

Religious Cosmologies and Homicide Rates among Nations

A Closer Look¹

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Abstract

Although religion has been viewed as playing an important role in the maintenance of moral order, the most recent analysis of variation in homicide rates among nations argues that homicide is facilitated by high levels of religiosity (Paul). That analysis, however, was based on scatter-plots for eighteen “prosperous nations” and focused primarily on the United States compared to “secular” nations. Because there are numerous dimensions to religiosity and a variety of alternative explanations of homicide rates, a more complex analysis is required before more definitive conclusions can be reached. This study attempts such an analysis for a much larger sample of nations and tests Durkheim’s hypotheses that religious passion, as a variable characteristic of nations, is a positive correlate of homicide rates. A multiple regression analysis reveals a complex relationship with some dimensions of religiosity encouraging homicide and other dimensions discouraging it. The relationships found not only survive controls for variables proposed in prior research, but also suggest major modifications to theories focusing on economic variables as characteristics of nations.

Introduction

[1] Any thorough attempt to assess the role of religion in relation to violence will encounter two conflicting themes. On the one hand, religious institutions, beliefs, and practices are commonly depicted as discouraging crime, either directly or indirectly through links with other social forces. The two sociologists who have written the most about religion and deviance, Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, argue that church attendance contributes to moral integration and, thus, inhibits a wide range of forms of deviance. In fact, Bainbridge and Stark propose that the preventative effect of religiosity is one of the few general propositions in the sociology of deviance that applies at both the individual and the collective level. Indeed, a meta-analysis of research on religion and crime concluded, “religious behaviors and beliefs exert a moderate deterrent effect on individuals’ criminal behavior” (Baier and Wright: 3). Stark and Bainbridge propose the same conclusion, but argue that it applies at both the individual and ecological level.

[2] In contrast to the preventative argument, some dimensions of religiosity have been proposed as sources of violence in one form or another. Religious zeal has been cited as a source of national and international problems, ranging from homicide, hate crime, and terrorism to genocide and ethnic cleansing. Reflecting upon *When Religion Becomes Evil*, Charles Kimball proposes that religious belief systems tend to become destructive when they are characterized by absolute truth claims, notions of a cosmic struggle between God and the Devil (cosmic dualism), and rigid dichotomies between good

¹ The author is grateful for support and encouragement for this project from the Center for the Study of Religion and Culture at Vanderbilt University, Volney Gay and Douglas Knight, Directors.

and evil. In short, when certain types of religious attitudes predominate in a nation, Kimball's argument suggests that they can contribute to an inclination towards interpersonal violence.

[3] Gregory Paul most recently highlighted the view that religious variables can have negative consequences. In an analysis of eighteen prosperous nations, Paul reports positive relationships between a variety of measures of religiosity and homicide rates as well as other social problems. He concludes that secular nations have lower homicide rates and less serious social problems than found in the United States. His conclusions were based on an examination of scatter-plots for a small set of nations with no attempt to consider alternative explanations nor to encompass the research in the larger body of sociological theory and research on the topic.

Prior Theory and Research

[4] The view that religion might play a role in encouraging homicide has a long history, beginning with Durkheim's classic study of suicide over a century ago. Although Durkheim is best known for his argument that religious integration inhibits suicide, he proposed a contrary argument for homicide. Depicting homicide as "a violent act inseparable from passion," he proposed that passionate attachment to religious group life encouraged homicide (340). The fact that he emphasized "passion" in his explanation suggests that his argument might not apply to all forms of religiosity.

