IN THE NAME OF GOD

THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN REBEL GROUPS’ USE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILIANS

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ABSTRACT
Violence against civilians and religion are two common characteristics in today’s armed conflicts. This study examines the role of religion in rebel group’s use of violence against civilians in intrastate armed conflicts between 1989 and 2015. In this paper, it is argued that religion can create a context in which certain in- and out-group attitudes are constructed. These attitudes can have a dehumanizing effect and lay the ground for out-group profiling where anyone outside the own group is viewed as the enemy. Religion in this environment can bolster the legitimization of violence in the name of God and could be seen as the link between conflicts and the warring parties’ behavior against the enemy. To test this theoretical framework, this study draws on new data on religious armed conflicts. Most notably, a positive correlation between the salience of religion in an incompatibility and violence against civilians is found which holds high statistical significance. Furthermore, the analysis supports the hypothesis that when religion is of high salience to the incompatibility of a conflict, the rebel group will conduct more violence against civilians.

*Key words:* religion, religious armed conflict, violence against civilians, one-sided violence, intrastate armed conflict
TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................................................................... 4
   1.1 PREVIOUS SCHOLARLY LITERATURE ......................................................................................... 5
   1.1.1 VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILIANS ................................................................................... 5
   1.1.2 THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN ARMED CONFLICT ......................................................... 6
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK .................................................................................................................... 9
   2.1 CONCEPTUALIZATION OF KEY CONCEPTS ............................................................................. 9
   2.1.1 RELIGION ......................................................................................................................... 9
   2.1.2 RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS .................................................................................................. 10
   2.1.3 VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILIANS .................................................................................. 11
   2.2 THEORETICAL ARGUMENTS .................................................................................................. 11
3. RESEARCH DESIGN ................................................................................................................................... 15
   3.1 SAMPLE AND METHOD .......................................................................................................... 15
   3.2 OPERATIONALIZATION OF VARIABLES .............................................................................. 15
   3.2.1 RELIGIOUS INCOMPATIBILITY ...................................................................................... 15
   3.2.2 VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILIANS .................................................................................. 17
   3.2.3 CONTROL VARIABLES ..................................................................................................... 18
   3.3 DATA COLLECTION AND LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH ............................................. 20
4. RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION ............................................................................................................. 22
   4.1 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS .................................................................................................... 22
   4.2 TESTING HYPOTHESIS .......................................................................................................... 23
   4.3 ROBUSTNESS TEST ............................................................................................................... 26
   4.4 DISCUSSION AND ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS .............................................................. 28
5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS ............................................................................................................... 31
6. BIBLIOGRAPHY ......................................................................................................................................... 32
7. APPENDIX A ............................................................................................................................................... 36
   7.1 R-SCRIPT ......................................................................................................................................... 36
LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

FIGURE 1: ARROW DIAGRAM OF CAUSAL MECHANISM .......................................................... 14
TABLE 1: VALUES OF THE INDEPENDENT VARIABLE ............................................................... 17
FIGURE 2: HISTOGRAM OF THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE DEPENDENT VARIABLE ................. 18
TABLE 2: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR THE VARIABLES .................................................. 22
TABLE 3: ORDINARY LEAST SQUARES REGRESSION .............................................................. 23
TABLE 4: ROBUSTNESS TEST ............................................................................................... 27
TABLE 5: TABLE FOR THE INDEPENDENT VARIABLE’S VALUES ........................................... 29
1. INTRODUCTION

The end of the Cold War marked a severe change in the characteristics of conflicts. The conflicts of today are fought primarily between states and non-state armed groups, where the targeting of civilians is common as well as it has become a war strategy. These characteristics of the world’s contemporary conflicts are prime examples of what Mary Kaldor (2006: 107) termed as ‘new wars’. The targeting of civilians in conflicts is generally referred to as one-sided violence and is often considered to be an inevitable part of conflicts today. Scholarly literature has extensively analyzed rebel groups’ characteristics and their complex relationship with the civilian community in order to further understand the logic behind the strategic targeting of civilians.

The end of the Cold War also marked a change in the political mobilization of rebel groups, from previously centering around ideology, to instead become centered around ethnonational and religious issues (Toft, 2007: 128). Religion has become a highly politicized topic over the last decades, and especially in the aftermath of 9/11, the connection between religion and violence have received more scholarly attention. Yet, there is no clear consensus in the research field regarding the relationship between these two dynamic phenomena, one-sided violence and religion. According to Svensson and Nilsson (2018a: 1136), conflicts which are fought over religious issues are becoming more common, both in substantive and proportional terms. This trend can be illustrated through several empirical examples; the armed conflict between the government of Algeria versus the rebel group GIA (1993-2003), in which the rebel group explicitly stated their religious aspirations in relation to the conflict’s incompatibility. Another example is the armed conflict between the government of Israel versus the rebel group Hamas, a conflict which involved both a religious incompatibility and different religious identities (Svensson, 2013:417). Hence, due to the rise of religious conflicts, it is of value to further explore the relationship between religion and violence in order to enable a deeper understanding of how certain religious components can come to influence the conflict dynamics.

