Faith in Conflict, Conflicting Faiths: Islam in the Context of Economic and Sectarian Correlates

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ABSTRACT

Does a growing Muslim population in a country foster conflict? The paper analyzes the effect of religious diversity – specifically the presence of Shiite and Sunni Muslim populations – on peace and order. It argues that it is not the presence of a Muslim population per se that catalyzes conflict; but the presence of "diverse" Muslim populations in which no single sect predominates.

To test this conjecture, the paper collated data from the 2011 Global Peace Index published by the Institute for Economics and Peace, and modelled peace as a function of religious diversity, as well as that of a state's socio-economic condition. Results of OLS estimates suggest that there are a mere handful of instances when the presence of a Muslim population affected peace and order negatively. The study further finds that religion itself is not a significant determinant of conflict especially when the predilections of the political elite in a country, and economic variables are taken into account.

In sum, there is not enough evidence to back the claim that the presence of a sizeable Muslim population fosters either conflict or violence. However, the cleavage between Shiites and Sunnis appears to play a role in determining the extent of conflict in a country, especially when economic circumstances are taken into account. This cleavage could then be exploited by opportunistic members of a country's political elite in order to give the false impression that internal strife is religious in nature.

Keywords: Islam, peace, index, conflict, order

Islam, as a religion, is said to be a peaceful one. Its very meaning, scholars would argue, pushes its adherents to submit to the will of *Allah subhana wa ta'ala* – God, the highest and most exalted. Adherence to Islam demands the complete surrender of one's self to God's will.

Inasmuch as scholars would refer to Islam as a peaceful religion, however, current conflicts can still be found in primarily Islamic countries. In Iraq, Daesh fighters masquerading as the true agents of God are fighting the legitimate government in place, as well as a coalition led by the United States. In Libya and Syria, rebel militias have been battling government troops for control of the oil-rich countries. In Yemen, more recently, a military intervention by a coalition led by Saudi Arabia seeks to reinstall the president who has been deposed by Houthi militiamen. These places, as well as others around the world, have been experiencing intense and prolonged violence for quite some time now, despite having a population which is primarily Islamic.

A question then has to be asked: does a growing Muslim population in a country foster conflict? The argument of the paper is discussed through two distinct levels. First, it argues that there are merely a handful of instances when the presence of a Muslim population had a negative effect on the peace and order situation in a country. Religion itself is not a significant indicator or a determinant of conflict, especially when a country's socio-economic condition is taken into account, or when the predilections of a country's political elite are considered.

The paper further argues that if the population of Sunnis and Shiites is more diverse – that is to say when one group is unable to dominate the other by virtue of sheer volume–then the country would appear to be more conflict-stricken than others. The data suggest that such is the case when one considers the economic circumstances a country is in. Compounding these results with those of previous studies reveal that, once again, unscrupulous individuals in a country may take advantage of this cleavage in order to prop up the legitimacy of their movement.

Previous studies have shown that while there is a significant relationship between the Muslim population of a country and its conflicts, such is not mutually exclusive to Islam, and is defined more strongly with other aspects (de Soysa & Nordås, 2007; Fish et al., 2010; Fox, 2001; Gleditsch

& Sørli, 2005; Kayani, 2011; Khan, 2013; Klem, 2011; Reynolds, 2005; Rowe, 2015). Other studies also argue that it is not Islam – nor religion per se , for that matter–that seems to be the cause, but rather institutions both within and without the State which politicize religion, thereby exacerbating the conflicts in which the State is engaged (Crowder, et al., 2014; Funk & Said, 2004; Harish, 2006; Joll, 2010; Klem, 2011; Toft, 2007). The findings of this paper reinforce the arguments put forth by other such studies and papers.

In order to quantify conflict, the study uses the Global Peace Index (GPI), as published by the Institute of Economics and Peace. The Peace Index is a weighted average of different components, and is used to measure the degree of conflict and violence in a given country. A score reflective of the findings of the report is given to each country. This score is inversely proportional to how peaceful a country is. That is to say, if a country is more peaceful, then it would have a lower score in the Global Peace Index. Similarly, if the country is less peaceful, then the country would be given a higher magnitude in the GPI.

The diversity of the Muslim population in a country is also taken into account. Its effect on the conflict situation in a given country is considered, as well as a number of other variables. These variables are added into a multivariate linear regression model in order to determine the effect that each has on the peace and order situation of a country, in conjunction with the percentage of Muslims in the same.

The data used in the paper was taken from the time period of Calendar Year 2010 as it is for this year that the main independent variable, the percentage of Muslims in a country's population that the source of the data applies. All other data were taken from the same period so as to more appropriately reflect the relationship between and among the variables.

