**Religion and foreign policy views: Are religious people more altruistic and/or more militant?**

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**Biography**

Ivica Petrikova is a Lecturer in International Relations at Royal Holloway, University of London. Her research focuses on the links between religion, politics, and development as well as on development issues including social exclusion, social capital, inequality, development assistance, and food security. Her articles have appeared in peer-reviewed journals such as the Journal of International Development, Journal of International Relations and Development, and Development in Practice.

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**Abstract**

Religion shapes people’s identity and behaviour and thus influences their foreign policy views. Yet existing literature has thus far not explored this issue in depth or cross-nationally. This article contributes to filling this gap, by examining the effects of religious belief, belonging, and behaviour on people’s foreign policy views across a large sample of countries. Further, it investigates how these effects are influenced by religions’ social standing and countries’ income level. The study finds that religion significantly heightens followers’ militant internationalist views. Its effect on cooperative internationalist views is more ambiguous. Frequent religious attendance, self-identification as a religious person, and adherence to Islam tend to make people more altruistic in their foreign policy views while affiliation with Christianity and other religious faiths (Hinduism, Buddhism…) may have the opposite effect. Overall, religion has a stronger effect on foreign-policy views among adherents to majority religions and in poorer countries.

**Key words**

Religion, public opinion, foreign policy, cooperative internationalism, militant internationalism

**Introduction**

Recent events like the rise of ISIS and Boko Haram and religiously motivated terrorist attacks across Europe demonstrate that religion plays an important role in international affairs. Research by the Pew Centre (2015) validates this: by 2050, the global percentage of religious people is expected to increase from the current 84 to 87. It is hence likely that religion will retain sizeable influence on international relations for the foreseeable future; yet to date, cross-country research on how religion affects foreign policy attitudes has been scarce. This study examines the impact of religious belief, belonging, and behaviour on people’s international views across a large number of countries.

The article proceeds in the following manner. The next section offers a brief discussion of the relevant literature and proposed theoretical arguments. The following sections talk about the empirical models employed and introduce the data used along with their summary statistics. Thereafter, I present the results of my analysis, discuss major findings, and provide some concluding remarks.

**The effects of religion on foreign policy views**

*What is religion and how it affects people’s views*

Religion has been commonly defined as an “institutionalised system of beliefs and practices concerning the supernatural realm” as well as “the personal beliefs by which an individual relates to and experiences the supernatural realm” (Lunn, 2009: 937). Religion thus both forms part of one’s multifaceted identity, i.e. one’s socially-influenced and culturally-constructed conception of self, and serves as a source of world views and values that “provide a guide to the right living” (Warner and Walker, 2011: 120).

Because different religious groups promote “different values, worldviews … [and] traditions”, the effect of religion on people’s views and attitudes likely varies with specific religious affiliation (Wuthnow and Lewis, 2008: 193). Religious beliefs and affiliations further interact with other social identifiers (e.g. ethnicity, race…). They are also shaped by attendance at religious services, which generally “consist of elevating the importance of [certain] values in the decision-making process of [congregation] members” (Djupe and Calfano, 2013: 644), as well as by the cultural and social portrayal of religion. A study aiming to understand how religion influences people’s views and attitudes should thus include measures of religious belief, belonging, and behaviour, along with some consideration of the religion’s social standing and country context (Glazier, 2013: 129).

*Classification of foreign policy views*

Literature on public attitudes, published predominantly in the United States, concurred initially that the general public was largely uninterested in and ill-informed about international relations (Holsti, 2004). For a long time, little attention was thus paid to people’s foreign-policy views and their determinants. However, this consensus eroded as research showed that “people have [actually] relatively well-defined attitude structures that make public opinion about foreign policy stable over time” (Taydas et al., 2012: 1222). Ensuing research evolved into measuring people’s foreign policy views along the “Wittkopf-Holsti-Rosenau” typology of *cooperative* and *militant internationalism* (Guth, 2013: 229).

Cooperative, or altruistic, internationalism (CI) is a foreign-policy attitude that emphasises international cooperation, the role of international institutions, and the welfare of people globally (Guth, 2013). Militant, or hegemonic, internationalism (MI) sees other countries as a possible danger to one’s own and considers the use of force in international affairs an often-inevitable necessity (ibid). The two opinion axes are orthogonal, with people’s views on them giving rise, as Figure 1 shows, to a four-fold classification into “hardliners” (high on MI, low on CI), “internationalists” (high on MI, high on CI), “accommodationists” (low on MI, high on CI), and “isolationists” (low on MI, low on CI) (Wittkopf, 1990). It is hence possible for people to be, for example, both highly cooperative and highly militant internationalist.