[5] A few clues about religious passion, dualist cosmologies, and violence can be found in more recent theory and empirical research. For example, in an attempt to make sense of high rates of homicide and low rates of suicide in the American South, Luper, Hopkinson, and Kelly suggest that southern Protestant fundamentalism ascribes intentionality to people's actions, prompting people to react to a wide variety of situations as intentional attacks requiring a personal counter attack. Grasmick, Davenport, Chamlin, and Bursik have developed similar arguments to explain southern support for punitive sanctions, and Unnithan, Huff-Corzine, Corzine, and Whitt have extended this line of argument by proposing, "adherence to a fundamentalist doctrine would increase the chances of attributing the causes of one's failures to the malevolent acts of others, thus resulting in aggression being directed outward rather than inward" (149).

[6] Recent research on homicide among cities in the United States reports findings quite compatible with the religious passion argument. Among southern cities, Ellison, Burr, and McCall found the percent of evangelical Protestants to be a positive correlate of homicide rates when other relevant variables were controlled. As a type of social bond or a type of conventional activity, religion may inhibit a variety of types crime, but measures of religiosity that tap into religious passion, evangelical dualism, or belief in malevolent forces may have the opposite effect on homicide.

Religious Cosmologies

[7] Much of the literature suggests that certain forms of religiosity are likely to contribute to high rates of homicide, and a far more complex assessment of that issue should be part of that future research. It seems reasonable to expand on Kimball's perspective to propose that when the moral and religious universe encompassing individuals involves cosmic struggles between benevolent and malevolent forces, moral struggles between "good guys" and "bad-guys," and dichotomous choices between good or evil, then there is little or no inclination to consider any middle ground, negotiation, or flexibility in dealing with lesser conflicts and struggles in everyday life. It may be that a religious cosmology with moral "wars" and "dueling deities" sets the stage for culture wars

(Hunter), facilitates interpersonal wars, and encourages people in conflict to think in terms of dueling contenders for righteousness. When moral boundaries are rigid, it may be easier to offend or “dis” others and harder to assume a personal responsibility for generating conflict. When there is only good and evil and there has to be a clear moral winner or immoral loser, then the options for controlling violent outcomes may be greatly restricted. In summary, there are precedents for proposing that different types of religiosity, differentially structured religious belief systems (religious cosmologies), and related dualistic worldviews can affect the structure of lethal violence among societies.

[8] Such an elaboration may make sense of the disparate perspectives on religion reflected in Stark’s recent work as compared to Kimball’s and Paul’s arguments. In *For the Glory of God*, Stark rejects the notion that “religion is all about ritual” and proposes that “Gods are the fundamental features of religions” (376). The focus of that work is on “monotheistic” conceptions of God and his final argument is that such beliefs contribute to moral order. However, the dominant religious cosmology in many nations, including the United States, incorporates both benevolent and malevolent elements and passionate dualisms that cannot be encompassed under the simple notion of monotheism. Contrary to Stark’s exclusive emphasis on the positive consequences of features of Gods, this paper suggests that certain religious cosmologies characterized by contending Gods are associated with dualisms that facilitate high rates of homicide. The Gods do matter, but in a far more complex fashion than proposed.

A Multiple Regression Analysis

[9] There has been very little research on religion and homicide among nations and Paul’s recent analysis is limited to eighteen nations with the primary focus on the United States compared to a few “secular” nations. Paul calls for further research and debate, but expresses a very negative view of the methodology necessary for progress in understanding the relation between religion and homicide – multivariate analysis. Among reasons given for precluding a multivariate analysis is the argument that such analyses “risk manipulating the data to produce errant or desired results” (¶12). However, his presentation of simple scatter-plots focusing heavily on the United States runs the same risk. Without some form of multivariate analysis, the findings may be “errant” (e.g., spurious) and the bivariate analysis may be preferred because it produces “desired results.”

[10] The key issues suggested in the theoretical and research literature cannot be addressed without a multivariate approach. The literature suggests that some forms or dimensions of religiosity are more conducive to homicide than others, an idea that requires an assessment of separable, independent associations between measures of religiosity and homicide. There are competing theories of variation among nations (e.g., institutional anomie) emphasizing economic characteristics that cannot be controlled fully by limiting the analysis to scatter-plots for a small set of prosperous nations. In short, multivariate analysis is mandatory for adjudicating among alternative perspectives and is a necessary tool for furthering research and debate. This study uses multiple regression techniques to isolate religious covariates of homicide among World Value Survey nations.