The potential effect that religion can have on a rebel group’s targeting of civilians have previously been neglected in the research which is puzzling since both one-sided violence and religion are two prevailing parts of conflicts today. Thus, the goal of this thesis is to fill this research gap by further analyze how the religious incompatibility in a conflict affect the rebel groups use of violence against civilians. It is crucial to highlight that it is not, by any means,

1 ’Violence against civilians’ and ’one-sided violence’ will be used interchangeably throughout the text.
2 Otherwise known as The Islamic Resistance Movement, or Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya.
argued in this thesis that religion per se causes violence. Rather, the danger of religion lies in the various interpretations of religious traditions that rebel groups (and governments) adapt in order to justify their violent behavior. Religion often bolster the complexity that armed conflicts inhibit, as Juergensmeyer (2003: 5) formulated it; “[...] religion may not be the cause of the anger that leads to violence in most places around the world, but it can vastly complicate the way that anger is expressed”.

The thesis will be structured as follows. The following sub-section will map out the research field and the research question of interest. The second section conceptualize central concepts as well as illustrating the theoretical framework aimed at answering the research question. The third section presents the research design of this thesis as well as operationalizing the variables of interest. In the fourth section, the result of the quantitative research will be analyzed and discussed. Conclusively, in the fifth section, the main conclusion and contribution will be evaluated.

1.1 PREVIOUS SCHOLARLY LITERATURE

1.1.1 VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILIANS

Violence against civilians is a phenomenon that has been thoroughly researched over decades. Civilians often play a central role in armed conflicts, voluntarily or involuntarily, due to the fact that they can provide the warring sides with resources, financing and information (Valentino, 2014: 94). Thus, it is puzzling that civilians are being strategically targeted in certain conflicts. However, some scholars argue that that violence against civilians should be understood as a central part in the warring parties war strategy (Valentino, 2014: 91). Weinstein (2005: 598) argues that the presence of economic endowments to a rebel group often attracts opportunistic fighters with little or no commitment to the group’s core goals. This entails a difficulty in controlling the members of the rebel group and points in the direction of a principal-agent problem. These types of rebel groups are thus more prone to conduct higher levels of violence against civilians, not due to the group per se but rather as a result of the fighters it attracts (Weinstein, 2005: 622). These findings are supported by previous research regarding the presence of alternative resource pools such as natural resources and external support, as these types of resources make rebel groups independent of the community and free themselves from responsibility, since the rebel groups are no longer accountable to the civilian community (See Wood, 2010; 2014; Salehyan et al, 2014).
It is important to note that not all rebel groups are alike, and one might thus benefit from analyzing how the internal characteristics of a rebel group affect their choice and use of violence. Stanton (2013: 1009) disaggregates different types of violence against civilians and concludes that the violence is often closely connected to the group’s strategic goals. Additionally, Stanton argues that rebel groups that challenge a democratic regime are more inclined to use violence against civilians since the government will likely respond with concessions instead of violence. Further elaborating on the internal characteristics of rebel groups are findings by Ottmann (2017: 29) regarding the civilian constituencies of the rebel group. Rebel constituencies can impose constraints as well as provide incentives to conduct violence against civilians. High levels of constituency fractionalization within the rebel group increases the possibility of the group conducting large scale violence against civilians (Ottmann, 2017: 27). Moreover, Heger et al (2017: 220) argues that the organizational structure of the rebel group enables violence to take place, thus it is of value to analyze a rebel group’s internal characteristics to gain deeper knowledge of their choice of strategic behavior. Despite these findings, there is no consensus in the research field regarding if certain types of internal characteristics affect rebel groups’ behavior against civilians in specific ways. As previously mentioned, the conflicts in the post-Cold War era, in general, are characterized by ethnonational and religious issues. Drawing on this, the thesis will focus on how religious component of a rebel group might influence their use of one-sided violence.

1.1.2 THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN ARMED CONFLICT

The research field of religious components in armed conflicts is somewhat under researched. Yet, ethnicity is a phenomenon that has been researched in abundance and been highlighted as an important identity factor in civil conflicts (See Fox, 1997; 2004; Reyal-Querol, 2002). Religion can be seen as a subset category within the phenomenon of ethnicity and it is thereby possible to draw on the extensive literature on ethnicity in order to explain certain aspects of religious influence in armed conflicts. One could argue that a religious identity is more fixed and is more excluding by its very nature compared to identity based on ethnicity and/or language. There are two reasons behind this argument; first, it is not possible to belong to two or more religious traditions simultaneously, in contrast to speaking two or more languages; second, religious identity encompasses a certain understanding of the world and implies a preferred way of living, something that is not a core feature of ethnicity and/or language (Reyal-
Querol, 2002: 32). Therefore, it could be argued that religion stretches beyond the effects of ethnicity.

An overwhelming majority of the literature connecting religion and armed conflicts focuses on how religion can influence the onset and the duration of a conflict. Several scholars make use of the ‘mobilization hypothesis’ when analyzing the influence of religion in conflicts. Basedau et al (2011: 752) argues that religious structures are more prone to mobilization as compared to armed conflicts, thus affecting the probability of conflict as well as increasing the conflict’s potential escalation process. The authors analyze both ethnic and religious identity and finds that an overlap between these two is a strong prediction of both religious conflicts and armed conflicts (Ibid: 767). Nordås and Gates (2014: 7) further analyzes recruitment in armed conflicts and how religion can assist rebel groups in overcoming the principal-agent problem, as well as the collective-action problem, by keeping the recruits committed to the group’s cause during the conflict. In contrast, Huang (2019: 8) challenges the conventional way of thinking about religion and argues that religion can intermittently become instrumentalized in conflicts, which in turn will alter the overall role of religion in the society as a whole. This indicates a potential endogeneity problem as religion could be viewed as a consequence of armed conflict rather than a cause of it since “[...] war causes religion to become relevant in it” (Ibid: 8-9). Furthermore, a substantial amount of the research focus has revolved around religion’s role in peace negotiations. Findings indicate that if the warring parties’ demands are based in religious traditions, the conflicts are less likely to be settled through a negotiated settlement due to the perception of an indivisible issue (Svensson, 2007: 930). This is however challenged by Svensson and Harding (2011: 145) which argues that religious incompatibilities can be separated from other incompatibilities of the conflict, and thus the religious conflict can be resolved no more different than non-religious conflicts.