[Figure 1]

*Theoretical effects of religion on cooperative and militant internationalism*

Turning now to the article’s key question - how religion affects people’s foreign policy views, psychological research has shown that moral values play an important role in shaping people’s foreign policy attitudes and religion is for many people a valuable source of moral values (Kertzer et al., 2014). Considering first cooperative internationalism, most religions encourage its associated moral values, including care for others, fairness, and reciprocity (Kertzer et al., 2014; Lunn, 2009). To mention specific examples, the Bible’s Old Testament, a basis for both Christian and Jewish teachings, frequently reminds believers to lend support to the less fortunate. For instance, the Book of Proverbs contends that “whoever has a bountiful eye will be blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor” (22.9). Giving to the needy is also one of the founding tenets of Islam, referred to as the *zakat*, and held in high esteem by Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism under the name of *daana* (discussed in the Vedic texts, on which teachings of the four religious traditions are based).

Given this broad support for altruistic values, religious belief in general should strengthen feelings of cooperative internationalism. However, one needs to simultaneously remember that the altruistic attitudes promoted by religion often pertain primarily to fellow believers, while excluding people of other religious affiliations (Norenzayan, 2014). That viewpoint is particularly espoused by religious traditions that encourage conversion from other faiths, such as Christianity and Islam (Koopmans and Statham, 2014). Consequently, these religious affiliations might not induce universal cooperative internationalist attitudes among believers at all. The effect of religious affiliation on cooperative internationalism is further likely to vary with the intensity of religious involvement, where more frequent religious practice may reinforce the effect of the religious affiliation due to higher exposition to religious preaching on values deemed important by that specific affiliation (termed “priming” – Djupe and Calfano, 2013: 645), and with the affiliation’s social standing (Guth, 2013). Followers of minority religions should be, with a view to group theory, more supportive of cooperative internationalism than followers of majority religions due to higher expected feelings of cross-border solidarity (Rapoport and Weiss, 2001).

Considering the second axis of foreign policy views, religious belief is theoretically associated with militant internationalism as well. Most religious texts, while advising followers to refrain from wanton violence, contain violent accounts and appeals for the use of violence against followers of competing religious faiths. As Holenstein (2005:10) puts it, “all great God narratives are familiar with traditions that legitimise force in certain circumstances … and demonise people of other religions”. This is particularly true of religions that encourage conversion, notably Christianity and Islam, and the effect might be enhanced by higher intensity of religious involvement. The impact of religion on militant internationalist views is further likely to vary with the religious groups’ social standing: followers of minority religions should be theoretically less supportive of militant internationalism than followers of majority ones, in view of their generally more vulnerable social status and greater sense of cross-border solidarity (Rapoport and Weiss, 2001).

*Existing research on the effects of religion on foreign policy views and practical implications*

Studies linking religion and foreign policy views to date have used predominantly data from the United States (US) and measured religion through only one or two of the three indicators (belief, belonging, and behaviour) utilised here. Nonetheless, many of their findings align with my theoretical suppositions. On cooperative internationalism, Guth (2013) discovered religious people in the US, and particularly religious minorities, to be more cooperative internationalist than non-religious people. On the other hand, evangelical Christians were found to be less internationally altruistic than other groups (Olson et al., 2013). Religious attendance also appeared positively correlated with cooperative internationalism in several studies, which, however, did not use other religious measures (Paxton and Knack, 2012; Wuthnow and Lewis, 2008).

Regarding militant internationalism, existing research has connected Christianity (particularly evangelical) in the US with higher support for military aid to Israel and interventions in the Middle East and Afghanistan (Baumgartner et al., 2008; Cavari, 2013). Christianity, along with Islam, has also been found to increase militant internationalist attitudes in general, but this effect appeared lower among religious minorities (Clements, 2013; Guth, 2009, 2013; Koopmans and Statham, 2014; Tessler and Nachtwey, 1998).

This brief literature review underlines the novelty of this study in its comprehensive operationalisation of religion and its cross-country nature. However, to highlight its contribution to existing research, it is necessary to consider also why one should try to understand how religion influences foreign policy views at all. There are two important reasons. First, public foreign policy views – influenced by religion – may directly or indirectly affect countries’ policies (e.g. Burstein, 2003; Risse-Kappen, 1991). This holds true more in democracies than autocracies; nevertheless, even authoritative governments respond selectively to public opinion (Brownlee, 2007; Reilly, 2013). Because foreign policy often constitutes an issue-area of low salience, selectively responsive authoritarian governments may choose to follow public sentiment on foreign policy issues to demonstrate responsiveness to public opinion without compromising in more crucial areas (e.g. Reilly, 2013). Second, foreign-policy attitudes influence how people think of and behave towards each other and the world (Lippman, 1946). Consequently, even if people’s views on foreign policy fail to translate directly into policy changes, over the long run they shape the construction and understanding of national interests of their respective countries, which ultimately affect the countries’ behaviour in the international realm (e.g. Finnemore, 1996; Wendt, 1992).