[11] The World Values Surveys (WVS) were conducted between 1990 and 1993 and between 1995 and 1997.² The surveys were limited to persons 18 years of age and older, randomly selected from

² The World Values Surveys were administered a third time in 2002, but the homicide data and other measures are from the mid- to-late 1990s. Hence, this analysis is limited to the first two waves of surveys. The survey data can be found in the MicroCase data Archive available through Thomson Learning.

randomly selected locations. Samples from as many as 54 nations provided data on several dimensions of religiosity in one or both of the surveys. In both waves, respondents were asked questions about the importance of God and religion in their lives, beliefs in the Devil, Heaven and Hell, belonging to a religious faith, and attendance at religious services.

[12] Measures of intensity are particularly important to tap the passion invoked in Durkheim's argument, and other items are relevant to arguments about dichotomous conceptions of the religious cosmos with malevolent and benevolent dimensions. If arguments about the direction of violence are correct, measures of religiosity that tap intensity, dualism, or malevolence should be positive correlates of homicide and negative correlates of suicide. In contrast, measures of religiosity that tap mere acknowledgment of a belief in God's existence, belief in Heaven, belonging to a religious faith, and attendance at services, should be less relevant to the structure of lethal violence.

[13] Data on average homicide and suicide rates among nations are derived from reports posted on the Internet by the World Health Organization in their compilation of causes of death. The homicide and suicide rates are based on the three most recent reports between 1992-1998 when possible and the estimate for one or two years when data for three years was missing. Interpol estimates were used to fill in missing cases when available and earlier WHO data were used as a last resort. The same procedure was followed for suicide rates.

[14] Although some patterns for both homicide and suicide rates will be presented, the focus in this paper will be on homicide rates for several reasons. First, there is a sizeable body of research on suicide while no definitive relationship has been established between any dimension of religiosity and rates of homicide (see Lester). Hence, a thorough analysis relevant to the effects of religion on homicide is the first priority at this point in time. Second, Paul's study has received national attention, despite its weaknesses, and a more elaborate assessment needs to be presented as soon as possible. Third, the analysis will contrast the impact of religious cosmologies with variables central to theories focusing on dimensions of "economic" culture specifically proposed to explain homicide rates (see Messner and Rosenfeld 1997; 2001). This set of goals is quite ambitious, and a detailed analysis of the stream analogy and the direction of violence will have to be considered in future analyses.

Findings

[15] Table 1 summarizes the bivariate correlations between logged homicide and suicide rates for eight WVS items tapping distinct features of religion. The findings are remarkably consistent with Durkheim's argument in that fifteen of sixteen correlations are statistically significant and are patterned as predicted. Moreover, measures that tap intensity and belief in malevolent religious or cosmic forces are more strongly correlated with homicide rates than the measures tapping belonging, attendance, belief in God, and belief in Heaven. The average correlation with homicide rates for the intensity and malevolence items is +.512 as compared to +.220 for the measures that tap institutional belonging, social involvement, and belief in God and Heaven. Consistent with Stark's argument, "features of the Gods" and the religious cosmos are stronger correlates than the measures of ritual (attendance and belonging).