Evidence in this paper suggests that while it is true that there are a handful of cases where there is a negative relationship between the percentage of Muslims in a country and its peace and order situation, such a relationship is not remarkably large especially when compared to the effects that the other variables have on the same. It is further suggested that while diversity in and of itself has no discernible relationship with the conflict experienced in a country, its effect is given substance and significance once it is compounded with economic variables. That is to say, it is implied that religious conflict

rooted in the differences between the Sunni and Shiite sects may, in fact, have an economic aspect attached to it. All in all, however, once all of the variables were taken into consideration, the percentage of Muslims in a country's population ceased to have any discernible effect on the GPI of a country. Similarly, once all of the variables were taken into consideration, the diversity between Sunnis and Shiites ceased to become statistically significant as well.

This paper is divided into seven sections. Section Two looks into the different concepts discussed by this paper: religion, Islam, and conflict. The succeeding section discusses the methodology and variables employed in pursuit of this study. Section Four talks about the data and the results gathered from the application of the methodology, while Section Five provides analysis and the discussion of the same. The discussion proceeds such that the perspectives employed from different studies are applied to this paper. Section Six concludes, and the last section lays out issues upon which other studies could be based. It also discusses a few pointers on how this study, as well as other similar and future studies, could be improved.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

As the subject matter of this paper is straightforward, three main concepts need to be fleshed out and explored in order to be able to fully appreciate the content of this paper. These concepts are religion, Islam, and conflict.

Religion is an extremely and inherently complex concept or idea to define. One of the more comprehensive definitions was provided by Toft (2007). In her study, religion:

> "…[may] include some or all of the following concepts – a belief in a supernatural being or beings; prayers and communication with that being; transcendent realities that might include some form of heaven, paradise, or hell; a distinction between the sacred and the profane and between ritual acts and sacred objects; a view that explains both the world as a whole and a person's proper role in it a code of conduct in line with that worldview; and a

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community bound by its adherence to these elements (Toft, 2007, p.14)."

Islam reflects all of the characteristics enumerated by Toft (2007). In and of itself, Islam means "peace". This peace implies liberation from that which binds a person, thereby gaining peace with respect to that entity (Qamar-ul Huda, 2002). Even so, this particular religion is divided into two main sects: Sunnis and Shiites (Pew Research Center, 2012).

Islam is also one of the world's eight major religions (Pew Research Center, 2012). About 23% of the world's population, numbering at about 1.6 billion people, are Muslims. Of all the Muslims in the world, about 90% are Sunnis, while the remaining 10% are Shiites (Pew Research Center, 2012).

Differences between the Sunnis and the Shiites reach way back into history. It is said that the rift between the two began with issues regarding the succession of leadership after the death of Prophet Mohammad in 632 AD. There are also vital differences in either's view of religious authority and how they interpret verses in the Quran. Even the role of Mohammad's descendants is a point of contention among the two major sects (Pew Research Center, 2009).

Previous studies have focused on the relationship between Islam and conflict. The study of Toft (2007), relating Islam and the causes of civil war, is groundbreaking. Her study identifies three main causes of conflict wherein Islam may be one among many factors.

According to Toft (2007), the first case can be made through historical analysis. The modern Western notion of the State was created at the conclusion of the Thirty Years' War. The War officially ended with the signing of the Treaty of Westphalia. Part of the implications of the peace accord was that Western European leaders should separate religious affairs from government and secular affairs. The secular State was thus borne out of the need to place temporal affairs on one hand, and sectarian affairs on the other. In such a state, the leader no longer acts as an authority or a leading figure of religion. In the case of such separation, religion can only be used in order to supplement the legitimacy of the rulers (Toft, 2007).

For Islam, however, there was no Thirty Years' War. There was no Islamic version of the Treaty of Westphalia. There are no incentives, therefore, for the Government to separate religion from their purview. In countries where Islam plays a dominant or primary role in government, religion and the State are one. The State further capitalizes on the divide between Muslims and non-Muslims. The internal divisions—those between Sunnis and Shiites—are conveniently forgotten (Toft, 2007).

The second factor is brought about by geographical circumstance (Toft, 2007). Toft argues that conflict in West Asia is primarily based on oil resources. This conflict was given a religious dimension when the Jewish State of Israel was created. What makes such a matter of concern for Muslims is that Israel was created in a region which has been inhabited by an Arab-Muslim population for as long as history can remember. This helped reinforce the notion that Muslims must unite with each other against Zionism (Toft, 2007).

Finally, structural factors should be considered when looking at how Islam affects conflict. It constantly refers to the concept of *jihad*, which basically means "struggle" (Qamar-ul Huda, 2002; Toft, 2007). *Jihad* also has two components, internal and external. An internal *jihad* refers to the struggle of oneself in order to attain peace with God, thereby becoming more like Him (Qamar-ul Huda, 2002). External *jihad*, on the other hand, refers to the, "[defence of] a Muslim community against unbelievers" (Toft, 2007). Unlike Christianity, the concept of having a *fidei defensor*—defender of the faith—in Islam did not become dormant since the concept of having secularized political leadership has not yet been conceived, with the notable exception of Turkey. Therefore, in an event which is as recent as the Soviet-Afghan War, zealous Muslims felt that it was their religious obligation to defend their Islamic brethren in Afghanistan against the "godless Communists" (Toft, 2007).