*Country groupings*

This article analyses data from 89 countries overall[[1]](#endnote-1). These constitute a diverse group from all six inhabited continents, with national per-capita incomes ranging from very low to very high. In order to control for such diversity, I have divided the countries into four blocs: 1) members of the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee (DAC) who have officially proclaimed their allegiance to altruistic foreign policies, 2) members of the OECD or the European Union (EU) who are not members of the DAC (NDAC), 3) “rising industrial powers” (RIP) – countries classified by the World Bank as upper-middle- or high-income that are not members of the OECD or the EU, and 4) “poor” (POOR) countries – those classified by the World Bank as low- or lower-middle-income.

The country classification was adapted from Petrikova (2016), who utilised it when examining countries’ foreign-policy decisions, and hence it is not explicitly connected to any form of religious belief or practice. However, the higher the group number, the lower the average per-capita income in the country grouping - and because national incomes are negatively correlated with religiosity (Pew Research Centre, 2015), the country groups with higher numbers are on average more religious. One of the main underlying reasons, it is argued, is that people in more affluent societies feel less need for religious support thanks to existing social safety nets, higher levels of education, and access to other psychological outlets including therapists and organised sports (Barber, 2012)[[2]](#endnote-2). In view of this discrepancy in religiosity, one can plausibly expect religion to have a stronger effect on foreign policy views in less economically affluent country groups.

*Formulating hypotheses*

Based on the theoretical considerations partly confirmed by existing research, I expect religious belief in general to bolster both cooperative and militant internationalist attitudes (Hypothesis 1a). However, I expect the positive effect of religious belief on cooperative internationalism to be reduced and the positive effect on militant internationalism to be enhanced in the case of religions that encourage conversion from other faiths, namely Christianity and Islam (Hypothesis 1b). Further, I anticipate that the influence of religious faiths on foreign policy attitudes is augmented by greater religious involvement (Hypothesis 1c). Regarding the conditional effect of religions’ social standing, I conjecture that adhering to a minority religion enhances followers’ cooperative and dampens their militant internationalism (Hypothesis 2). Finally, I expect religion to have a stronger impact on people’s foreign policy views in poorer than in richer country groups (Hypothesis 3).

**Data, summary statistics, and empirical methods**

*Data*

This study analyses data from the World Values Survey (WVS), a global research project that explores people’s values and beliefs across the world and how they change over time[[3]](#endnote-3). I supplement the WVS data with country-level data from the World Development Indicators and the Uppsala University Conflict Data Programme.

The basic model, based on the theoretical considerations above, is the following:

FPijk = β0jk + β1ijkRB + β2ijkRF + β3ijkRI + β4ijkCV+μijk+εijk

where FPijk is the level of support for cooperative or militant foreign policies at time i of a respondent j in a country k, RB is respondent’s religious belief, RF is respondent’s religious faith, RI is respondent’s religious behaviour/involvement, CV are control variables, μ is the difference between individual and country means and the overall mean of the regression, and ε represents the stochastic term.

The model is first refined by interacting the three religious measures - belief, faith, and behaviour – to better assess the first hypothesis (H1a, b, c). Further, it is expanded by including interaction terms between religious faiths and the religions’ majority/minority standing, to evaluate the second hypothesis (H2), and between the religious variables and the four country groups, to test the third hypothesis (H3)[[4]](#endnote-4).

Dependent variables

To identify appropriate measures of cooperative and militant internationalism, I first conducted exploratory factor analysis (EFA) of possible suitable variables, theoretically inspired by influential studies on the topic (e.g. Wittkopf and Maggiotto, 1983; Wuthnow and Lewis, 2008). The EFA showed two measures - support for economic aid to poorer countries and for the UN - loading strongly on the latent cooperative internationalism variable and two measures - support for the use of force in international affairs and not opposing the army in directing foreign policy – loading highly on the latent militant internationalism variable[[5]](#endnote-5). Confirmatory factor analysis confirmed the existence of the two latent variables and their separate components, with moderately strong factor loadings (see Figure 2). The model’s goodness-of-fit statistics all fall well within the acceptable range.

[Figure 2]

As main dependent variables, indices of cooperative and militant internationalism are hence used, both measured on a 0-2 scale. Because support for foreign aid was not measured in the most recent wave of the WVS and previously only in a limited number of countries, the sample used to assess the effects of religion on cooperative internationalism derives from three WVS waves, conducted between 1994 and 2009 in 51 countries. In contrast, the sample utilised to analyse the impact of religion on militant internationalist views comes from four WVS waves conducted between 1994 and 2014 in 89 countries. I chose not to restrict analysis of the second latent variable to the same sample as the first one’s, to take advantage of the greater availability of information via-à-vis militant internationalism. Nevertheless, in a sensitivity analysis I compare thus-obtained results with ones attained with the more restricted sample used for the analysis of cooperative internationalism. Components of the foreign-policy-view indices are also analysed separately to test the results’ robustness.