The most prominent research gap in the field regards how religious influence in a conflict might affect the conflict’s intensity, and the religious dimensions of violent actions in conflicts (Svensson, 2013: 427). Several scholars have attempted to fill the research gap, yet only encompassing regional and/or national levels of analysis (See Brathwaite & Park, 2019; Pearce, 2005). Moreover, there is a lack of focus on how religion might affect the strategic targeting of civilians in a conflict context. However, this gap is somewhat filled by Toft (2007: 116) who illustrates that conflicts that have a central religious incompatibility are far deadlier for non-combatants compared to conflicts with a peripheral religious incompatibility. Nevertheless, Toft (2007: 127) draw these conclusions based on the total number of non-combatants deaths in the conflict. It therefore remains unclear if these non-combatants, or
civilians, were deliberately targeted or if they should be considered as collateral damage. Thus, the link between religious dimension in armed conflicts and rebel group behavior remains unclear and needs to be further analyzed. The main reason for this research gap is due to the lack of extensive data, something that is subsequently filled by the Religion and Armed Conflict (RELAC) dataset constructed by Svensson and Nilsson (2018a). This dataset enables new research to take place regarding religion and conflict dynamics, as well as it is the most comprehensive dataset to date on religious armed conflicts (Svensson & Nilsson, 2018a: 1129).

Hence, building on the above presented themes and gaps in both research fields, this thesis poses the following research question; Does the religious incompatibility in a conflict affect the rebel group’s use of violence against civilians? The question will make use of the RELAC dataset, hence contributing to the field by analyzing it in relation to data on one-sided violence. The question sheds light on rebel groups’ internal characteristics, more specifically their religious components, and how that might affect their behavior against the civilian community. Adding to this is the fact that the question aims at addressing the puzzle regarding religion and conflict intensity which, as previously mentioned, have been under researched.
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 CONCEPTUALIZATION OF KEY CONCEPTS

2.1.1 RELIGION

First and foremost, religion is a complex, subjective, and normative concept. Thus, the conceptualization and definition that will be proposed in this thesis should not be seen as comprehensive and definite, rather it is presented in order to add clarity to the theoretical framework discussed below (See section 2.2). A distinction is often made between the ‘substantive’ and the ‘functionalist’ definition systems when defining ‘religion’. The former relates to what religion is, while the latter refers to what religion does for those who subscribe to it (Chryssides & Geaves, 2014: 19). The ‘salient features’ is yet another approach in attempting to define what religion is. Using this approach, common definitions often include factors such as: the belief in, and prayers to, supernatural beings; transcendent realities, for example heaven and hell; distinction between the sacred and the profound; and a community that is adhering to these different components (Toft, 2007: 99). Ninian Smart is well-known for defining religion in terms of seven salient dimension: experiential, mythic, doctrinal, ethical, ritual, social, and material (Chryssides & Geaves, 2014: 30). Furthermore, building on the above proposed functionalist definition systems, Emile Durkheim proposed a socio-functional definition of religion: “a religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to special things, which beliefs and practices unite into one single moral community [the goal] all those who adhere to them” (in Taves, 2009: 176). The definition is rather broad in the sense that it does not differentiate between polytheistic and monotheistic features of religion. Yet, one can derive two core attributes from the definition; religion can be viewed as a set of “common beliefs and practices” to which people adhere to, subsequently creating a “single moral community” with equal minded. One common feature of almost every definition of religion is that they encompass a specific worldview, yet, not all worldviews are religions hence why it is crucial not to overlook the role of the supernatural when defining religion. When linking together the above proposed definition of religion, one can create a combined definition of religion that this thesis will make use of: “religion is a unified system of common beliefs and practices relative to supernatural beings, uniting a single moral community with a shared worldview, with equal minded people”. In the proposed theoretical framework of this thesis, it is not the religion per se that is of main importance, instead it is what religion can do that is of research interest. More specifically, religion can be seen as an identity basis over which
individuals an connect to each other, “[…] regardless of the depth and intensity of their beliefs” (Svensson, 2007: 932).

### 2.1.2 RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS

Conflicts can be disaggregated into two main components when following the definition of social conflict posed by Wallensteen (2015: 17-18); actors and incompatibility. Two distinctions are important to make here. First, conflicts can without a doubt be carried out in both non-violent and violent ways. However, the focus of this thesis lies on violent conflicts. Second, a conflict requires at least two warring parties. While this can be any type of actor, this thesis’ focus lies on intrastate armed conflicts, meaning that at least one of the parties is the government. Building on the proposed conflict definition and the two main concepts derived from it, Svensson (2013: 415-416) identifies two main categories of religious conflicts. Firstly, religion can influence parts of the incompatibility of the conflict and explicit references to religious aspirations can be made by the warring parties. A prominent example of this is the Islamic State which have taken up arms in the name of religion and their goal is to establish a transnational caliphate. Another example of these types of conflicts are Al-Shabaab and their stated goal in 2008 which included the aim of establishing a system of governance based on Sharia law (Svensson & Nilsson, 2018a: 1131). Secondly, religion can also influence the belligerents’ identities and how the group defines themselves. The conflict in Northern Ireland is clear example where the warring parties mobilized around religion – Protestant and Catholics – yet the incompatibility of the conflict did not concern religion (Svensson & Nilsson, 2018a: 1135). Relating to the made distinctions between these two types of influences, events such as isolated terror attacks that might have been religiously motivated will not be taken into consideration in this thesis. Moreover, the proposed theoretical framework will solely focus on conflicts with a religiously influenced incompatibility.