All of these factors are amplified when the political elite of a country politicize religion. This is known as *religious outbidding* (Toft, 2007), and it will be discussed in a latter part of this paper. Suffice it to say, the primary finding of the study by Toft (2007) is that Islam is invoked in a significantly higher number of civil wars than other religions. The most likely cause of this is that political elites use religion as a method to galvanize support both at home and abroad.

Crenshaw, et al. (2006) also suppose that the issue is not Islam per se. Rather, the issue of conflict relative to Islam is Islamist terrorism. They identified four likely causes of Islamist terrorism. These are: (1) social strains caused by modernization, such as urbanization and the growth of government consumption; (2) competition between Islam and other religions; (3) growth of secular governments, leading to an increased level of female participation in both the government and the labor force, and; (4) Western military dependency (Crenshaw, et al., 2006).

Rowe (2015) supports this claim in his study. He argues that Islam in and of itself is not violent. Islam is not the primary factor for the rise of religious extremism. Other factors may be—and should be—taken into account, such as the individual psychologies of the extremists, the political and socioeconomic realities of the time, and the different ideologies of the sects within (Rowe, 2015).

While some studies support the claim that Islam or a Muslim population is a factor, but is not the sole nor the biggest factor (de Soysa & Nordås, 2007; Fish, et al., 2010; Fox, 2001a 2001b; Gleditsch and Sørli, 2005; Kayani, 2011; Khan, 2013; Klem, 2011; Reynolds, 2005; Rowe, 2015); other studies homed in on Islam not being a factor at all (Etienne, 2007; Fox, 2001; Harish, 2006; Kuppinger, 2014; Norton, 2008; Qamar-ul Huda, 2002; Yamin, 2008).

Qamar-ul Huda (2002), for instance, argues that actions by the State, while secular in nature, can be identified with Islam since, "what is good for the government is good for Islam" (Qamar-ul Huda, 2002). Violence is used by the State, not as a tool of aggression or persecution, but as a means of survival and resistance to oppression. As the State manifests its need for protection, violence becomes inevitable (Qamar-ul Huda, 2002).

Etienne (2007) also asserts that Islam should not be identified with violence at all. He bases this claim on four main points. First, Islam is not a monolithic religion as there are many subcultures within it. Secondly, not all whose ethnic origin is Arabic are Muslims. Moreover, not all Muslims speak Arabic; just as not all people who can converse in Arabic adhere to Islam. Third, not all Muslims are overzealous–or even pious, at that. Some are even secular, or even atheists. Fourth, taking all of these factors into account, most of the world's Muslims are not Arab in origin (Etienne, 2007).

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Clearly, there are many views which can be taken with regard to this issue. As the paper progresses, its argument will put forth that while Islam is a factor in a handful of cases, it is not the sole nor dominant factor. Further, as other factors are taken into consideration, Islam ceases to be a cause or a predictor of conflict or violence in a country.

METHODOLOGY

The paper uses an ordinary least square function with multivariate regression as its main method of analysis. Multiple models are formulated in order to frame the issue in a manner reflective of the aim of the study. All in all, there are 125 countries included in the study. These countries were selected by virtue of the availability of data in all variables. That is to say, a country is not included in the analysis if data in one variable is missing from the database.

The variables employed in the study are as follows:

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable in this study is a country's Peace Index. It is taken from the 2011 Global Peace Index, as published by the Institute for Economics and Peace. The 2011 report summarizes findings applicable for Calendar Year 2010. It was employed since the data regarding the Muslim composition of a given country are dated to be as of December 2010.

The Peace Index does not measure peace, per se. It measures the *absence of violence* (IEP, 2011). It was developed such that it would be able to identify which characteristics of different cultures are, among others, structurally linked to different states of peace (IEP, 2010). The components of this index have both qualitative and quantitative aspects. The logic with the measure is that if a country holds a higher magnitude, then that country is less peaceful.

The Peace Index itself is a weighted average of 23 different indicators, each of which can be classified under three general categories: (1) Ongoing Domestic and International Conflict, (2) Safety and Security in Society, and (3) Militarization (IEP, 2011).

On the other hand, the different indicators are, under the first category of Ongoing Domestic and International Conflict: (1) number of external and internal conflicts fought, (2) estimated number of deaths from organized external conflict, (3) number of deaths from organized internal conflict, (4) level of organized conflict, and (5) relations with neighboring countries (IEP, 2011).

