause some groups to form transnational communities existentially opposed to other groups' existence, has forecasted the inevitability of inter-civilizational wars.

Despite the sheer number of studies on the subject of religious violence and the growing volume of research demonstrating the impact of religion on individuals' preferences toward the use of force,[6] scholars continue debating whether a generalizable influence of religion on interstate militarized disputes exists. As one study of religion and interstate conflict aptly notes, "[f]or every apparent example of religion affecting an interstate dispute, numerous counterexamples exist."[7] This raises the question: Does religion or regime type drive interstate military disputes? The goal of this article is to test empirically the association between liberal democracy and religion on conflict in the joint and mixed dyads of states. In light of the heightened attention to the role of Islam in contemporary intra- and inter-state wars, we are particularly interested in examining the propensity for conflict in dyads of Christian and Muslim states.

Our analysis integrates data from the Correlates of War with the World Religion Dataset over the period of 1980–2001.[8] Although, Huntington's prognosis of the rise in inter-civilizational conflict applies to the post-1991 period (the bi-polar standoff between the communist and capitalist ideologies superseded cultural clashes between Christianity and Islam during the Cold War), we extend the timeframe for our analysis to a decade preceding the Soviet Union's dissolution.[9] There are several reasons for doing so. The year of 1979 was a turning point in the history of Islam and politics. First, it was the year of the Islamic revolution in Iran. The event had an immense international impact. It changed the image of Islam in the non-Muslim world, generating more interest in but also fear of religion.[10] Second, in December 1979 the Soviet Union intervened in Afghanistan's civil war, dragging itself into a protracted conflict that not only weakened the Soviet empire, but also brought the Taliban to power in Kabul. Lastly, 1979 was the beginning of a new Muslim century according to the Islamic calendar. Some studies of terrorism associate the year of 1979 with a new wave of religious terrorism[11] characterized by the intensified use of bombings, hostage taking, and assassinations.

We begin this article with a brief overview of the competing explanations of preferences for states' foreign policy conduct. Next, we employ international image theory (IIT) to conceptualize how religion impacts perceptions of other states and foreign policy decisions toward foreign countries. This is

followed by the presentation of the research design, findings, and concluding observations.

Regime versus religion: Competing bases of preferences for foreign policy conduct

The democratic peace proponents offer two primary explanations for democratic comity. Reduced to bare basics, the structural accounts point out various democratic institutions, procedures, and processes that enable and ensure the peaceful resolution of domestic and international conflicts.[12] Normative accounts of democratic peace maintain that democratic culture, liberal ideology, and democratic norms, which emphasize rational debate, negotiation, tolerance of differences, and respect for individuals' liberties, steer democracies away from the use of violence against their own people.[13] Democracies externalize these domestic norms of peaceful conflict resolution and respect of individual rights in their relations with other democratic states, in this way avoiding violent conflicts with other democracies.[14]

The informational, preferential, and perceptions-based accounts have become more recent additions to the democratic peace literature. The informational hypothesis states that openness and transparency characterizing democratic institutions enable them to send and receive costly signals, thus allowing democracies to resolve disputes at lower levels of hostilities. The preferential logic derived from the social identity theory posits a strong correlation between domestic institutions and foreign policy choices and expects democracies to have similar foreign policy preferences. Lastly, the perceptions-based explanations maintain that democracies must perceive their counterparts as similarly democratic for peace between them to hold.[15]

Implicit in the logics of democratic peace are the propositions about ways in which foreign policymakers and citizens of democratic states use information about the regime type of a foreign state for making their preferences and decisions about bilateral relations.[16] Because of the dyadic nature of democratic peace, democratic citizens and leaders must recognize democratic features of a foreign state and identify with foreign democracies.

Several critiques of democratic peace maintain that it conflates regime-based similarity with affinity based on other dimensions. First, Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis posits that cultural similarities and differences have been the primary drivers of states' foreign policy since the end of the Cold War. Democratic peace, therefore, is epiphenomenal to the rise of Christian democracies in the international system.[17] Second, scholars of international relations working in the constructivist tradition argue that states' foreign policies are fundamentally shaped by their identities. While there are multiple ways in which international relations scholars conceptualize the term, one strand of research on identity draws on the social identity

theory, a well-established social psychology approach to intergroup relations.[18] Interstate cooperation is possible through the formation of a "collective identity" among states, who foreswear the use of military force in relations among themselves.[19] Democracy, in this conceptualization, is but one facet in the broader ideational structure of norms, values, and interests in which state identity is embedded. Since states' conduct is shaped by their social identities, it is the complex structure of norms, values, and interests shared by Western capitalist democracies that account for inter-democratic peace.[20] Third, several scholars extended the analysis of the impact of dyadic similarities beyond political regime to include shared ethnicity, language, and economic institutions as the factors encouraging peace and mitigating conflict in the dyads of similar states.[21]