Yet, the centrality of religion might be different in each religious conflict. As previously mentioned, conflicts with a centrality of religion are deadlier than conflicts where religion plays a peripheral role. Hence why it is of value to distinguish between the peripheral and the central role religion can have in an incompatibly. Toft (2007: 97) defines a conflict

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3 Intrastate armed conflict is defined in accordance with the UCDP definition; “[...] a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in a calendar year” (Pettersson, 2019a: 1).
where religion has a central role as “[...] fighting over whether the state or a region of a state would be ruled according to a specific religious tradition[...]”, and a conflict where religion has a peripheral role when the combatants in a conflict “[...] identify with a specific religious tradition and group themselves accordingly, but the rule of a specific religious tradition could not be the object of contention”. The centrality of religion is translated into the salience of religion in the RELAC dataset and identifies if religious claims are stated by the rebel group and if the religious issue is considered to be the main question for the group (Svensson & Nilsson, 2018a: 1135). The salience of religion will be taken into consideration and discussed further when operationalizing the main independent variable of interest (See section 3.2.1).

2.1.3 VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILIANS

It is of value to first define who is a civilian in a conflict setting when discussing violence against civilians. According to UCDP, civilians are “unarmed people who are not active members of the security forces of the state, or members of an organized armed militia or opposition group [...]” (Pettersson, 2019b: 3). Furthermore, violence against civilians can take many forms and the phenomenon is thus difficult to define. Different types of violence can be included in the concept such as extremes types of violence including mass killings and genocide, alongside sexual violence, rape and one-sided violence (Hultman, 2014: 290). It is indeed a concept that encompasses different types of violent behavior with various strategic motives, ranging from deliberate killings to abuse. Bearing this in mind, distinct types of violence against civilians have different theoretical explanations. One common definition of one-sided violence is presented by Eck and Hultman (2007: 235) and encompasses “[...] the intentional and direct use of violence [...] by a government or an organized group [...]”. Acknowledging that one-sided violence can be conducted by various different perpetrators, the focus of this thesis lies on the violence against civilians conducted by rebel groups. More specifically, the intentional targeting of civilians that results in lethal violence.

2.2 THEORETICAL ARGUMENTS

The theoretical arguments of this thesis, in essence, connects two main theories posed by Nordås and Gates (2014), and Hasenclever and Rittberger (2000). It is argued that religion can create a context which facilitates in- and out-group attitudes that can further bolster the legitimization of violence in the name of God. Religion can be seen as a link between the conflict and the warring parties’ violent behavior against the enemy.
Exploring the theoretical framework more in depth, the first step in the proposed causal chain builds on ‘mobilization theory’ which identifies religion as a main component which can assist with keeping recruits committed during the conflict period (Nordås & Gates, 2014: 1). The author’s largely focuses on religious justification of violence and highlights that religion often sustains social networks (Ibid: 6). Rebel groups that holds a religious component often have extremely loyal followers due to several reasons. When the leader(s) of the rebel group can credibly claim that the group is fighting for and representing the will of God (or other supernatural beings), the leader(s) can also command extreme loyalty from the groups’ constituencies. This in turn deter against potential defection from the members (Ibid: 12). Adding to this is the fact that rebel groups often are isolated from external opinions which enables radical attitudes to flourish within the group which, subsequently, can produce intense group cohesion (Ibid: 15). This could be linked to the idea that the group is fighting for the God (or supernatural being) they believe in and are thereby perceived as doing their duty as ‘true believers’. Hoffman et al (2019: 4) further develops the argument regarding religion and in-group cohesion by describing that the presence of a strong religious identity can facilitate intergroup discrimination. Religion can create an ‘us versus them’-mindset which can lead to violent conflict since the religious identity may result in discrimination towards other religious (and non-religious) groups. This discrimination can ‘easily’ be justified by the fact that the group is fighting for God, making the other group unfaithful or morally wrong. However, it is important to note that this is not a unique attribute of religion, other identity aspects such as ethnicity and ideology can also work at inducing a sense of belonging in a group. Furthermore, this mindset can also occur between two sided of the same religious tradition that are fighting each other.

Presumably, this strong in-group bias, that has been facilitated by religion, can escalate into out-group targeting during a conflict (Bruneau & Kteily, 2017: 3). Dehumanization often takes place when there is a strong in-group bias, and findings have shown that such bias also heightens the acceptance of civilian causalities in conflicts (Ibid: 14). As previously mentioned, in religious terms, this could be seen as targeting unfaithful groups or perhaps groups that belongs to the ‘wrong’ religious tradition. Gregg (2014: 42) analyses religious terrorism and argues that when religious cleansing is carried out by a rebel group, the salient characteristics between the rebel group and the group that is being targeted is grounded in religion, not in differing ethnicities. Strengthening this step further is findings by Fjelde and Hultman (2014: 1231) indicating that this mindset can enable collective targeting to take place based on identity. The authors draw on ethnicity for this explanation and argues that ethnic ties
can create incentives for rebel groups (as well as governments) to target the enemy’s co-ethnic constituencies. Thus, the rebel group is strategically targeting civilians to undermine the adversary’s support (Ibid: 1234). As previously mentioned, the relationship between ethnicity and religion is rather intertwined. What separates religion from ethnicity in this theoretical framework is the fact that religion can provide legitimacy to certain actions, and violence requires legitimization. Moreover, ‘out-group-profiling’, or collective targeting, becomes possible since one can fit civilians into a stereotype and frame them as enemy sympathizers. A historic example of this is the Crusades, a series of brutal religious wars fought between Muslims and Christians which took place for almost 500 years (Horowitz, 2009:174). This behavior often takes place at a group level, hence enabling large-scale violence against civilians to take place, and thus relating back to the in- and out-group cohesion posed in the previous causal step.