Table 1: Homicide and Suicide Rates (Natural Logarithms) by Measures of Religiosity (World Value Survey Nations)

Items	Homicide	Suicide
God Important	+0.524**	-0.663**
Religion Important	+0.447**	-0.507**
Believe in the Devil	+0.566**	-0.391**
Believe in Hell	+0.510**	-0.459**
Believe in God	+0.301*	-0.582**
Believe in Heaven	+0.284*	-0.545**
Attend Services	+0.273*	-0.449**
Belong to a Religion	+0.024	-0.372**

Number of nations: 41-46

Significance Levels: ** = .01, * = .05

[16] Because the measures of religiosity are positively correlated with one another, an analysis based solely on bivariate relationships could yield quite “errant” conclusions. Among nations, the percentage who believe in God is very highly correlated with the percentage who believe in the Devil. Belief in Heaven tends to be correlated with belief in Hell. In fact, the alpha index for all eight religiosity items in Table 1 exceeds .90, which would justify creating a single index of general religiosity. However, this analysis is guided by theoretical precedents that imply a structure to the relationships with homicide – a structure that may reflect Stark’s view that religion is far more than ritual and Durkheim’s emphasis on passion. Measures of religiosity may be highly correlated with one another, but still enter into quite distinct relationships with homicide.

[17] Table 2 summarizes the results of regressing logged homicide rates on summed z-scores for 1. the two items relevant to a malevolent religious cosmos (the Devil and Hell), 2. the two items tapping intensity or “passion” (the importance of God and religion in respondent’s lives), 3. two items tapping relatively benevolent beliefs (God and Heaven), and 4. two items tapping more ritualistic dimensions of religion (belonging and participation). The pattern of findings is remarkably consistent with both Kimball’s argument about the properties of religious cosmologies that facilitate violence and the implications of Stark’s arguments about the contribution of belief in God for “moral order.” When the different dimensions of the religious cosmos are introduced, measures of passion and malevolence are strong positive correlates of homicide rates among nations while the more benevolent beliefs are strong negative correlates. The measure of ritual is not related to homicide rates when included in the same analysis with the other measures. Moreover, the pattern found is not a product of the effect of high levels of collinearity among independent variables on the coefficients isolating the impact of different sets of items. Not only do ridge regression tests uniformly indicate that multi-collinearity is not a significant problem for the analysis in Table 2, but ridge regression analysis correcting for any such problem does not alter the results.³ Although highly

³ Ridge regression was carried out using ridge traces with a range of “k” values. The value of “k” was the smallest value that resulted in stable coefficients. The conclusions were unaffected despite exploration of several ridge traces. It should

correlated with one another, the different measures appear to be tapping different features of religion that covary with homicide rates in different ways.

Table 2: Homicide Rates (LN) Regressed on Religious Variables

	Unstand.b	Stand.Beta	Std.Err	t
Intensity	0.516	0.709	0.252	2.049 *
Malevolent	0.475	0.658	0.162	2.929 **
Benevolent	-0.685	0.743	0.304	-2.250 *
Ritual	-0.129	-0.163	0.156	-0.828

N: 42 Multiple R-Square = 0.409

God-Devil Dualism

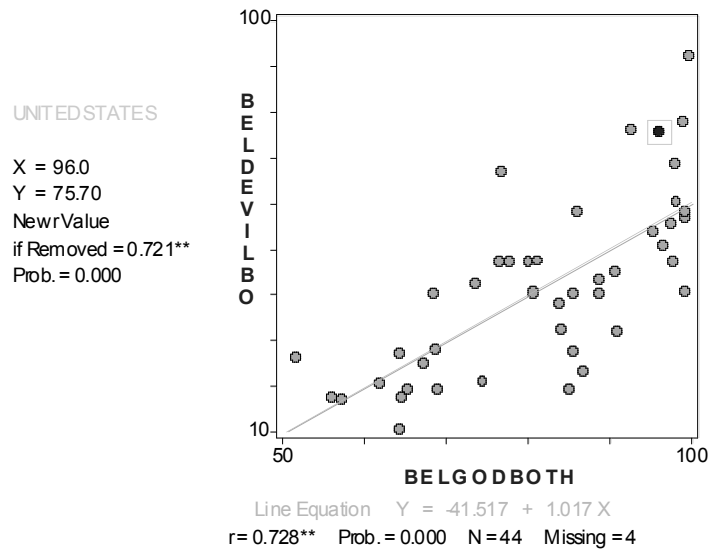
[18] In an attempt to assess Paul’s argument about the benevolent consequences of “secularism” and the implication of Kimball’s argument that religious dualism encourages homicide, nations were classified based on the percentages of respondents that believe in God and the percentage who believe in the Devil. The scatter-plot for these two items is reported in Figure 1 with the United States located in the upper right corner. The United States can be considered “dualist” in that 96 percent believe in God and 76 percent believe in the Devil. South Africa, the Philippines, and the Dominican Republic fall in the upper right corner as well.