The studies of the "clash of civilizations" thesis and research into states' identities as drivers of conflict and peace have found mixed support. The scholarship on social identity and conflict has been criticized for conforming the impact of identity in an *ex post facto* fashion. In their analysis of the relationship between cultural similarities and differences and international dispute behavior in the post–World War II period, Gartzke and Gleditsch, for example, found little evidence that states with different cultural affiliations were more prone to conflict.[22] On the contrary, the scholars found that violence was more likely among states with similar cultural ties. Empirical tests performed by Chiozza refuted Huntington's prognosis of conflict in mixed "civilizational" dyads.[23] On the other hand, a sizable body of the scholarship has linked inter-democratic peace to broader cultural similarity, rather than joint democracy.[24] The phenomenon of "African peace," which refers to peaceful co-existence of African peoples prior to their colonization, has been attributed to the unique and shared aspects of the continent's indigenous cultures.[25] It has also been shown that democratic dyads evince greater religious similarity than dyads of non-democratic states. And while religious similarity mitigates war, it does not vitiate the impact of joint democracy on inter-state conflict.[26]

The evidence on the impact of cultural and religious similarity on conflict in the dyads of similar and dissimilar states remains, therefore, inconclusive. However, the various explanations of the inter-democratic peace agree that information about foreign countries shapes a state's conduct toward them. If the democratic peace thesis asserts the salience of regime type in the decision-making process concerning the use of military force, other scholars argue that inter-democratic peace is either an artifact of other types of political, cultural, and religious affinities or it is weakened by the cultural heterogeneity characterizing inter-state relations. Theoretical insights from political psychology can inform our understanding of the role of information in foreign policy decision-making and merging the formation of perceptions about other countries with international relations theorizing about inter-state conflict.

Religion and interstate conflict: Insights from the international image theory

Political psychology offers two distinct mechanisms that may help us understand how perceptions of similarity between one's own and other countries inform individuals' foreign policy views. First, at the most fundamental level, individuals' personalities differ, and while some may exhibit openness and curiosity, others hold deeply ingrained intolerant attitudes. Those individuals who score low on the dimension of tolerance are more likely to perceive culturally different individuals and groups as threatening.[27] One of the assumptions of the normative explanations of the democratic peace thesis holds that the democratic citizenry, in the aggregate, is characterized by greater tolerance. A corollary of this proposition is that democratic states will externalize this predisposition to their relations with other states and will be more tolerant of inter-state differences and peaceful in their relations with other countries. The monadic argument of democratic peace, however, was successfully overturned by empirical records of violence employed by democracies against non-democratic states.[28] Therefore, the first psychological explanation runs inconsistent to the democratic peace thesis.

Second, many psychological perspectives on foreign policy draw on the model of individuals as "cognitive misers" having limited knowledge and struggling to process and comprehend the sweeping amounts of information. In the realm of international politics, in particular, individuals tend to be less knowledgeable of the state of affairs than in the context of domestic politics. Still, individuals are capable of forming and maintaining remarkably coherent and consistent views of foreign countries.[29] Various heuristics, or cognitive shortcuts, help them make sense of the world and form attitudes toward countries they know very little about.

Images of foreign countries represent one such cognitive shortcut. The international image theory (IIT) is a psychological perspective maintaining that individuals form and maintain national images of other states.[30] Similar to other types of heuristics, national images play the role of information-enhancing devices shaping individuals' attitudes and foreign policy preferences.[31] They also play a role of cognitive filters for elites assisting them in organizing information into meaningful clusters of categories and structuring foreign policy decision-making.[32] Importantly, according to the IIT, national images are not merely summaries of information about other countries, but also important meaning-making devices. As such, national images help individuals to lessen the informational burden and enrich their understanding of the bilateral relationship between their own and foreign states. In this way, national images add interpretive elements that were not there in the first place.[33] This aspect of the IIT makes it useful for explaining inter-state behavior: the information-based logic that lies beneath every reviewed account of democratic peace starts with an individual perceiving a foreign country

along some dimension and making an inference about the "appropriate" conduct of the state of their own based on the foreign state's representation.