As aforementioned, religion can be seen as a mediating variable between conflict and the warring actors’ choice of conflict behavior (Hasenclever & Rittberger, 2000: 649). Violence requires legitimization which religion can (or cannot) choose to provide, thus subsequently escalating conflict behavior further since the violence can be framed as “for the sake of God” (Ibid: 642). However, if and how violence is actually used in a conflict depends on a number of different factors. Hasenclever and Rittberger focus on the strategic choice of elites in a conflict and argues that the probability of using violence depends on “[...] both the mobilization of the group’s members and the support provided by the wider societal environment” (Ibid: 652). The leader(s) of the rebel group must be certain that the combatants are willing to make sacrifices to the group’s cause, which is achieved through appealing to religious ideas as mentioned above. Adding to this is the process of identifying the leader’s claim as the commands of God, thus making no means seems illegitimate or too unjust to use in the conflict (Ibid: 656). By appealing to the religious consciousness of the rebel group’s constituencies, violence in the name of God can be legitimized and by grant the group moral superiority (Ibid: 655).

To conclude, the proposed theory assumes that rebel groups are rational actors which conduct violence against civilians strategically. The theory is conditional on high salience of religion in a conflict, not evaluating the rebel group’s commitment to the religious tradition. As previously discussed, it is not religion per se that is of interest, rather it is what religion as a social construct can facilitate for groups in terms of cohesion and legitimization. Furthermore, this thesis will solely focus on, and are only aimed at explaining the behavior of, rebel groups that are waging conflict against a government, i.e. intrastate armed conflicts.
Thereby, religious motivation behind other types of violence such as isolated attacks on civilians by for example militia groups, or communal conflicts will not be taken into consideration in the analysis.

*Figure 1. Arrow diagram of causal mechanism.*

The aim of this thesis’s research question is to analyze if the religious incompatibility in a conflict increases the involved rebel group’s use of violence against civilians. Hence, the independent variable of interest is the religious incompatibility of a conflict, while the dependent variable of interest is violence against civilians, conducted by the rebel group in the conflict. The operationalization of the two variables will be discussed in depth in section 3.2. Thus, the hypothesis and the testable implication of the theoretical framework is:

*H1: When religion is of high salience to the incompatibility of a conflict, the rebel group will conduct more violence against civilians.*
3. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 SAMPLE AND METHOD

The aim of this thesis is to empirically test the above-presented theory and to establish covariation between the independent and the dependent variable of interest. The expected relationship between these two variables is positive, a religious incompatibility of high salience will lead to more violence against civilians conducted by the rebel group in the conflict. The thesis largely builds on two datasets; the RELAC dataset4 (Svensson & Nilsson, 2018a), and the UCDP One-sided Violence dataset 5 (Eck & Hultman, 2007). The chosen time-period for the analysis is 1989 to 2015, which is determined by data availability when combining the two previously mentioned datasets. The RELAC dataset was consulted in order to identify all active intrastate armed conflicts within this timespan6, both religious and non-religious. Each dyad has a unique id, hence enabling each conflict episode to be recorded in isolation. When applying these conditions to the RELAC dataset a sample of 299 dyads in 204 conflicts emerges. The unit of analysis in this thesis is rebel groups, and the unit of observation is rebel group-conflict. The sample thus includes 299 observations of rebel group-conflict, one observation per conflict dyad. In order to analyze the potential relationship between the independent and the dependent variable, a quantitative analysis will be conducted using the method of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression which minimizes the sum of the squared residuals (Kellstedt & Whitten, 2018: 193). First, a bivariate regression will be applied to test the relationship between the independent and the dependent variable. Second, a multiple regression will be applied in order to test for the potential relationship between the independent and the dependent variable, while controlling for other explanatory factors.

3.2 OPERATIONALIZATION OF VARIABLES

3.2.1 RELIGIOUS INCOMPATIBILITY

The main independent variable of interest, salience religious incompatibility, will be operationalized in accordance with the RELAC dataset by Svensson and Nilsson (2018a). This variable was constructed through combining two dichotomous variables from the dataset,

5 Version 18.1 (Eck & Hultman, 2007). This specific version is chosen due to its compatibility with the RELAC dataset.
6 The RELAC dataset follows the UCDP definition of intrastate armed conflicts as previously mentioned. Yet, in the dataset this type of conflict is termed ‘internal conflict’. Thus, this was the type of conflict that was identified in order to retrieve the sample of this thesis. See Appendix 7.1 for more elaborate information regarding the coding.
thereby creating the categorical independent variable that will be used in this thesis. The religious incompatibility variable in the RELAC dataset, *RelIncomp*, is coded as a dichotomous variable, where a score of 1 indicates that there was an explicitly stated religious dimension to the original incompatibility of the conflict. A score of 0 indicate that there was no religious dimension to the original incompatibility. However, the dataset does not differentiate between incompatibilities where religion was the most important demand in the conflict, or where religion could be one of many other demands made by the primary parties (Svensson & Nilsson, 2018b: 4). Building on this fact, in order to capture the diversity of religious incompatibilities, the salience of religious claims made by the primary parties are also taken into considerations when coding the main independent variable of interest to this thesis. This in accordance with the previously presented conceptualization as well as the theoretical framework of the thesis regarding high salience of religion.