Under the category of Safety and Security in Society, the indicators are: (1) level of perceived criminality in society, (2) number of refugees and displaced people as a percentage of the population, (3) political instability, (4) level of respect for human rights, (5) potential for terrorist acts, (6) number of homicides per 100 000 people, (7) level of violent crime, (8) likelihood of violent demonstrations, (9) number of jailed population per 100 000 people, and (10) number of internal security officers and police per 100 000 people (IEP, 2011).

Finally, under the third category—militarization—the indicators are as follows: (1) military expenditure as a percentage of GDP, (2) number of armed services personnel per 100 000 people, (3) volume of transfers of major conventional weapons imports per 100 000 people, (4) volume of transfers of major conventional weapons exports per 100 000 people, (5) financial contribution to UN peacekeeping missions, (6) aggregate weighted number of heavy weapons per 100 000 people, (7) ease of access to small arms and light weapons, and (8) military capability or sophistication (IEP, 2011).

There are 125 countries for this variable. The data ranges from 1.152 units to 3.342 units. Its mean is 1.990 units. In the data set, it is identified as *PeaceIndex*.

Independent Variable

The main independent variable in this study is the percentage of Muslims in a country's population. The data was taken from a report published by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2012). The figures for the percentage of Muslims in a country are applicable for Calendar Year 2010.

There are 125 countries for this variable. The data ranges from 0.1 percentage points to 99.9 percentage points. Its mean is 25.29 percentage points. In the dataset, it is identified as *PercentMuslim*.

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Control Variables

The paper employs a number of control variables to cover the economic and socio-political circumstances which a country is in. These are GDP per capita, unemployment, population of refugees, and military expenditure.

GDP per capita in this paper is measured in constant 2005 USD (The World Bank, 2010). It can be used to account for the level of economic development and productivity in a country (Kaya, 2010). In this paper, GDP per capita is scaled to be expressed for every USD 1 000.00. In the dataset, it is identified as *ScaledGDPperCapita*.

Unemployment is defined as, "the share of the labor force that is without work but available for and seeking employment" (The World Bank, 2010). It is used to account for economic factors as well. Along with GDP per capita, unemployment can be seen as a measure which can be used to account for the level of economic productivity in a country (Kaya, 2010). In the dataset, it is identified as *Unemployment*.

The population of refugees, on the other hand, is a measure of the level of peace—or the lack thereof—experienced by a country (IEP, 2010). Refugees are, "people who are recognized as refugees under the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol, the 1969 Organization of African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, people recognized as refugees in accordance with the UNHCR statute, people granted refugee-like humanitarian status, and people provided temporary protection" (World Bank, 2010). Further, the number of refugees used in this paper reflects those which hold citizenship in the country from which these people fled (World Bank, 2010). In this paper, the number of refugees is scaled to be expressed for every 10 000 people. In the dataset, it is identified as *ScaledRefugee*.

Finally, military expenditure is defined as:

"…all current and capital expenditures on the armed forces, including peacekeeping forces; defense ministries and other government agencies engaged in defense projects; paramilitary forces, if these are judged to be trained and

equipped for military operations; and military space activities. Such expenditures include military and civil personnel, including retirement pensions of military personnel and social services for personnel; operation and maintenance; procurement; military research and development; and military aid (in the military expenditures of the donor country) (The World Bank, 2010)."

It is expressed as a percentage of the country's GDP (The World Bank, 2010). The Institute for Economics and Peace (2014) sees the level of military expenditure to be reflective of the level of militarization a country engages in. In turn, this level of militarization is an indicator of how a country sees its own level of both internal and external peace (IEP, 2014). In the dataset, the level of military expenditure is identified as *MilitaryExpenditure*.

A final variable, *DiversityFactor*, measures the level of diversity between the Sunni and Shiite populations in a country. Its methodology is taken from a report by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2014). In it, the Religious Diversity Index was identified to be a derivation of the Herfindal-Hirschman Index, which is used to measure the degree of concentration in various fields (Pew Research Center, 2014). Unlike the Herfindal-Hirschman Index, however, the Religious Diversity Index is directly proportional to the increase of the factor it measures. That is to say, a high magnitude of the index reflects a high degree of diversity. The measure takes on values from zero to 10.

The methodology for getting the diversity score was adapted from the report published by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2014). It is a three-step process involving mathematical calculations and computations. The first step is to get the sum of the squares of the percentage of Sunnis and Shiites relative to the percentage of Muslims in a country. The next step is to subtract the sum from 10 000 – the square of 100, representing no diversity as one sect represents all of the Muslims in a country. The difference is then divided by 500 – the divisor necessary to get a value of 10 in the diversity scale, representing complete diversity (Pew Research Center, 2014).

For example, let there be a case where a Muslim population can be divided equally into the two sects. That is to say, of all the Muslims in a country, 50% are Sunnis and 50% are Shiites. The first step is to get the sum

of the square of their percentages. In this case, the sum of the squares is 5 000. The next step is to subtract the sum from 10 000, giving a difference of 5 000. This is then divided by 500, yielding a quotient of 10. A value of 10.00 represents full diversity as one sect is not in a position to dominate the other sect by virtue of sheer volume alone.