IIT suggests three dimensions of bilateral interstate relations that are important for image formation and later activation. First, image formation involves a judgment about compatibility of states' goals: Is the foreign state threatening? Can it be exploited? Does it represent an opportunity for mutual gain? Second, there is a judgment about the foreign state's capabilities: Is it weaker, stronger, or comparable in capabilities? Lastly, national images also include a cultural judgment about foreign states: Is my state's culture superior to that of another state? What norms and behavioral expectations is another state likely to follow? Based on these three judgments, IIT proposes five ideal-type images: enemy, ally, degenerate, dependent, and imperialist.[34]

What role do religion and regime play in the national image formation? Religion and regime can provide simple cues activating the judgment about the compatibility of goals and culture. According to Doyle, "fellow liberals benefit from a presumption of amity; non-liberals suffer from a presumption of enmity."[35] The same logic applies to religion. Religious sameness can be a salient cue for likeability, while religious differences can be perceived with suspicion and threat. Importantly, the whole culture of a foreign country may be too complex to be condensed into a cognitive shortcut. Religion, on the other hand, that is a salient aspect of regime and/or culture, is easier to grasp because of the existence of predefined religious categories and the ease with which these categories can be mapped onto the religious features of one's own society. Our expectation, therefore, is that religious similarities and differences will play a mollifying and amplifying effect, respectively, on the conflict within state dyads. Given the widespread image of Islam as intolerant of other religions, we expect that the mixed dyads of Christian–Muslim states will be more conflict-prone than other state dyads.

We also surmise that religion and regime may interact in their influence on interstate conflict. Of all religions, it is Islam that has been persistently discussed for its incompatibility with democracy.[36] Consequently, the perception of a state as Islamic can also prompt an association with it being undemocratic. In other words, being Islamic and being undemocratic belong to the same mental image of an "enemy" with different and incompatible goals and, therefore, posing a threat. We hypothesize that religion will interact with liberal democracy and that liberal democracies that are Christian will be more likely to find themselves in conflict with illiberal Muslim states.

Research design

The outcome variable in this study is a militarized interstate dispute (MID) (following the COW criteria) for the state dyad coded on an annual basis as (1) if the dyad experiences at least one MID and (0) if it did not. We include all state dyads between the years 1981 and 2001.

Our main independent variables measure religious makeup of state dyads: whether states in the dyad are of the same or different religions. To measure state religion, we considered all religious faiths recorded in the World Religion Dataset[37] and condensed them into seven categories: Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Hinduist, other East Asian, other minor and tribal religions (including Jainism, animism, syncretism, among others), and non-religious. Recognizing that the common Christian and Islamic roots do not always amount to religious similarity providing a salient clue for likeability, we further disaggregated Christianity into the Catholic and Protestant groups, and Islam into the Shia and Sunni categories. These categories were determined based on the following rule: at least 50 percent of the population of a given state had to self-identify with the same religion or established category. Next, we created a nominal "religious composition" variable with the following values: 1 = joint Christian dyads; 2 = joint Jewish dyads; 3 = joint Muslim dyads; 4 = joint Hindu dyads; 5 = joint East Asian religion dyads; 6 = joint Buddhist dyads; 7 = joint minor and tribal religions; 8 = joint non-religious dyads; and 0 = other, non-same-religion dyads. Given our interest in the mixed dyads of Christian–Muslim states, we created a dummy for those dyads, and dyads of Christian–Christian states. To tease out whether the internal divisions within Christianity and Islam may lead to conflict-proneness within Christian–Christian and Muslim–Muslim dyads, we created Catholic–Protestant and Shia–Sunni dummies, in addition to two categorical variables where we coded Catholic–Protestant dyads as "2," other combinations of Christian–Christian dyads as "1," and all other dyads as "0" (similarly for a categorical variable for Islam, Sunni–Shia dyads were coded as "2," all other Muslim–Muslim dyads as "1," and all other dyads as "0").

The studies of democratic peace have examined countless possible covariates. In an effort to keep our statistical models simple,[38] we chose to focus on the explanatory factors that consistently appear in the democratic peace scholarship. Thus other independent variables included in the models are the regime type of the dyad, the contiguity of the states, existing alliances within the dyad, relative military capabilities, relative wealth, and the presence or absence of major powers with the dyad.