The RELAC dataset presents a salience variable, *SalienceRel*, which is coded as a dichotomous variable. A score of 1 (high) indicates that the religious incompatibility is the main question at stake for the rebel group, as well as that the religious claim is made by one rebel organization or a unified alliance of several rebel groups. A score of 0 (low) indicates that the religious claims are one of several issues at stake and/or that the claims are made by an alliance of several rebel groups where the priority of the claims are not unified (Svensson & Nilsson, 2018b: 14). The combination of the religious incompatibility and its salience are considered and chosen as the main independent variable of interest in order to truly capture the centrality of religion in a conflict. Thus, the independent variable of this thesis, *salience religious incompatibility*, ensures that religion truly played a part in the conflict dynamics and the operationalization enables three different types of religious conflicts to be illustrated.

To illustrate the independent variable and its ordinal scale, a score of 2 indicates the presence of a religious dimension to the incompatibility of the conflict, as well as that religion was of high salience to the rebel group in the conflict. This score makes it possible to assume that the rebel group is religious in some aspect, or that religion is somehow instrumentalized within the group when pursuing the group’s goals and religion is thus of value to the conflict dynamics. Furthermore, a score of 1 indicates that the incompatibility indeed had a religious dimension to it, yet the salience of religion in the conflict was low. A score of 0 indicates that the incompatibility was not religious, hence the salience is not relevant. The comparison component of interest in this thesis is between religious incompatibilities with high salience (2) versus those with low or none religious salience (1, 0). See Table 1 for an illustration of the variable’s values.
Table 1. Illustrating the values of the main independent variable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low salience of religion</th>
<th>High salience of religion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religious incompatibility (Yes)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious incompatibility (No)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2.2 VIOLANCE AGAINST CIVILIANS

The dependent variable of interest, violence against civilians, will be operationalized in accordance with UCDP’s operationalization of one-sided violence: “[...] the use of armed force by the government of a state or by a formally organized group against civilians which results in at least 25 deaths” (Allansson & Croicu, 2017: 2). Violence against civilians will thereby ‘only’ reflect the conducted lethal violence by the rebel group, in accordance with the conceptualization since this is the type of violence that the theoretical framework is aiming to explain. Furthermore, the variable will be measured in numbers of deaths per rebel group-conflict in accordance with the unit of observation. The BestFatalityEstimate variable from the UCDP One-sided violence dataset will be consulted when collecting data. These numbers are a result of the aggregated most reliable numbers of all conducted one-sided violence during a conflict year per conflict actor (Allansson & Croicu, 2017: 4). When analyzing the data, it is clear to observe that the values are over-dispersed (See Figure 2). Ultimately, following established practice (King, 1989), a negative binominal regression would be used in order to handle this over-dispersion. Yet, given the scope of this thesis an OLS regression will be used while log transforming the variable in order to compensate for the data skewness. The main statistical argument for logging a variable is to get a better understanding of it by transforming it to another scale. Following established practices (Lacina, 2006: 284), when a variable is not normally distributed it should be log transformed. In this thesis, a natural log transformation will be used on the dependent variable in order to get a better understanding of the number of deaths and a more linear relationship. Adding to the statistical reasoning is the theoretical argument that one can expect differences at the lower end of the scale to have a bigger impact than differences at the higher end of the scale. To illustrate, an increase from 0 to 25 killed civilians is excepted to have a bigger impact than an increase from 1000 to 1025 killed civilians.
3.2.3 CONTROL VARIABLES

In accordance with the above-mentioned unit of analysis of this thesis and the aggregated data on rebel group-conflict, static control variables that can be recorded at the beginning of the conflict are needed when controlling for alternative explanations to the potential relationship between the independent and the dependent variable. Three control variables are chosen based on their ability to influence the two main variables of interest; religious identity, the rebel group’s stated incompatibility, and regime type.

The first control variable is religious identity. As previously discussed, religion can influence the incompatibility of a conflict and/or the warring parties’ identities. In relation to the independent variable of this thesis, it is of value to control for the religious identity of the conflicting parties in order to more fully capture the religious dynamics within the conflict. The variable religious identity will reflect whether the warring actors come from different religious traditions or not. Data was gathered from RELAC dataset, which only takes the six world religions into considerations. The variable is recorded at the beginning of the conflict as is then static throughout the conflict-episode, due to the improbability of one of the warring parties changing religious identity. A score of 1 indicates that the conflict actors differ in religious traditions, or sub-traditions. Subsequently, a score of 0 indicates that the majority constituencies of the conflict actors belongs to the same religious tradition, or sub-traditions (Svensson & Nilsson, 2018b: 3-4). This can be connected back to the theoretical framework, assuming that
if the warring parties have different traditions or sub-traditions it will result in more conducted one-sided violence due to the possibility of out-group profiling.