In another example, suppose that 75% of the Muslims are Sunnis, and the remaining 25% are Shiites, then the sum of their respective squares is 6 250. The difference between 10 000 and 6 250 is 3 750. Dividing the difference by 500 would yield a diversity factor of 7.50.

The data regarding the estimate of the number of Shiites in a population is taken from a 2009 report made by the Pew Research Center. The Sunni population of a country is taken as the difference between the Shiite estimate of said report and 100.

DATA AND RESULTS

There are a total of nine models employed in this paper. Each of them includes the main independent variable: the percentage of Muslims in the population. Table 1 which shows the regression of a country's Peace Index based on the predictors presented is seen below.

The first model is the simplest one, expressing the Peace Index as a function of the percentage of Muslims alone:

$$PeaceIndex = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PercentMuslim + u \qquad (1)$$

The data shows that every unit increase in the percentage of Muslims in the population would increase the Peace Index by 0.00346 units. The measurement of how close the data is to the fitted regression line, otherwise known as the R-squared value, is 0.0722 in this model.

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Table 1. Regression of the Peace Index on Hypothesized Predictors

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9
Muslims in population (as %)	0.00346**	0.00330**	0.00330**	0.00121	0.00236*	0.00276*	0.00112	0.00182	-0.000160
	(0.00117)	(0.00109)	(0.00109)	(0.000923)	(0.000944)	(0.00111)	(0.000914)	(0.000981)	(0.000867)
Diversity of Muslim population		0.0104	0.0105	0.0376*	-0.00234	0.00383	0.0400*	-0.00890	0.0209
		(0.0190)	(0.0192)	(0.0159)	(0.0170)	(0.0197)	(0.0155)	(0.0168)	(0.0130)
Unemployed people in the labor force (as %)			-0.000262				-0.00688		-0.00773*
			(0.00516)				(0.00376)		(0.00368)
GDP per Capita (in USD 1 000s)				-0.0184***			-0.0188***		-0.0178***
				(0.00175)			(0.00176)		(0.00156)
Number of refugees (by country of origin, in 10 000s)					0.00557***			0.00557***	0.00450***
					(0.00152)			(0.00158)	(0.00121)
Military expenditure (as % of (0.00117)						0.0455		0.0452	0.0522
						(0.0376)		(0.0336)	(0.0325)
Intercept	1.903***	1.889***	1.891***	2.110***	1.899***	1.824***	2.171***	1.835***	2.100***
	(0.0478)	(0.0561)	(0.0773)	(0.0482)	(0.0520)	(0.0752)	(0.0637)	(0.0698)	(0.0720)
	0.0722	0.0749	0.0749	0.434	0.208	0.0915	0.441	0.224	0.548
	125	125	125	125	125	125	125	125	125

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

The second model includes the diversity factor of a country, as seen in:

$$PeaceIndex = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PercentMuslim + \beta_2 DiversityFactor + u \quad (2)$$

The data shows that every unit increase in the percentage of Muslims in population would increase the Peace Index by 0.00330 units. The diversity in a country has no discernible effect on the Peace Index of the same. This model has an R-squared of 0.0749.

The third model now includes the unemployment rate of a country as part of its control variables:

$$\text{PeaceIndex} = \beta_0 + \beta_1\text{PercentMuslim} + \beta_2\text{DiversityFactor} + \beta_3\text{Unemployment} + u \tag{3}$$

The data shows that only the percentage of Muslims in the population is statistically significant. Holding all else constant, every unit increase in the percentage of Muslims in a country increases its Peace Index by 0.00330 units. This model has an R-squared of 0.0749.

The fourth model features the GDP per capita of a country, expressed in USD 1 000s, as part of its control variables:

$$\text{PeaceIndex} = \beta_0 + \beta_1\text{PercentMuslim} + \beta_2\text{DiversityFactor} + \beta_3\text{ScaledGDPperCapita} + u \tag{4}$$

The data shows that the percentage of Muslims has no discernible effect on the Peace Index of a country. However, it is interesting to note that the diversity of the population now does, adding 0.0376 units to the Peace Index for every unit increase in diversity. Similarly, the Peace Index decreases by 0.0184 units for every USD 1 000.00 increase in a country's GDP per Capita. This model has an R-squared of 0.434.

The fifth model includes the population of refugees, expressed as every 10 000 people, who hold citizenship in the country from which they fled:

$$\text{PeaceIndex} = \beta_0 + \beta_1\text{PercentMuslim} + \beta_2\text{DiversityFactor} + \beta_3\text{ScaledRefugee} + u \tag{5}$$

The data shows that the percentage of Muslims, once more, has a discernible effect on the Peace Index of a country – increasing the latter by 0.00236 units for every percentage added. Further, every 10 000 increase in the number citizens fleeing a country increase the Peace Index by 0.00557 units. The diversity between Sunnis and Shiites has no significant effect on the dependent variable. This model has an R-squared of 0.208.