Main independent variables

The main independent variables measure religious belief, belonging, and behaviour (following Glazier, 2013). Religious belief is operationalised via a binary variable that inquires whether the respondent self-identifies as a religious person. Religious belonging is approximated through respondents’ self-declared religious faith (None, Christian, Muslim, or Other). When testing the second hypothesis, religious faith is interacted with religious majority, a binary variable that awards 1 to religious denominations that constitute a majority in their country.

Religious behaviour is measured via the frequency of religious-service attendance, with 1 standing for at least once a month and 0 less often than that. Given that even the most religiously devout may choose to expose themselves to the basic tenets of their faith through prayer rather than attendance of religious services – this may be particularly true for Muslims (Pew Research Centre, 2015)- as a robustness test I have used an alternative binary variable, religious practice, in which 1 stands for people who either attend religious services at least once a month or pray at least once a week. Although this variable is more theoretically valid than religious attendance, it is not used as the main operationalisation of religious behaviour because it severely reduces the samples analysed.

Control variables

Research has identified, aside from religion, five categories of influential determinants of foreign policy views: charitable beliefs, attention to international affairs, psychological characteristics, demographic factors, and country-level variables. Charitable beliefs were found to bolster support for cooperative and weaken support for militant internationalism (Guth, 2009; Wuthnow and Lewis, 2008). The estimate used here is “left-right”, which measures respondents’ position on a 10-point ideological scale where higher numbers mean greater conservatism.

Greater international awareness and psychological characteristics such as trust and satisfaction were discovered to have similar effects on foreign policy views as charitability (Paxton and Knack, 2012; Wuthnow and Lewis, 2008). These controls are operationalised here through the following three variables: “interest in politics”, with higher scores meaning more interest, “trust” - binary variable where 1 denotes people who generally trust others, and “satisfaction” - a 1-to-10 scale, where higher numbers signify greater satisfaction with one’s financial situation.

Turning to demographics, women are usually more supportive of cooperative internationalism than men while higher age is associated with militant internationalism (Guth, 2009; Paxton and Knack, 2012). Education has been found to strengthen cooperative and reduce militant internationalism while higher incomes and social class to strengthen both (Guth, 2009; Paxton and Knack, 2012; Wuthnow and Lewis, 2008). The variables used in this category are male (male 1, female 0), age (1-6 scale, 1: respondents between 15 and 24, 6: respondents older than 65), number of children, education (1-8 scale, with 8 meaning “completed university education”), and self-reported economic class (1-10 scale, with 10 the highest class).

Finally, country-level variables influence people’s foreign-policy views as well (Paxton and Knack, 2012). Five such variables are included – countries’ GDP per capita, adjusted for purchasing power parity, their population size, coloniser/colony dummy variables that award 1 to countries that had colonies/had been colonised in the past, and countries’ conflict intensity (0-2 scale, 0: no conflict, 2: high conflict intensity).

*Summary statistics*

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics of all the variables utilised, for the sample used in the analysis of cooperative internationalism on the left and of militant internationalism on the right. The first section of the table shows that the average attitudes towards cooperative internationalism (aid giving and support for the UN) and militant internationalism (use of force in international affairs and the army directing foreign policy) all lean towards espousal. Table 2, with results of T-tests of sample means comparing each of the three non-DAC groups with the DAC group, reveals that cooperative internationalism is generally embraced in DAC countries more than elsewhere. Militant internationalist views, in contrast, have lower support in DAC countries than in the remaining country groups.

[Table 1]

The second section of Table 1 contains information about the religious variables. 67 to 69 per cent of respondents have self-identified as religious people, depending on the sample utilised. From religious faiths, the most numerous are Christians, followed by members of “Other” religions (predominantly Buddhism, Hinduism, and Judaism), Muslims, and people of no religious faith. Average religious attendance indicates that 42 to 45 per cent of respondents attend religious services at least once a month. 62 per cent of respondents belong to a religious faith that is in a majority position in their country. Looking at how these variables compare by country group, people in DAC countries are, as expected, significantly less religious than people in the other three groups.

The last part of Table 1 displays summary statistics of the control variables used. The survey respondents apparently position themselves on average in the political middle, with a slight inclination to the conservative right. The average respondent is further between somewhat and not very interested in politics, moderately satisfied with his/her financial situation, and distrustful – fewer than 30 per cent of respondents proclaimed to trust other people. People in non-DAC countries, compared to those in DAC countries, are generally less interested in politics, less satisfied with their financial situation, and less trusting.