An important element of this analysis is capturing the level of liberalness of a regime, rather than just a standard measure of electoral democratic-ness. In order to achieve this, we used a variable measuring the level of liberal democracy from the data published by the Varieties of Democracy Project at the Universities of Gothenburg and Notre Dame.[39] The goal of the project is to systematically analyze and code democracy across seven dimensions that go beyond the presence of elections. The refined coding procedures resulted in over 350 democracy measures recorded for the period of 1900 to the present. All indicators are coded by a community of experts, and their final

representations are aggregated using specific mathematical formulas. The liberal democracy indicator seeks to answer the question, "To what extent is the ideal of liberal democracy achieved by a state?" It is a measure of the state's liberal democratic-ness based on the following formula:

$$0.25*\text{polyarchy}^{1.6} + 0.25*\text{liberal} + 0.5*\text{polarchy}^{1.6}*\text{liberal}$$

where polyarchy is the measure of the extent to which electoral democracy is achieved, and liberal is the extent to which liberal principles such as civil liberties, rule of law, checks and balances, and an independent judiciary are protected and upheld. Actual measures of liberal democracy range continuously from 0.0136 to 0.9068. Given our interest in the effect of liberal democracy on conflict, we created a joint liberal democracy score. This score reflects the combined liberal democracy score of both countries in the dyads. Higher scores represent greater joint observance of liberal democratic principles.

We use a binary indicator to code alliances where "1" denotes state dyads linked by a mutual defense treaty, a neutrality or nonaggression pact, or an entente, and 0 otherwise. The coding is based on the COW Alliance Dataset.[40] To measure relative capabilities of states in a dyad, we used the CINC military capabilities index composed of the weighted average of a country's share of the system's total population, urban population, energy consumption, iron and steel production, military manpower, and military expenditures.[41] Capabilities ratio equals the natural log of the ratio of the strongest state's CINC capabilities index to the weaker state's capabilities.

Contiguity is an ordinal variable made up of six categories of decreasing physical proximity, from shared land border to separated by more than 500 miles of water, either directly or through colonial possessions ("1" = land or river border; "2" = 1–12 miles of water; "3" = 13–24 miles; "4" = 25–150 miles; "5" = 151–400 miles; and "6" = not contiguous). GDP, or the country's relative wealth, is calculated as within dyad difference in per capita GDP.[42] It is the difference between the higher and lower monadic scores in per capita GDP. GDP values are logged. We also include a dummy variable that is coded "1" if at least one state in a dyad is one of the five post–World War II major powers (China, France, United States, United Kingdom, and USSR/Russia), and "0" otherwise.

All models are executed using Poisson regression with a robust error variance estimation, which is a maximum likelihood estimation appropriate for nonnegative rare-event binary data that follow the Poisson distribution.[43] Though Poisson regression is frequently thought of as only modeling count data, it works well when modeling binary outcomes, especially when they are rare or when the unit may experience the outcome more than once over time.[44] It performs particularly well when the outcome is predominantly zero. In fact, the Poisson estimator is preferable to the logistic estimator when the event rate (outcome) is low and units experience repeated events.[45] Over the last two

decades, Poisson regression and Poisson Quasi Maximum Likelihood Estimation (PQMLE) have become the standard analysis for rare binary outcomes in epidemiological and medical literature.[46] Analogous to an individual experiencing an illness at time *t* and then experiencing that same illness at time *t* + *4*, dyads may experience conflict at one time and again in later years, with similar underlying assumptions about the dependence structure of the data.

Poisson regression, alongside logistic regression (random effects) and survival analysis, has been a primary statistical tool for analyzing propositions of democratic peace.[47] Researchers have also suggested the employment of zero-inflated models for two process outcomes—for example, battle deaths contingent on experiencing a battle in that time period, and negative binomial regression for overdispersed data.[48] We chose Poisson regression for this study because our dependent variable, conflict, is a rare outcome that some dyads may experience more than once over time. In addition, it has been shown that the underlying data generating processes of the logit, probit, risk (such as Weibull or gamma), and Poisson models are similar and that each may be conditionally appropriate to model binary, duration, and count data.[49] A chi-square test was performed to discount the presence of overdispersion in the data and determine goodness-of-fit of the Poisson model, especially over the negative binomial model. The chi-square test statistic was not significant, indicating the Poisson model to be a good fit for the analysis of the data at hand.[50] It also signifies no indication of overdispersion, which we might have expected to see as a result of unobserved heterogeneity within dyads. The lack of overdispersion in the data further validates our choice in the Poisson model over the negative binomial model as it indicates that the Poisson model "would be the most appropriate estimator.[51]" In addition, a natural cubic spline was fitted to the model in order to deal with the possibility of contagion and temporal dependency.[52]

Results

The main findings of the study are presented in Table 1. Model 1 uses joint Christian–Christian dyads as the predictor of conflict. In Model 2, the dependent variable is regressed on the Christian–Muslim dummy. Model 3 reports findings with the "religious composition" variable." Model 4 tests the probability for war on a dummy variable that indicates whether two states are religiously similar or dissimilar. Model 5 uses Muslim–Muslim dyads among its predictors.