The second control variable is *stated incompatibility*. In broad terms, there exists two overarching categories of incompatibilities: governmental and/or territorial (Wallensteen, 2015: 25). No connection is made in the RELAC dataset between the potential religious incompatibility and the two overarching incompatibility categories. Hence why the rebel group’s stated incompatibility will be controlled for in order to capture the influence that different religious incompatibilities can have on the rebel group’s violence against civilians. Findings by Eck & Hultman (2007: 240) show that governmental conflicts overall see more one-sided violence than territorial conflicts. For rebel groups, when disaggregating this data, the difference in conducted one-sided violence is only marginal between the two incompatibility types. Rebel groups conduct slightly more one-sided violence in governmental conflicts than in conflicts regarding territory. The RELAC dataset provides data on the stated incompatibility; a score of 1 indicates territorial conflict, a score of 2 indicates governmental conflict, and a score of 3 indicates a conflict over both government and territory (Svensson & Nilsson, 2018b: 9). Yet, the latter score is only recorded in interstate conflicts in the RELAC dataset and is thus not relevant for the scope of this thesis. Furthermore, this variable is recoded as 0 and 1 in order to facilitate the coding process, and further on a score of 0 indicates governmental conflicts, while a score of 1 indicates territorial conflict.

The third control variable is *regime type*. Findings by Stanton (2013: 1020-1021) show that a government’s regime type influences the rebel group’s choice of violence. Stanton (2013: 1010) argues that democracies are more likely to make concessions in response to violence conducted by rebel groups, something that rebel groups take advantage of. These findings are supported by Eck & Hultman (2007: 234) which find that while autocratic governments use more levels of one-sided violence compared to democratic governments, rebel groups in democracies uses more one-sided violence than rebels operating in autocratic countries. Moreover, it could be argued that regime type could be seen as a proxy variable for religious freedom since, generally speaking, democracies do not impose any brutal constraints on the individual freedom. Religious issues might be framed differently in democracies compared to in autocracies, where the issue could be framed as an all-or-nothing type of issue. Data on this variable will be collected from Polity IV Project (Marshall et al, 2019) and the country’s polity score will indicate the regime type of the year that the conflict began, in

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accordance with the rebel group-conflict observations. The dataset scores regimes on a 21-point scale, ranging from -10 (most autocratic) to +10 (most democratic). The variable polity2 will be consulted in order to extract the values from the dataset. This variable modifies the combined annual polity score by replacing certain standardized scores to the conventional 21-point scale, either as missing values or a neutral 0 (Marshall et al, 2019: 17). Using this variable as an indicator of regime type facilitates a more coherent analysis to take place due to the avoidance of missing values.

3.3 DATA COLLECTION AND LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

First and foremost, the data collected for the analysis originates from three main dataset; UCDP One-sided violence dataset, RELAC dataset, and Polity IV dataset. All of these sources are reliable and holds comprehensive data which enables generalization of the potential findings to take place. It is important to highlight that data from UCDP is based on secondary sources, yet the information is triangulated before coding (Allansson & Croicu, 2017: 5). Even though the data could be exposed to bias, the extensive data collection process of UCDP induces reliability to the data. Additionally, the heavy dependence on the RELAC dataset in this thesis is due to the fact that the dataset is the most comprehensive dataset to date on religious armed conflict. Moreover, the dataset builds on UCDP data which makes it favorable with the data management. Furthermore, measuring regime type is not a straightforward task and data often include multiple variables to reflect the thickness of the concept. Given the scope and time limit of this thesis, Polity IV dataset and the variable polity2 was chosen. The Polity IV project have an academic authority within the field and the polity2-variable is good at examine the general effects regime type can have. However, the dataset is not unproblematic and have been criticized by several scholars in the field (See Vreeland, 2008). One implication is that the scores in the middle of the 21-point scale is somewhat difficult to differentiate between and should therefore be used with causation (Marshall et al, 2019: 17). However, in this thesis the polity2-variable is only used as a control variable and the analysis does not put too much of explanatory power into specific polity scores. Moreover, the sample chosen for this thesis is not randomly selected as would have been preferred in an ideal quantitative research. Rather the sample is constrained and chosen due to data availability.

Unfortunately, much of the validity will be lost in this quantitative study when comparing the original concepts to the operationalizations. However, this allows for the possibility to draw inferences from the potential findings, as well as it allows demonstrating the
RELAC dataset. In the theoretical framework, religion is treated as a static phenomenon, when in reality it is rather a social construct. In spite of this, for the sake of generalizability, religion will be treated as static in this thesis in order to conduct a proper quantitative analysis. As a result of this, the potential presence of an endogeneity problem is controlled for by the fact that the religious incompatibility and its salience is recorded at the beginning of the conflict and then remains static. Thus, hindering the possibility that violence against civilians could further bolster the salience of religion in the conflict and subsequently creating a vicious circle of more violence against civilians and higher levels of religious salience. Lastly, it is essential to note that measuring one-sided violence merely in lethal death have implications since this is not the only outcome of violence against civilians, as previously discussed. It is important to keep in mind that the numbers from UCDP are estimates of the number of deaths and could very well fail to reflect the true number of deaths occurring due to one-sided violence. Hence, a replication of this study could generate different results depending on which definition and operationalization of one-sided violence that is applied. Yet, using the UCDP’s operationalization the variable could be seen as valid since it measures what it is intended to measure, that is lethal violence which is in line with both the theoretical framework and the conceptualization. The narrow definition benefits the extraction of reliable data on which it is possible to draw inference from.
4. RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