Looking at demographics, slightly over half the respondents are male. The mean respondent is around 42 years old, has completed secondary education, and has two children. Non-DAC survey respondents have on average significantly more children and are younger than the DAC ones. They are generally also less educated and classify themselves in relatively lower economic class, indicating higher levels of domestic inequality.

Country-level summary statistics show that the average national income per respondent is between 13,000 and 15,000 USD, depending on the sample used[[6]](#endnote-6). 58 to 65 per cent of respondents live in former colonies, 15 per cent in former colonising countries, and fewer than 30 per cent in countries experiencing conflict. As expected, the three non-DAC groups have significantly lower per-capita incomes than DAC countries, more of them were colonies than colonisers in the past, and generally experience more conflict.

[Table 2]

*Empirical methods of analysis*

The data used in this study are hierarchical, i.e. individual-level data are nested within different countries and time periods. The appropriate analytical method, also following the majority of researchers analysing the WVS data (e.g. Schofer and Fourcade-Gourinchas, 2001; Paxton and Knack, 2012), are thus multilevel hierarchical models (MLHM). The specific type depends on the character of the dependent variable, with multi-level ordered logistic regressions used for cooperative and militant internationalism indices and multi-level logistic regressions for the indices‘ components.

Hierarchical models are used when some units of analysis are clustered but their variance is not necessarily constant, as is the case here (Gelman and Hill, 2007). These models allow for assessment of determinants of an individual-level outcome that are measured on both the individual and the country level more correctly, by explicitly calculating separate individual-level and group-level errors (Steenbergen and Jones, 2002). The utilisation of hierarchical models is supported by the interclass correlation (ICC) levels, which demonstrate that across the different models, more than 10 per cent of total variance in the support for cooperative and militant internationalism can be attributed to between-country differences (see Table 3). However, to assess the robustness of this approach, as a secondary method I use pooled (ordered) logistic regressions with country clustered standard errors and wave dummy variables to control for time and country fixed effects.

**Results**

*Effects of religion on foreign policy views in general (Hypothesis 1)*

Table 3 displays results from the basic model, which examines the separate effects of religious belief, belonging, and behaviour on foreign policy attitudes. General religious belief (i.e. self-identification as a religious person) increases both cooperative and militant internationalism, as hypothesised in H1a. In line with Hypothesis 1b, Christian (but not Muslim) faith reduces adherents’ cooperative internationalism[[7]](#endnote-7) and particularly Islam strengthens its adherents’ militant internationalism. Religious behaviour, whether measured through religious attendance or religious practice, augments both cooperatively and militantly internationalist views, with the effect of religious practice slightly higher in magnitude. Across the different models, the most consistently significant are the positive effects of religious identification and behaviour as well as of Muslim self-identification, on militant internationalism.

[Table 3]

In order to understand how the three religious measures work together in their impact on people’s foreign policy views, as a second step I examine their interactive effects. Figure 3, based on Table 4 (http://ivica.petrik.uk/IPSR-tables.pdf), displays the results graphically. Consistent with H1a and results from the basic model, religious belief without associated faith[[8]](#endnote-8) augments both militant and cooperative internationalism. The influence of religious belief on militant internationalism is enhanced further by association with Islam, as H1b argued, but not consistently with the other faiths. Islam is, however, also the only faith that strengthens the positive effect of religious belief on cooperative internationalism. In contrast, self-alignment with Christianity and Other religious faiths achieves generally the opposite. These findings align overall with those from the basic model, which also confirmed H1b only partially.

[Figure 3]

Finally, to assess the veracity of H1c, Figure 3 shows that rather than deepening the effects of religious faiths on foreign policy views as was hypothesised, religious involvement more straightforwardly promotes cooperative internationalism and to some extent also militant internationalism. Consequently, Christians who attend services at least monthly are more cooperative internationalist than non-attending Christians despite the generally dampening effect of Christianity on cooperative internationalism. Frequently attending Muslims are the most cooperative and militant internationalist group[[9]](#endnote-9) of all the different permutations of the three religious measures analysed but interestingly, frequent religious attendance does not raise Muslims’ militant internationalist views as it raises the cooperative internationalist ones[[10]](#endnote-10).

*Interactive effect of religion’s social standing (Hypothesis 2)*

Next, I turn to the question whether the majority or minority standing of religious faiths influences their effects on their adherents’ foreign policy attitudes. Consistent with group theory, I expected to find the followers of minority religions more cooperative and less militant internationalist than the followers of majority religions (Hypothesis 2).