The sixth model includes the country's military expenditures, expressed as a percentage of the GDP, as part of its control variables:

$$\text{PeaceIndex} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{PercentMuslim} + \beta_2 \text{DiversityFactor} + \beta_3 \text{MilitaryExpenditure} + u \qquad (6)$$

Only the percentage of Muslims in the population is statistically significant. The remaining two variables are not. Every percentage increase in the Muslim population of a country increases the Peace Index by 0.00276 units. The model has an R-squared of 0.0915.

The seventh model includes both of the economic variables—ScaledGDPperCapita and Unemployment—as part of the control variables:

$$\text{PeaceIndex} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{PercentMuslim} + \beta_2 \text{DiversityFactor} + \beta_3 \text{Unemployment} + \beta_4 \text{ScaledGDPperCapita} + u \qquad (7)$$

Only the diversity of the Muslim population and the scaled GDP per capita are statistically significant in this model. *Ceteris paribus*, every unit increase in the diversity factor of a country increases its Peace Index by 0.0400 units. Similarly, holding all else constant, every USD 1 000.00 increase in a country's GDP per capita decreases its Peace Index by 0.0188 units. This model has an R-squared of 0.441.

The eighth model, rather than using the economic variables, includes the socio-political variables instead, namely *ScaledRefugee* and *MilitaryExpenditure*:

$$\text{PeaceIndex} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{PercentMuslim} + \beta_2 \text{DiversityFactor} + \beta_3 \text{ScaledRefugee} + \beta_4 \text{MilitaryExpenditure} + u \qquad (8)$$

The model shows that only the number of refugees has a discernible effect on a country's Peace Index. Holding all else constant, every 10 000 people added to the number of refugees from a country increases that country's Peace Index by 0.00557 units. This model has an R-squared of 0.224.

Finally, the last model includes all variables in it:

$$PeaceIndex = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PercentMuslim + \beta_2 DiversityFactor$$
$$+ \beta_3 Unemployment + \beta_4 ScaledGDPperCapita$$
$$+ \beta_5 ScaledRefugee + \beta_6 MilitaryExpenditure + u \qquad (9)$$

Of the six variables included, only the rate of unemployment, GDP per Capita, and the number of refugees from a country have a discernible effect on the Peace Index of a country. All things constant, every percentage increase in the number of unemployed people in a country decreases its Peace Index by 0.00773 units. *Ceteris paribus*, every USD 1 000.00 increase in a country's GDP per capita decreases its Peace Index by 0.0178 units. Holding all else constant, every additional 10 000 people fleeing from a country increases its Peace Index by 0.00450. This model has the highest R-squared of all nine models—0.548.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Earlier works have shown that while there is a statistically significant relationship between the number of Muslims in a population, and the results and causes of conflict in some cases, this is not disproportionately greater than or more pronounced than when the percentage of Muslims in a country is not considered (de Soysa & Nordås, 2007; Fish, et al., 2010; Fox, 2001; Gleditsch & Sørli, 2005; Kayani, 2011; Khan, 2013; Klem, 2011; Reynolds, 2005; Rowe, 2015). This paper reinforces the findings of those previous studies, in that the data show that in cases where the percentage of Muslims in the population does have a discernible effect on the peace and order situation of a country, the magnitude of such an effect is lower than the magnitude of the effect of other economic and socio-political factors.

Of the five models which show that the percentage of Muslims in a population has a statistically significant effect, for instance, the respective magnitudes of the effect of such on the Peace Index are low—never breaching 0.003 when rounded to the nearest thousandth. It can be said, therefore, that the Muslim composition of the total population is a factor—albeit a relatively negligible one. When one combines this observation with the level of the R-squared, such would suggest that this particular variable does not constitute

the be-all-and-end-all of studies on the causes of conflict. Other variables are far more statistically significant, far more decisive, and far more pronounced in determining how peaceful—or how conflict-ridden—a country is.

An interesting case can be made from the diversity of Sunnis and Shiites in a country. In some instances – particularly in Models Two, Three, Five, Six, Eight, and Nine—the diversity between the sects is one which does not concern the peace and order in a country. However, when one includes GDP per capita in the equation, this diversity factor becomes statistically significant. Every increase in diversity now comes with a deterioration of the general tranquility of the country. It would seem therefore, that economics has a hand to play in the exacerbation of conflict; an effect which must be considered in the light of intra-religious differences.