The results of Model 1 suggest Christian–Christian state dyads are 0.235 times less likely to go to war with one another than the dyads of all other religious makeup. This is a decrease in 77 percent of odds of war in the Christian–Christian dyads, holding other factors constant. All other predictors also returned significant results. As expected, higher joint liberal democracy scores in state dyads are associated with the decreased chances of war in

Table 1. Impact of religiously similar and dissimilar dyads on inter-state conflict.

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Joint Christian Democracies	−1.45*** (0.42)				
Christian/Muslim Dyads		0.58 (0.30)			
Same Religion Dyads				−0.80 (0.56)	
Unshared			1.44*** (0.42)		
Muslim			1.69*** (0.47)		−0.84* (0.37)
Hindu			0.86 (0.87)		
East Asian			−24.77*** (0.64)		
Other			−22.74*** (0.88)		
Non-Religious			−17.83 (0.745)		
Same Religion/ Democracy Interaction				−2.14* (0.95)	
Joint Muslim/Democracy Interaction					4.04*** (0.89)
Joint Liberal Democracy	−2.61*** (0.32)	−3.34*** (0.15)	−2.60*** (0.33)	−3.10*** (0.14)	−3.36*** (0.15)
Alliance	−0.28* (0.14)	−0.34** (0.14)	−0.31* (0.15)	−0.55*** (0.14)	−0.35* (0.14)
CINC	0.23*** (0.05)	0.26*** (0.04)	0.23*** (0.05)	0.30*** (0.04)	0.26*** (0.04)
Contiguous	−0.80*** (0.07)	−0.68*** (0.05)	−0.80*** (0.07)	−0.69*** (0.04)	−0.68*** (0.05)
GDP	−0.36* (0.16)	−0.14 (0.11)	−0.35* (0.16)	−0.17 (0.10)	−0.4 (0.10)
Major Power	−1.74*** (0.36)	−1.54*** (0.34)	−1.74*** (0.37)	−0.50 (0.29)	−1.55*** (0.34)
N	222,014	222,014	222.014	222,014	222.014
R-squared	0.207	0.203	0.208	0.216	0.204

All numbers are rounded up to two digits after decimal point.
***$p \leq 0.001$; **$p \leq 0.01$; *$p \leq 0.05$.

these dyads. A one-unit increase in joint liberal democracy score in a state dyad leads to a 92.6 percent decrease in the odds of this dyad experiencing a militarized dispute. If the states within a dyad are also members of an alliance, this makes them 0.777 times less likely (a 22.3 percent decrease) to go to war. Greater disparity in military capabilities within state dyads is associated with a 1.26 times increase in the probability of war in those dyads. States that are contiguous are also more likely to go to war. Lastly, greater disparity in GDP within a state dyad (in one-unit increments) results in a 30 percent decrease in the odds of war in the dyad, while having a major power in the dyad decreases the odds of war by 82.5 percent.

The findings of Model 2 provide suggestive support to our expectations about the greater propensity for conflict in mixed Christian–Muslim state dyads. The relationship is in the expected direction and just outside the realm of conventional statistical significance (p-value = 0.056). The purpose of p-values is to provide an estimate of the probability of falsely accepting the

hypotheses alternative to the null. Social sciences have largely, yet arbitrarily, set the threshold of significance at 0.05.[53] At the same time, some methodologists suggest that the threshold for the level of significance should be set based on the context of the research and might even be considered as a continuous function of the magnitude of p.[54] Ward, Greenhill, and Bakke (2010) found that setting the significance threshold at 0.1 in international conflict research allowed for "an increase in the number of correctly predicted onsets" of conflict, moreover, moving to a more stringent threshold, such as 0.05 for example, "increased false positive rates" with regard to the onsets of conflict by over 50 percent.[55] This finding is particularly relevant to this research because it also discusses the increased rate of type II errors, not rejecting the null when it is actually false when dealing with especially large datasets, lending further credence to the suggestive evidence of the likelihood of that Christian–Muslim dyads may be more conflict-prone than other religious pairings of states.

As with the previous model regressed on the Christian–Christian dyads, the joint liberal democracy score is significant in the second model where Christian–Muslim dyads are used as a predictor. A one-unit increase in joint liberal democracy score in a state dyad leads to a 96.5 percent decrease in the odds of this state dyad experiences war. All other variables, except the GDP ratio, produced significant results consistent with Model 1 and the democratic peace literature.