[Figure 4]

Graphs in Figure 4[[11]](#endnote-11) partially support this hypothesis. Christians and Muslims are indeed less prone to militant internationalism when they constitute a religious minority. This stems from greater cross-border bonds experienced by members of minority religious groups, which may make the consequences of international use of force or the army directing foreign policy feel more intimate. On the other hand, while minority Muslims and Others are more cooperative internationalist than majority Muslims and Others as hypothesised, minority Christians are actually less cooperative internationalist than majority ones. Jointly, these results indicate that alignment with a minority religion has an accommodationist effect on Muslims’ but an isolationist, anti-internationalist, effect on Christians’ foreign policy attitudes.

*Interactive effect of country groups (Hypothesis 3)*

The final test, the results of which are displayed in Figure 5, assesses how the effects of religion on foreign policy views differ in the four country blocs examined – DAC countries, EU/OECD non-DAC countries (NDAC), rising industrial powers (RIP), and poor countries (POOR) – and if, as hypothesised in H3, the impact of religion is stronger in the poorer country groups. The visualisation strongly corroborates the hypothesis.

[Figure 5]

While the different religious variables have only a mild effect on people’s foreign policy views in the DAC countries, their impact in NDAC and particularly in RIP and POOR countries is much stronger. The effects of these different religious measures are generally closely clustered by region, with a notably strong positive impact of religion on militant internationalism in RIP countries and on both cooperative and militant internationalism in POOR countries. The divergent effects of Christianity and Islam in the different country groups can be elucidated to some extent by the religions’ different social standing: being a Muslim in DAC and NDAC countries, where Muslims mostly find themselves in minority, increases militant internationalist views less than being a Muslim in RIP and POOR countries, where Islam is often the dominant religion. Analogously, Christianity in RIP and POOR countries, where it more frequently finds itself in a minority position, inspires more isolationist foreign policy views than in DAC and NDAC countries.

**Discussion and concluding remarks**

This study offers insights into the previously underexplored links between religion and people’s foreign policy views across a large number of countries. The main finding is that irrespective of how it is measured, religion promotes militant internationalist views but has a more ambiguous effect on cooperative internationalism. This connects with the second broad finding that the precise effect of religion on followers’ foreign policy attitudes varies with specific religious belief, belonging, behaviour, religion’s social standing as well as the specific country where one lives.

The first finding is evident from Figures 3 through 5. These show that regardless of the particular combination of religious belief, belonging, behaviour, religion’s social standing, and a country group examined, religious people are never less and in majority of cases significantly more militant internationalist than non-religious people. Looking at the interaction between religious belief, belonging, and behaviour in Figure 3 for illustration, only one group of religious people[[12]](#endnote-12) out of 15 does not appear significantly more militant in foreign policy views than non-religious people. The effect of religion on cooperative internationalism is much more varied, however.

The latter conclusion segues into the second broad finding of the study, which is that the direction and size of religion’s impact on cooperative internationalism and the size of its positive effect on militant internationalism vary with one’s specific religious belief, belonging, behaviour, whether one’s religion is in a majority or minority in one’s country, and in which country one lives.

Generic religious belief has an internationalist effect. In other words, within all religious faiths and most country blocs examined (with the exception of DAC), people who have self-identified as religious persons have both more cooperative and more militant internationalist views than people who have self-identified as non-religious. This effect can likely be attributed to religious teachings, which across different faiths emphasise the need for charity in everyday life and the necessary use of force to punish wrongdoings, as well as to the internationalism enjoyed and promoted by most religions for centuries.

Religious faiths generally have a hardliner influence on their followers’ foreign policy views, strengthening the positive effect of religious belief on militant internationalism and somewhat attenuating its positive effect on cooperative internationalism. I anticipated such influence among religions that encourage conversion – i.e. Christianity and Islam - due to potential feelings of hostility against the followers of other religions, and have confirmed its existence with one exception. Contrary to expectations, association with Islam does not reduce but in some contexts actually increases the positive effect of religious belief on cooperative internationalism. Consequently, followers of Islam, particularly practicing ones, hold on average, *ceteris paribus*, more altruistic foreign policy attitudes than either non-religious people or followers of other religions. The underlying reason could be a greater emphasis on charitability by Islam than by other religions (charity as *zakat* constitutes one of Islam’s five main pillars) or the fact that a large portion of Muslims examined for cooperative internationalism in this study are in minority positions in their countries of residence; however, more research on this topic is needed to yield a better substantiated explanation.