Toft (2007) argues that such can be the case because political elites frame the conflict in their country as a religious one even when such conflict simply is not. Toft refers to this phenomenon as *religious outbidding* (2007). In particular, Toft's study shows that civil wars tend to be presented by the political leadership of a country as a struggle of their religion against those who would wish to—putting it bluntly—obliterate it. This is a form of politicizing religion, culture, and identities (Crowder, et al., 2014; Funk & Said, 2004). In so doing, the country's political, economic, social, and religious elites are able to establish some form of religious credibility. With that credibility comes the support from fellow members of their faith abroad, while it galvanizes the support of the faithful at home. Participation in the conflict then becomes a form of divine mandate and a sacred obligation which the faithful—if not the zealous—should take up (Toft, 2007). This applies even to foreign fighters who have no geographical or economic connection with the conflict in the area whatsoever, save that they feel that they should become a defender of the faith by virtue of this *religious outbidding* (Heghammer, 2010/2011). Thus, religion and the perception that religion itself plays the pivotal role in the catalysis of conflict play second fiddle to the reality painted by the political elite of a country already embroiled in crisis.

On the other hand, one might also consider that the effect of diversity compounded with the economic conditions of a country is caused by mere economics, rather than temporal or spiritual rhetoric. It is interesting to note that the absolute value of the effect of diversity on the Peace Index is discernibly greater than the absolute value of the effect of GDP per capita.

That is to say, the magnitude of the change resulting from every unit increase in the Diversity Factor of a country is greater than the magnitude of change resulting from every USD 1 000.00 increase in a country's GDP per capita. This view can be seen from two levels. First, poverty is a factor—a significant factor at that —of conflict (Gleditsch & Sørli, 2005). Secondly, taking into account the religious differences between the Sunni and Shiites, and the fact that one sect is unable to dominate the other in a country, conflict may arise about how wealth is distributed between the two sects (Pew Research Center, 2009). This conflict, in turn, may become violent, especially if the State shows bias for or against one sect over the other (Joll, 2010). Again, it is not religion nor sectarian differences themselves that constitute the central source of conflict. Rather, it is the exploitation of sectarian differences that serve to push people who already are on edge overboard.

Such was the case in Southern Thailand. Joll (2010) presents that insurgents were able to recruit young men to fight the Thai government because of two primary reasons. First, high unemployment pervades among the Malay Muslim youth of Southern Thailand. Secondly and, perhaps, more importantly, the Thai government has shown a bias towards Thai Buddhists. Despite having Thai citizenship, therefore, a person's religion—as well as his/her ethnicity—is a factor in receiving second-class treatment from one's own government. This, compounded with economic factors, push people into conflict (Joll, 2010).

Another interesting case can be found in the fifth model, wherein both the percentage of Muslims in the population and the number of refugees from a country are statistically significant. The increase resulting from the percentage of Muslims may be attributed to the politicization of religion, known as *religious outbidding*, as discussed above (Toft, 2007). What turns unrest or discontent into conflict and violence however, is not so much the sheer number of Muslims, per se. It could also be attributed to the doctrines of the belief system itself.

Toft (2007) identifies some factors which may contribute to the violent manifestations of conflict. It must be noted that these factors are present in all three Abrahamic religions, namely Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. These religions, she noted, were uncompromising. That is to say, the tenets outlined in their respective sacred scriptures— the Bible, the Quran, and the Torah, respectively—demand that these be followed without fail nor

exceptions. These must be acted upon with no hesitation, even if non-compliance is, from a rational perspective, a more peaceful path to take (Toft, 2007).

These religions further emphasize that the religious self is far more important than the physical self. The former is eternal and immortal, as opposed to the temporal and mortal physical self (Toft, 2007). From a rational choice point of view, it would make sense to engage in the activities of the followers of a faith—even if it means violence—if there is an eternal reward. Sacrificing the physical self in order to gain access to an eternity in heaven or in paradise—or, at least, to avoid damnation in the eternal flames of hell—is a choice which is completely rational at least from the point of view of the religious and the zealous (Toft, 2007).

Unfortunately, as this study did not include the percentage of Christians or Jews in a country, it is not able to empirically state whether or not such is held to be true for the other two Abrahamic faiths.

As for the refugee population, the data suggests that as more and more civilians flee a country, the more violent and conflict-ridden that country becomes. This might be possible because as the number of civilians in a country dwindles, so does the inhibition of all the parties involved in the conflict to refrain from unnecessary destruction. To put it quite bluntly, if a house is of strategic value to the enemy, but is occupied by non-combatants or non-belligerents at a given time, then that house has a fighting chance to be spared from the destruction wrought by arms and armor. On the other hand, if the residents of that same house have fled the conflict zone, then belligerents are less willing to spare it from weaponry.

Kayani (2011) further asserts that radicalization, a cause of Islamist terrorism (Crenshaw, et al., 2006), may take root in those people who choose to stay in a conflict zone. It may also happen to the refugees themselves, especially since they experience extreme poverty, discrimination, or human rights violations, as they more often do (Kayani, 2011).