[19] In contrast, the nations in the bottom left corner exhibit relatively low levels of belief in either God or the Devil. For example, 56 percent of the respondents from Sweden believe in God and 18 percent believe in the Devil. The nations in this quadrant tend to be viewed as “secular,” but it should be noted that the majority of respondents in these nations report they believe in God. In fact, there is no nation exhibiting less than fifty percent belief in God. Hence, the nations designated as “secular” should be viewed as relatively “more secular” than other nations.

[20] The respondents in some nations exhibit a low level of belief in the Devil, but a relatively high belief in God. These nations might be considered as the most “monotheistic” in that respondents do not recognize the Devil as a significant actor in their religious cosmos. For example, 85 percent of respondents from Iceland indicate belief in God, but only 19 percent acknowledge a belief in the Devil. Spain (91% vs. 32%), Switzerland (84% vs. 32%), and Austria (87% vs. 23%) exhibit similar disparities. These nations are neither secular nor dualist and, for the sake of simplicity, will be categorized as “God-Only.”

be noted that analysis using the NCSS ridge regression routines did not require that such a procedure be used. However, many analysts use these procedures for small sample sizes as well, and they were conducted as an extra precaution whether necessary or not.

Figure 1: Belief in God and Belief in the Devil



[21] There are several nations that might be considered dualist because of the combination of belief in both God and the Devil, but do not exhibit particularly high levels of belief in God. For example, 80 percent of Australians express belief in God and 47 percent express belief in the Devil. Australia is certainly more dualist than Iceland, but does not fall in the top third in terms of belief in God and belief in the Devil. Similarly, 77 percent of Ukrainians express belief in God and 47 percent express belief in the Devil, exhibiting a greater dualism than the God-Only nations. Hence, two categories of dualism were created to encompass the nations that did not fall towards the two ends of the continuum. That middle set was differentiated into those where the ratio of God to the Devil exceeded the median (High Dual) and those below the median (Dual).

Table 3: Average Homicide Rates (LN) for Secular, God-Only, and Dualistic Nations

	N	Mean
Secular	12	0.747
God-Only	9	0.741
Dualist	10	1.707
Dualist (High)	13	1.978

Significant contrast is between 1. secular and God-only versus 2. dualist and “high ” dualist.

[22] As summarized in Table 3, the high dualist nations have the highest homicide score followed by the lesser dualist nations with God-Only and secular nations exhibiting lower scores. However, the statistically significant contrast is between the dualist nations and the God-Only and secular nations. Relative to dualist nations, nations with a sizeable percentage believing in God (but not the Devil) have a significantly lower score. The most secular nations exhibit a significantly lower score than dualist nations as well. But, contrary to Paul’s emphasis on secular versus religious nations,

there is no difference between the non-dualist, God believing nations, and the relatively more secular nations. These patterns are quite consistent with the multivariate analysis reported above. Some features of religious belief systems are negative correlates of homicide and some features of religion are positive correlates.

Alternative Explanations

[23] A legitimate response to the findings involving religiosity is to propose that there is a reasonable probability that the relationships reported are spurious; that is, the relationships may be attributable to other variables that have not been taken into account. This criticism is legitimate and some attempt should be made to eliminate plausible alternatives. One approach to the issue is to consider the relationships involving religious variables together with other variables that have been proposed as crucial to the explanation of international variation in homicide rates and the high rate in the United States. If the relationships endure when incorporated into such models, then the patterns observed gain credibility.