Regarding the effect of religious behaviour, I conjectured that more frequent religious involvement and hence more intense exposure to the values of specific religious creeds would intensify the impact of religious faiths on foreign policy views. Following this logic, Christians who attend religious services more often should be less cooperative internationalist than those who attend less often. Nevertheless, that is not the case. Instead, religious attendance appears to promote cooperative internationalism in all the faiths examined. Consequently, frequently attending Christians hold more altruistic foreign policy views than non-attending Christians and even than non-religious people. Vis-à-vis militant internationalism, more frequent religious attendance reinforces the positive effect of general religious belief in all faiths except for Islam[[13]](#endnote-13). These findings suggest that there is a discrepancy between some of the basic values espoused by followers of religious faiths and the values actually promoted by faith leaders in houses of worship – with some clergy reinforcing the basic foreign policy views of religious faiths while others likely contradicting them (see e.g. Djupe and Calfano, 2013).

The social standing of religious faiths also affects how they impact their adherents’ foreign policy attitudes. Based on the anticipation that religious minorities feel more cross-border solidarity than religious majorities, I expected to find the minority standing of religious faiths to strengthen adherents’ cooperative while weakening their militant internationalism. The study’s results have partially confirmed this expectation, with minority Muslims indeed more accommodationist – i.e. less militant internationalist and more cooperative internationalist - than majority Muslims. Nevertheless, being a minority Christian has an isolationist rather than accommodationist effect, highlighting an apparent tendency of minority Christians to distance themselves from international affairs in foreign policy views. This finding may reflect a protectionist mentality imposed on Christian minorities by their vulnerable social standing but requires a deeper investigation to be truly explained.

Differences between the effects of majority and minority religions on foreign policy views explain some of the variance observed between the four country groups. Muslims in POOR and RIP countries and Christians in DAC countries, where they predominantly constitute majorities, are more supportive of militant internationalism than Muslims in DAC and NDAC countries and Christians in RIP countries, where they are largely minorities. The effects of religious belief and behaviour on foreign policy views also vary by country group, however, with the effects in RIP and POOR countries significantly stronger than in NDAC and particularly in DAC countries, corroborating my third hypothesis (H3).

To position the study’s results in broader literature, the discovery that religion in general encourages militant internationalist views fits with existing research that has on one side aligned religiosity with authoritarianism (e.g. Wink et al., 2007) and on the other side connected authoritarianism with militant internationalism (e.g. Guth, 2009). In contrast, the link between altruism, associated with cooperative internationalism (ibid), and religion is more contested in literature (e.g. Saroglou, 2013), with findings varying depending on the religious measures and analytical methods utilised – which is again consistent with the results of this study.

The results of this study entail two main implications. First, religion has clearly an important effect on people’s foreign policy views globally, with a particularly constant, reinforcing effect on militant internationalism. It is hard to quantify religion’s relative importance in this regard compared to other variables as it is measured via several different measures; nevertheless, all its embodiments appear to have a generally stronger influence than demographic characteristics such as age or the number of children. Some repercussions of this religious influence, particularly on militant internationalism, may have played out in recent terrorist events in which individuals with religious convictions used force against perceived “enemies” (e.g. Shiloach, 2016). Most policy implications of religion’s effect on foreign policy views are significantly less obvious, direct or sudden, however. Through its texts, associated beliefs and myths, public messages and image as well as social standing, religion affects how people think of other countries and the world at large. These opinions in turn affect the way people behave and vote, and therefore may impact upon their countries’ official policies (see e.g. Soroka and Wlezien, 2010; Wendt 1992). The effect of religion on people’s foreign policy views is less significant in richer countries, where its influence has declined somewhat over the last two decades. Nonetheless, as the already mentioned Pew Research Centre’s (2015) findings suggest, the global proportion of religious people is set to rise rather than decline by mid-century. Whether economic growth in the Global South will be accompanied by increasing secularisation is also questionable (Clark, 2012). Religion is thus likely to continue significantly affecting people’s foreign policy views and in turn their countries’ behaviour for the foreseeable future.

However, the second main implication of the study’s findings is that although the effects of the different religious measures on foreign policy views are relatively stable across different specifications, how precisely religion influences one’s foreign policy attitudes varies across the different religious concepts (belief, belonging, and behaviour) as well as religions’ social standing and country group – suggesting that religion, like culture, is very fluid (da Silva Moreira, 2014). Some of these concepts such as religion’s minority or majority position cannot well be modified; however, through religious priming in houses of worship or portrayal of religion in media the overall impact of religion on adherents’ cooperative and militant internationalism can be moulded. For example, the study’s results show that even though self-identifying as Christian generally weakens cooperative internationalism, higher religious involvement measured through attendance of religious services promotes this attitude. If there is an interest among policymakers to strengthen religions’ cooperative internationalist and weaken their militant internationalist effects, which could arguably ameliorate conflicts and improve relations among countries, it could be supported by modifying which moral values are elevated in religious sermons and how different religious faiths are depicted in the media.