The most telling explanation however, is found in the last model, where neither the diversity of the Muslim population nor its percentage has any significant or discernible effect on the country's peace and order situation. The only significant variables are unemployment, GDP per capita, and the

number of refugees from a country. There are two main points which can be drawn from this model. Firstly, it reinforces the notion that there are more significant and more relevant factors which explain conflict and violence in a country. The economy, for example, is a far more reliable factor in order to explain such.

Secondly and more surprisingly, unemployment and conflict have a negative relationship with each other. That is to say, as the unemployment rate of a country grows, the Peace Index of a country decreases. In other words, as more people become unemployed, the more peaceful a country becomes. This runs contrary to the arguments of Joll (2010) and Kayani (2011) which state that a higher degree of unemployment—thereby a higher degree of poverty —will push a population to become radicalized, and therefore more violent. A partial explanation can be found in how unemployment only becomes significant when the number of refugees is taken into account. The data implies that unemployed people in the country choose to pack their bags and leave, rather than stay and hope. That is to say, when unemployment becomes a chronic issue in a country, it would appear that most people would go with the tide of refugees in order to be able to find a better life elsewhere.

CONCLUSION

The paper first discusses the existing literature on the relationship between Islam, conflict, and violence. It has found that the themes and arguments of these studies generally revolve around two particular issues. First, there is a discernible relationship between Islam—usually quantified as the percentage of Muslims of a country's population—and conflict. Conflict has been measured in numerous ways in equally numerous studies. It has been measured as the number of deaths due to political violence (Fish, et al., 2010), as the number of civil wars in a country (Toft, 2007), and as a localized insurgency (Harish, 2006; Joll, 2010), among others. The degree or the effect of such a relationship, however, is not outrageously significant. That is to say, numerous other factors should be taken into account as these might be able to explain the causes of conflict far better than any singular predictor (Yamin, 2008).

Secondly, Islam, as a religion in and of itself, is not one which fosters violence or conflict (Etienne, 2007; Norton, 2008; Qamar-ul Huda, 2002; Reynolds, 2005; Rowe, 2015). The view that Islam is one such religion is merely a product of circumstance and of Western bias (Fox, 2001; Kuppinger, 2014). While certain tenets of Islam push the more pious and more zealous to indulge their tendencies of violence, these are not mutually exclusive to Islam (Toft, 2007). Other factors—such as the ulterior motives of the political elite in certain countries—amplify these tendencies, thereby contributing to the notion that Islam is conflict-ridden.

These and the data presented in this study put forth three main conclusions. First, the percentage of Muslims in a country's population has a discernible effect on the peace and order situation of a country in a mere handful of instances. In such cases nonetheless, the magnitude of such effect is notably smaller when compared to the effect that other economic and socio-political factors have. Secondly, religious differences between Sunnis and Shiites have a discernible effect on the peace sand order situation of a country only when economic factors—such as the level of economic growth and productivity—are taken into account. Otherwise, such a relationship would have shaky foundations. Lastly, while the population percentage of Muslims may be a factor, it is not the sole factor of conflict. In fact, it lies at the bottom end of the list of influential factors when it comes to the root of conflict. In the final analysis, economic factors still dominate as the predictors of conflict against all else.

Frankly, this is a welcome development. If it turned out that religion is the sole or, at least, the primary factor in determining conflict, then the State would not be in a position to solve conflict. No secular organization or entity would be in any position to help solve the conflict. It would take years upon years, if not generations upon generations, to solve matters founded on religious foundations. As the data show that economic prosperity is a significant predictor and that religious composition relatively less so, and as previous studies show that State policies and institutions are able to prevent conflict (Joll, 2010), it comes as a welcome relief that the State and the Government are still the entities which are most able to effectively reduce conflict.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As one of the key findings in this study is that there is a relationship between the deterioration of a country's peace and order situation, and the diversity of Muslims in a country and its economy, other studies may build upon this particular point. This paper was not able to utilize a measure of economic inequality as one of its variables. Relating diversity and economic inequality, and conflict is a topic which deserves significant attention.

Other variables may also be used to operationalize conflict. The Global Peace Index is but one of many variables and indicators of the presence, prevalence, and consequences of conflict. These may be used in order to provide a more comprehensive approach to the issue.

Other religions may also be taken into account. That is to say, the diversity of the total population of the country, and not just Islamic diversity, merits consideration. This study could also be tailored to measure the effect of Christian populations and diversity, Jewish populations and diversity, Hindu populations and diversity, Buddhist populations and diversity, and other similar permutations.

More control variables could also be employed in order to increase the comprehensiveness of this study. Urbanization, population size, level of democratic participation, government spending on social services, and female participation in the labor force and in government could all be looked at in order to determine whether or not these have a discernible effect on conflict (Crenshaw, 2006).

NOTE

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