[24] A particular brand of criminological theory called “institutional anomie theory” has dominated analysis of homicide rates among nations in recent years and should provide a strong contender for eliminating or explaining the patterns reported. Messner and Rosenfeld (1997, 2001) attribute variation in homicide among nations to variations in the strength of national investments that free citizens from market forces. Such investments are referred to as “decommodification,” and their analysis supports the argument that there is a negative relationship between such investments and homicide rates. From the perspective of their argument, the United States has an exceptionally high rate of homicide as a product of stresses and strains stemming from “economic dominance,” a form of “institutional imbalance” that generates high rates of crime (2001).

[25] Two economic variables central to institutional anomie theory, welfare funding and income inequality, are significant bivariate correlates of logged homicide rates in this analysis. Consistent with Messner and Rosenfeld’s perspective, the greater the national investment in decommodification (based on welfare expenditures relative to GDP), the lower the homicide rate ($r = -0.351$). Moreover, the greater the income inequality (based on a gini score) of a nation, the higher the homicide score ($r = +.546$). Greater income equality and national investments in decommodification are associated with lower homicide scores.

[26] Table 4 summarizes the results of a multiple regression analysis incorporating a score designated “passionate dualism” combining z-scores for intensity, dualism (a God/Devil ratio), and malevolence, the benevolence score, and the two economic variables. The findings continue to support the relevance of religious variables to homicide. The two religious variables persist as strong correlates of logged homicide rates, while the coefficients for the two economic variables are not statistically significant. The economic variables may have an indirect effect with religious variables acting as mediating mechanisms, or their association with homicide is spurious due to shared connections with religious variables. Regardless of the interpretation, the relationships involving the religious variables cannot be attributed to spurious shared associations with economic variables.⁴

⁴ The final analysis violates rules of thumb about sample size necessary for the number of predictors in the multiple regression analysis. Hence, the results should not be viewed as the definitive statement on the relative importance of variables in the model. However, confidence in the interpretation of the results is strengthened by several characteristics of the results in this paper and results reported in the literature. First, the number of variables and cases were close to acceptable and further exploration of models adding additional variables did not alter the conclusions. Robust

Table 4: Homicide Rates (LN) Regressed on Religious and Economic Variables

	Unstand.b	Stand.Beta	Std.Err	t
Passionate Dualism	0.498	1.1211	0.154	3.242 *
Benevolent	-0.861	-0.923	0.289	-2.980 **
Inequality	0.216	0.175	0.243	0.891
Welfare	0.001	0.008	0.022	0.051

N: 41 Multiple R-Square = 0.431

[27] Table 5 summarizes the results for a model regressing logged homicide rates on the two religious scores together with four other variables (Latin American nation, civil war, newly established government, and cultural diversity) found to correlate with variation in homicide rates in prior research (Jensen and Akers). Each of the six variables is a significant independent covariate of homicide. The measure of passionate dualism is a strong positive correlate while the benevolence score is a strong negative correlate. Categorization as a Latin American nation, the presence of civil war in a nation, a relatively new form of government, and cultural diversity are all positive correlates of homicide, explaining nearly 75 percent of the variation in logged homicide rates among 41 nations. In short, the relationships involving religious variables persist and are not spuriously attributable to other variables examined in prior literature.