In Model 3, the key predictor variable is a nominal religious composition scale (1 = joint Christian dyads; 2 = joint Jewish dyads; 3 = joint Muslim dyads; 4 = joint Hindu dyads; 5 = joint East Asian religions dyads; 6 = joint Buddhist dyads; 7 = joint minor and tribal religions (other); 8 = joint non-religious dyads; and 0 = other, dissimilar religion dyads). Since several types of joint dyads—Jewish Buddhist—had no observations, they were dropped out of analysis. Model 3 uses Christian–Christian dyads as the baseline. Religiously dissimilar state dyads are 4.22 times more likely to go to war than Christian–Christian dyads. Muslim–Muslim dyads are 5.40 times more likely to go to war than Christian–Christian dyads. However, the dyads of East Asian religions, minor/tribal religions, and non-religious state dyads are all more than 99 percent less likely to go to war than Christian–Christian dyads. All other predictors returned signs and coefficients consistent with the other two models.

We are interested not only in the independent effects of religion and regime type on the probability for war, but also in the interaction between the two. Model 4 tests the probability for war on a dummy variable that measures whether two states are religiously similar (1) or religiously different (0) and models its interaction with dyadic regime type. On its own, the religious similarity dummy is insignificant, while higher joint democracy score suggests lower conflict probability. The interaction of religious

similarity with joint democracy score is statistically significant and visually demonstrated in Figure 1. The results of this interaction effect suggest that as the joint liberal democracy score increases within a religiously similar dyad, the probability for conflict decreases 0.118 times (88 percent reduction). Substantively speaking, the pacifying impact of joint observation of liberal democracy is higher in the religiously similar state dyads.

As a complement to Model 1, we tested the probability of conflict in the Muslim–Muslim dyads. The results for the "Muslim–Muslim" dummy were significant, suggesting that the Muslim–Muslim dyads are less likely to go to conflict compared to all other religiously similar and dissimilar dyads (but more conflict-prone than the Christian–Christian dyads set in the context of a seven-category test, per Model 3). However, the interaction between dual Muslim dyads and joint liberal democracy means that although joint Muslim–Muslim dyads are less conflict-prone than all other types of religions and religiously dissimilar state dyads, they are more conflict-prone in dyads with greater democracy scores. This suggests that Muslim nations are more likely to go to war when their opponent is a liberal democracy. All other predictors, except GDP and major power in dyad, are significant and consistent with the results of the earlier models.

Consistent with our theoretical argument that it is the perception of religious sameness of another state that has a mollifying effect on conflict within state dyads, we performed additional tests on the dyads of Protestant–Catholic and Sunni–Shia states. According to the public opinion data, the dominant view among the Catholics and Protestants in Europe is that they are more similar religiously than they are different.[56] However, the political mobilization of Christian movements in Latin America and Africa serve as a reminder that the conflict between Protestants and Catholics is not over.[57] A history of sectarian violence in the Middle East exacerbated by political rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia has translated into the perceptions of enmity and animosity between the Shia and Sunni states, despite the shared Muslim foundations.

Another purpose for carrying out these analyses is to test whether the differences between states within the same religious family are more or less significant than disagreements between Christian and Muslim countries, when it comes to the mollifying or amplifying effect on inter-state conflict. In both cases, we found the intra-religious differences to be significant predictors of militarized disputes (see Table 2). Models 6 and 8 with dummy variables ("1" = Catholic–Protestant; "0" = other; and "1" = Sunni–Shia; and "0" = other) as well as Models 7 and 9 with categorical variables ("2" = Catholic–Protestant or Sunni–Shia; "1" = other Christian and other Muslim dyads; and "0" = all other dyads) returned significant coefficients at all baselines (i.e., we compared each level of dyads against one another). Catholic–Protestant dyads are at a 4.9 increased odds of engaging in