This study constitutes a first step into the territory of empirical cross-country examination of the links between religion and foreign policy views. It has yielded two broad conclusions – that religion still plays a noteworthy role in shaping adherents’ foreign policy views and in general bolsters adherents’ militant internationalist attitudes. However, the extent to which militant internationalism is bolstered by religion and how cooperative internationalism is impacted depend on a combination of religious belief, belonging, behaviour, a religion’s social position as well as country’s economic standing. As any cross-country quantitative analysis, this study has several limitations. Chiefly, it has been unable to provide conclusive explanations to some of the significant results, including the greater positive effect of Islam than of other faiths on followers’ cooperative internationalism or the reason why minority status increases cooperative internationalism among all religious faiths except for Christianity. Second, the study has briefly mentioned that the portrayal of religious faiths by media may influence which values religious followers perceive as crucial but has not had space to examine the topic in more detail. Future research should explore these questions in greater depth.

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**Figure 1. The classification of foreign policy views employed in this study**



*Source:* author’s own graphic



**Figure 2. Cooperative and militant internationalism – confirmatory factor analysis.**

Fit statistics: Chi2 = 1.064, p>0.01; CFI = 0.989, RMSEA = 0.009, SRMR = 0.008.

Standardised coefficients significant at least at the 10% level are in bold.

**Figure 3. The interactive effects of religious belief, belonging, and behaviour on foreign policy views**



The intersection of the two axes represents the non-religious position. The marginal effects displayed in the figure were calculated from regressions listed in Table 4 in the Appendix.

**Figure 4. Marginal effects of religious denominations’ minority/majority positions on cooperative and militant internationalism**



The marginal effects displayed in the figure were calculated from regressions listed in Table 5 in the Appendix.

**Figure 5. The effects of religious belief, belonging, and behaviour on foreign policy views in different country blocs**



The positions of the religious variables on the two axes for the four different country groups were determined on the basis of marginal effects estimated from regressions displayed in Table 6 in the Appendix. RB= religious belief, RI = religious involvement/attendance, Chr = Christian, Mus = Muslim, Oth = other faith.

**Table 1. Summary statistics of the variables used**



*Notes*: For each independent variable, two means and two standard deviations are listed. Numbers on the left were obtained with the sample used to analyse cooperative internationalism, numbers on the right with the sample utilised to examine militant internationalism.

**Table 2. T-test comparisons of means between non-DAC and DAC countries**



*Notes:* The table above displays means of all the variables utilised in the study, separately for the four different country groups. Means for NDAC, RIP, and POOR country groups were compared via T-tests with the means for the DAC country group – if the results are significantly lower (higher), the means are displayed in dark grey (light grey). For control variables, numbers on the left were obtained with the cooperative-internationalism sample while numbers on the right with the militant-internationalism sample.

**Table 3. Effects of religious belief, belonging, and behaviour on foreign policy views**



*Notes*: \*\*\* p <0.01, \*\* p <0.05, \* p <0.10. Model 7 was estimated on the same sample as Model 1. The number next to each variable is the coefficient, underneath in italics is the corresponding robust standard error. All regressions were controlled for time effects.

1. For a list of the countries, see Table 7 at http://ivica.petrik.uk/IPSR-tables.pdf. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Yet, as findings by Pew Research Centre (2015) indicate, it does not necessarily follow that rising incomes will reduce religiosity globally. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. More information at www.worldvaluessurvey.org [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. When evaluating the second and third hypotheses, I refine the basic model rather than the interactive model. I do so to avoid models with four-way interactions because their results would be too complicated to display numerically or graphically. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Following standard practice when estimating SEMs, I used the EM algorithm to treat missing values. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. The sample analysed for militant internationalism includes relatively more RIP and POOR countries and hence the average national income per respondent is lower than in the sample analysed for cooperative internationalism. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Identifying with Christianity reduces cooperative internationalism more in magnitude than general religious belief raises it. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. In the two samples analysed, 9 and 7 per cent, respectively, of respondents self-identifying as religious declared not to be affiliated with any religious faith. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. This effect may be even stronger in reality as certain groups of devout Muslims commonly choose to practice their religious faith via prayer rather than attendance of services. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Looking briefly at other determinants of foreign policy views in Table 3, education and trust have an accommodative effect - i.e. strengthen cooperative and weaken militant internationalism. Age exerts an isolationist tendency while living in a conflict-affected country a hardliner one. Satisfaction and interest in politics heighten both types of internationalism. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. The figure is based on results in Table 5 (http://ivica.petrik.uk/IPSR-tables.pdf). [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. People of Other religions who do not self-identify as religious persons and do not attend services frequently – 4.4 per cent of the sample. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. This finding is contrary to the perception of Islam, increasingly popular in right-wing Western media, as a religion that encourages militant views the more one engages in its practice. Nevertheless, Islam does appear to increase its adherents’ militant internationalist views more in magnitude than the other religious variables examined. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)