Table 5: Homicide Rates (LN) Regressed on Religious and Other Variables

	Unstand.b	Stand.Beta	Std.Err	t
Passionate Dualism	0.368	0.717	0.115	3.211 *
Benevolent	-0.496	-0.542	0.183	-2.716 *
Latin American	0.888	0.257	0.398	2.230 *
Civil War	1.321	0.359	0.335	3.947 **
New Government	0.845	0.313	0.285	2.971 **
Multi-Cultural	0.011	0.233	0.006	2.042 *

N: 41 Multiple R-Square = 0.753

The United States

[28] Paul focuses primarily on the high homicide rate and other selected ills characterizing the United States in a set of eighteen prosperous nations, attributing that unique position to a high level

relationships should persist across a variety of models. Second, a variety of statistical procedures were used in the overall analysis, yielding a coherent set of observations across a variety of techniques. Third, earlier analyses carried out by Messner and Rosenfeld (1997) included even more predictors for fewer cases and used a .10 level of significance. Although the sample size issue is not resolved by citing published violations, it is appropriate to ask whether the incorporation of new, theoretically well-founded variables yields better results in a comparative sense. All of these features of the current analysis suggest that the results are stable and meaningful.

of religiosity. This approach can be badly misleading and a similar approach could be taken to highlight problems in more secular nations. For example, the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, Germany, and seven other nations have higher burglary rates than the United States (based on Interpol and United Nations data). The United States ranks ninth in cirrhosis death rates with at least four of the secular nations, including Japan, Denmark, France, and Germany exhibiting higher rates. The United States ranks thirteenth in suicide rates, seventh in estimates of daily consumption of narcotic drugs (Interpol estimates), and fourteenth in estimates of net annual alcohol consumption (Interpol estimates). In short, Paul's analysis generates the "desired results" by selectively choosing the set of social problems to include to highlight the negative consequences of religion.

[29] The more complex analysis in this study applies to the set of nations studied and does not allow a conclusive determination of the fundamental source of the high rate of homicide in the United States. The model reported in Table 4 persists when the United States is dropped from the nations in the analysis. The patterns found apply to variations among nations included in the World Values Surveys where data on homicide and other data are available. Those nations with the highest homicide rates tend to be those that can be characterized as high in religious passion or passionate dualism, and the United States falls in that set. Moreover, that religious cosmology appears to be the most prominent shared characteristic of nations with high homicide rates. However, the United States also has a high rate of income inequality, a relatively under-funded welfare safety net, and other characteristics that could explain the high homicide rate. Indeed, religious passion and dualism could be intimately intertwined with other characteristics of the United States. High levels of inequality and economic insecurity may encourage religious cosmologies and passions that facilitate homicide.

Conclusions and Discussion

[30] There are obvious limitations to this analysis, and just as sociologists should not over-generalize about the positive effects of religion based on prior research, negative consequences have not been established conclusively. The data are cross-sectional and the temporal links among the variables studied have not been established. Moreover, the analysis is a secondary analysis of data that have already been collected which limits their applicability to more complex arguments.

[31] Yet, this analysis is the first step towards a more meaningful specification of the complex links between religiosity and homicide rates at the ecological level using nations as units of analysis. Some of the results are remarkably consistent with Durkheim's passion hypothesis about religion and homicide and are contrary to over-generalizations about religion as a barrier to crime. On the other hand, relatively secular nations do not have lower homicide rates than nations where people accept God and Heaven, but do not embrace their malevolent counterparts, the Devil and Hell. Collective beliefs suggesting a relatively benevolent religious cosmos are negatively correlated with homicide when included in a regression analysis with more malevolent, dualist dimensions of the religious cosmos.

[32] These patterns were supported using nations as units of analysis, and should not be used to reach conclusions about the characteristics of individuals and their involvement in violence. Yet, the findings certainly have implications for reasonable speculation about homicide at other levels of analysis. The findings are consistent with Ellison, Burr, and McCall's analysis of the strength of "Evangelical Protestantism" and city homicide rates. It seems quite reasonable to hypothesize that

the evangelical movement encourages high levels of passion and moral and/or religious dualisms. It is plausible to propose that religious and moral dualisms may coincide with other forms of dualism at the individual level. As Luckenbill and Doyle argue, homicide is one outcome of situated transactions where honor is at stake with a narrow range of options for responding and heightened sensitivity to what might appear to be minor affronts. Whether called a “culture of violence” or a “code of the street” (Anderson), disputes are easily triggered and there is little flexibility in acceptable responses. In short, other cultural or sub-cultural dualisms may help explain variation in behavior at the individual level. If a youth grows up in a world where there are rigid boundaries for attaining honor, a wide range of situations that are interpreted as disrespect, and limited cultural means for reestablishing honor, the range of situations generating interpersonal violence are enhanced.