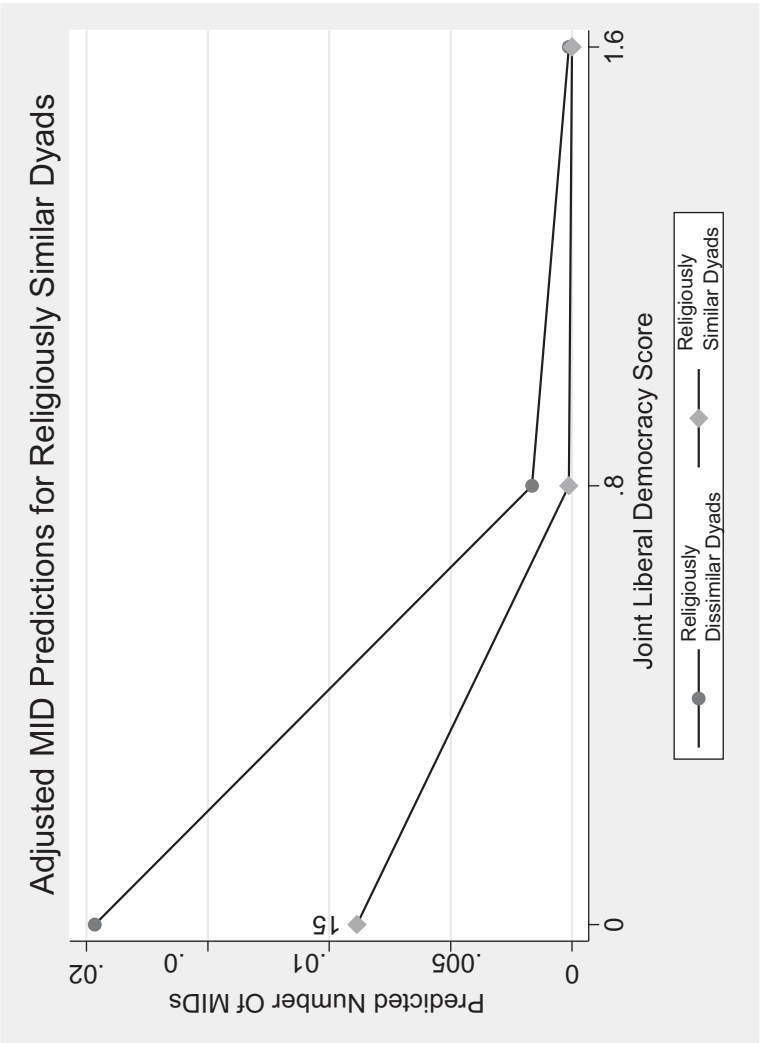

Figure 1. Interactive effects of religion and democracy on conflict.

militarized conflict over all other dyad types. Model 7 further affirms these results, suggesting that jointly Christian dyads, other than Catholic–Protestant, and all other dyad types are statistically significantly less likely to engage in militarized disputes with one another by 84 and 75 percent, respectively. The effect of intra-religious differences is also demonstrated in Model 8, which tests Sunni–Shia dyads against all other dyads and finds that they are 5.66 times more likely to engage in conflict. Echoing these results, Model 9 shows that Sunni–Shia dyads are more likely to engage in conflict than non–jointly Muslim dyads, but no more or less likely to engage in conflict than jointly Muslim dyads broadly speaking. Model 10, which tests the interaction between Sunni–Shia dyads and liberal democracy, parallels the results of Model 5, suggesting that Sunni–Shia dyads are more likely to go to war when their opponent is democratic.

The overwhelming majority of world Muslims are Sunni, with only 10–13 percent identifying themselves as Shia, and Shia Muslims are concentrated in a handful of countries (Iran, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Iraq, and Lebanon).[58] Given

Table 2. Catholic–Protestant and Shia–Sunni state dyads and inter-state conflict.

Variables	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11
Catholic/Protestant Dyads	1.55***					
	(0.29)					
Christian Nonspecific		−1.84***				
		(0.38)				
Non-Christian		−1.37***				
		(0.35)				
Sunni/Shia Dyads			1.74***		−0.30	
			(0.29)		(0.30)	
Muslim Nonspecific				0.59 (0.32)		
Non-Muslim				−2.01***		
				(0.29)		
Sunni/Christian Dyads						2.73***
						(0.41)
Shia/Christian						0.77 (0.42)
All Other Muslim/ Christian						2.61***
						(0.34)
Sunni/Shia Democracy Interaction					3.20***	
					(0.49)	
Joint Liberal Democracy	−2.51***	−2.42***	−2.40***	−2.19***	−4.88***	−2.17***
	(0.27)	(0.29)	(0.27)	(0.27)	(0.40)	(0.28)
Alliance	−0.38**	−0.36*	−0.39**	−0.42**	−0.31*	−0.45***
	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)
CINC	0.25***	0.24***	0.25***	0.23***	0.23***	0.25***
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Contiguous	−0.81***	−0.83***	−0.83***	−0.85***	−0.92***	−0.03***
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
GDP	−0.38**	−0.41**	−0.40**	−0.45***	−0.60***	−0.41***
	(0.13)	(0.15)	(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.16)	(0.14)
Major Power	−0.86**	−0.96*	−0.76*	−0.57	−0.74*	−0.32
	(0.33)	(0.39)	(0.33)	(0.31)	(0.30)	(0.29)
N	222,014	222,014	222,014	221,669	222,014	222,014
R-squared	0.216	0.216	0.219	0.223	0.228	0.225

***$p \leq 0.001$; **$p \leq 0.01$; *$p \leq 0.05$.

the findings of intra-Muslim war proneness that provided us with additional insights into behavior of states sharing the same broad religious category, and the uneven distribution of world Muslims across the major Islamic traditions, we performed additional tests that compared the chances of war in Christian–Sunni, Christian–Shia, and Christian–Muslim (other than Shia and Sunni) dyads against all other state dyads. The findings largely supported our expectations. Christian–Sunni dyads are statistically significantly more likely to go to war than other state dyads, so are Christian–Muslim (other than Shia and Sunni) state dyads. However, the results for Christian–Shia dyads are statistically insignificant. All other variables retained their coefficients in the expected direction of impact as well as the significance. Model 11 in Table 2 reports the findings with a categorical variable ("3" = Christian–Sunni; "2" = Christian–Shia; "1" = Christian–Muslim other than Shia and Sunni; and "0" = All other dyads). The findings for models with Christian–Sunni and Christian–Shia dummies are similar to those reported in Model 11 and, therefore, are not reported here.

Conclusion

This study was motivated by the growing interest in the impact of religion on the interstate conflict. We provided a theoretical justification grounded in the IIT for the relevance of religious cues in activating certain images of foreign countries in individual citizens and decision-makers. Thus we hypothesized that conflict will be less likely in the dyads of religiously similar states, while Christian–Islamic dyads will have the highest propensity for conflict. The presence of the religious makeup variable did not vitiate the impact of the joint regime variable, suggesting that conflict is still less likely in the dyads of liberal democracies even when we control for the dyads' religious makeup. Other findings lend support to our initial expectations. First, in the joint Christian–Christian states, shared religious makeup of the dyad is second only to the joint liberal democracy score in lessening the likelihood of conflict between these states. However, when we singled out intra-religious differences, such as Protestant–Catholic state dyads, we found that those were significantly more likely to experience militarized dispute than other Christian dyads or all other state dyads.

We found evidence to suggest that Christian–Muslim state are more likely to engage in militarized disputes (p = 0.056), particularly if the Muslim counterpart is Sunni or other Muslim (non-Shia and non-Sunni). Other types of religious makeup in state dyads—East Asian, minor religious, as well as non-religious pairs of states—are less likely to go to war than Christian–Christian dyads, while religiously dissimilar states are more likely to fight than Christian–Christian dyads.

We also found that Muslim–Muslim dyads, broadly speaking, were more likely to go to war than Christian–Christian dyads, but less likely to experience conflict than other religiously dissimilar and religiously similar states. Given the well-known antagonisms between, for example, Iran (a majority Shia state) and the majority Sunni states (e.g., Saudi Arabia), it not surprising that the analysis returned strong statistical support for the Sunni–Shia dyads being more conflict-prone than all other state dyads. However, the results were unable to confirm that Sunni–Shia dyads are more conflict-prone than other jointly Muslim dyads.

The interaction of political regime and religion variables also produced results suggesting that religiously and politically dissimilar states are more likely to conflict. We found, for example, that religious sameness within the dyads of liberal democracies further decreases their likelihood to engage in a militarized dispute. In the Muslim–Muslim dyads, political dissimilarity was a contributing factor to greater likelihood for war.

Taken together, the findings of this study lend support to the perceptual accounts of democratic peace. Perceptual and cognitive processes describing the ways in which people interpret and organize information about others are at the center of the international image theory. The IIT offers a framework for understanding how various salient clues, such as state religion, contribute to the formation of images of other countries, and how these images can play a major role in dispute escalation and persistence of conflict.[59] Our findings of intra-religious animosity within the Christian–Protestant and Sunni–Shia state dyads are also consistent with the expectations of the IIT, even though in these two instances religious similarities did not translate into the perceptions of religious sameness. In the Sunni–Shia case, for example, the rhetoric about the incompatibility of these states' goals strengthened by the politics of the major powers in the Middle East have contributed to the formation and maintenance of the images of enemies among the countries with similar religious foundations. In other cases, broad religious cues, especially in the relations between Muslims (Sunni and Other Muslim) and Christian states, turned out to be strong enough to contribute to views of the goals' incompatibility between states and, subsequently, to perceiving a foreign country as a threat. On the backdrop of the rhetorical hype about the threat of Islam, perceiving a state as being "Islamic" may serve as a powerful cue for activating an enemy image.

Notes

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