[33] Similarly, if there is only one appropriate way for a spouse to behave with dualist “macho” conceptions of the male as the lord of the household, then challenges to such authority may elicit passionate attempts to reestablish “moral order.” Although it may seem to be a huge step from dualist cosmologies to forms of interpersonal violence, there may be a great deal of asymmetry between dualisms that can operate to generate violence in the family, on the street, and elsewhere. At a minimum, this research suggests that far more attention needs to be paid to moral and religious cosmologies in criminology, including their etiology and consequences at ecological and individual levels of analysis.

[34] The findings are significant for current controversies in sociological criminology as well. For example, institutional anomie theorists argue that it is a disparity between widely shared cultural aspirations for pecuniary success and realities of limited opportunities that generate high levels of homicide. In short, it is economic culture that contributes to a high rate of homicide unless ameliorated by state decommodification policies. Not only is there little or no support for the decommodification argument, but recent attempts to assess such economic values as a source of variation in homicide have failed to support that argument, whether applied to international variations or to the unusual rate of homicide in the United States (see Jensen).

[35] A more reasonable explanation for the high homicide rates would focus on religious and moral cosmologies. Indeed, it is reasonable to propose that variables such as inequality may have significant, but indirect, consequences for homicide by reinforcing dualistic moral cosmologies. High levels of inequality may be associated with high levels of “us-versus-them” views of the moral cosmos and tendencies to blame external forces for interpersonal problems. This paper does not establish the sources of such dualist cosmologies, but does point to promising avenues for further research.

[36] It is interesting to consider the possibility that Messner and Rosenfeld may have located the United States in the wrong category in terms of their conceptions of “institutional imbalance.” They argue that within a social system “dominance by family and religion generate crimes in defense of the immediate, parochial social order such as vigilanteism, hate crimes and violations of human rights.” Such offenses allegedly reflect a climate of “extreme moral vigilance” and “a strong sense of interpersonal obligations . . . restricted to those with whom they share particular social statuses or identities” (2001: 156). The extra-ordinary primacy accorded both the family and religion by U.S. respondents to World Value Survey items could justify categorizing the United States as parochially organized and dominated by strong in-group/out-group distinctions as well as extreme moral vigilance. Such characteristics are likely to coincide with familial, religious, and moral dualisms.

Moreover, these dualisms should be far more relevant to homicide than to instrumental offenses, an argument supported by the fact that the United States does not have an unusual rate of the very forms of instrumental crime that would reflect a dominance of economic values and institutions. As Zimring and Hawkins note, "Crime is not the problem." Rather, it is lethal violence that distinguishes the United States from other industrial nations.

[37] Finally, this analysis supports Stark's proposal for a reconsideration of the ways in which religion affects moral order. He chides Durkheim for putting too much emphasis on ritual rather than "features of the Gods." However, when Durkheim introduces the notion of "passion," he appears to go beyond simple ritual. If the dimension of the religious cosmos captured by belief in God and Heaven is a form of public embracement of monotheism, then Stark's argument that such features of the Gods encourage morality and discourage deviance is consistent with the findings reported above. On the other hand, findings that other dimensions of the religious cosmos are positive correlates of homicide is consistent with arguments that religion can "become evil." Paul's "first look" at popular religion as a positive correlate of homicide is partially correct. But, a "closer look" supports a more complex, but quite meaningful, set of findings that accord some validity to each perspective.

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