The sample used in this analysis includes 299 observations with the unit of observation being rebel group-conflict. Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for each variable included in the analysis. Due to the sample size being equal throughout the different models, inference can be drawn with confidence. Furthermore, as presented above, the values for the regime type variable ranges from -10 to +10 in theory. Yet, in practice, the values range from -9 to +10 which indicates that there is no country which have a polity2-score of -10 in the sample during the given time period of 1989-2015. Additionally, one-sided violence is a log-transformed variable and can therefore not be interpreted substantially in its original metric. To get a better understanding of this variable’s distribution, the non-logged values are included as well. Moreover, it is of value to note that the independent variable’s mode is 0, around 216 cases take this value. There is thereby an over dispersion of 0 which might affect the results. Lastly, both religious identity and incompatibility type are dummy variables, and it therefore is of value to look at their mode. The mode of religious identity is 0, indicating that there is a majority of conflicts were the warring parties belong to the same religious tradition or sub-tradition. The mode for incompatibility type is 0, meaning that the majority of the conflict’s in the sample regards governmental conflicts.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for the included variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>St. Dev.</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>Mode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salience religious incompatibility</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>0.478</td>
<td>0.808</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-sided violence</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>347.127</td>
<td>1,228.058</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10,229</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-sided violence (ln)</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>1.630</td>
<td>2.760</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious identity</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>0.311</td>
<td>0.464</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incompatibility type</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>0.411</td>
<td>0.493</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regime type</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>-0.013</td>
<td>5.8181</td>
<td>-9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2 TESTING HYPOTHESIS

Revisiting the hypothesis presented above, this thesis assumes that when religion is of high salience to the incompatibility of a conflict, the rebel group will conduct more violence against civilians. The theoretical framework aimed at explaining this hypothesis argues that religion creates a context in which in- and out-group attitudes are created which can bolster the legitimization of violence in the name of God. Religion can be seen as a link between the conflict and the warring parties’ behavior against the enemy. In order to test the proposed theory, several different regression models will be analyzed. The results of these initial regressions are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Regression results of the effect that salience of religion in an incompatibility have on the level of one-sided violence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dependent variable: One-sided violence (ln)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low salience religious incompatibility</td>
<td>1.956*** (0.573)</td>
<td>1.818*** (0.591)</td>
<td>1.868*** (0.572)</td>
<td>1.867*** (0.568)</td>
<td>1.793*** (0.586)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High salience religious incompatibility</td>
<td>2.071*** (0.381)</td>
<td>2.049*** (0.382)</td>
<td>2.120*** (0.380)</td>
<td>2.154*** (0.379)</td>
<td>2.176*** (0.381)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious identity</td>
<td>0.318 (0.337)</td>
<td>0.318 (0.337)</td>
<td>0.318 (0.337)</td>
<td>0.318 (0.337)</td>
<td>0.318 (0.337)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incompatibility type</td>
<td>0.589* (0.308)</td>
<td>0.589* (0.308)</td>
<td>0.589* (0.308)</td>
<td>0.589* (0.308)</td>
<td>0.589* (0.308)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regime type</td>
<td>0.068*** (0.026)</td>
<td>0.068*** (0.026)</td>
<td>0.068*** (0.026)</td>
<td>0.068*** (0.026)</td>
<td>0.068*** (0.026)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>1.064*** (0.178)</td>
<td>0.980*** (0.199)</td>
<td>0.818*** (0.219)</td>
<td>1.055*** (0.176)</td>
<td>0.867*** (0.223)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.110</td>
<td>0.113</td>
<td>0.121</td>
<td>0.130</td>
<td>0.136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>0.104</td>
<td>0.104</td>
<td>0.112</td>
<td>0.121</td>
<td>0.121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Figures are coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The results were generated in RStudio. *p<0.1 **p<0.05 ***p<0.01

Model 1 presents results from a bivariate regression, i.e. the effect that the independent variable has on the dependent variable. It is important to highlight that the independent variable is an ordinal variable, ranging from 0 to 2. This variable has been
converted into a factor variable in order to facilitate more substantial interpretations when implementing it into statistical modelling. The regression coefficients for the independent variable in the model is in reference to a 0, which indicates the absence of a religious incompatibility. By converting the independent variable into a factor variable, it allows for comparison to be made between the three types of conflicts that the independent variable holds.

The relationship between religious incompatibilities with high salience and one-sided violence is positive, as well as it is statistically significant at the 99.9% confidence level which is indicated by the asterisk in the table. The same results can be observed for religious incompatibilities with low salience. The independent variable thus has a p-value that is lower than 0.01. However, the dependent variable of interest is log transformed and the regression coefficients in the model cannot be directly interpreted other than their positive or negative direction. When exponentiating and interpreting the regression coefficient in Model 1, it shows that rebel groups in conflicts with a religious incompatibility of high salience are seven times more likely to conduct one-sided violence as compared to rebel groups holding a non-religious incompatibility. Furthermore, rebel groups in conflicts with a religious incompatibility of low salience are six times more likely to conduct one-sided violence as compared to rebel groups holding a non-religious incompatibility. In order to examine if the presented relationship holds when other explanatory variables are introduced, model 2 through 5 illustrates the results of different multiple regressions.

In model 2, religious identity is introduced alongside the independent variable, salience religious incompatibility. The relationship between religious identity and one-sided violence is positive in its direction. Yet, the standard error in relation to the regression coefficient is large and the relationship is not statistically significant, thus indicating that the relationship could be a product of coincidence. Even though the effect of the independent variable decreases marginally in this model, both for the lower and the higher value, the relationship still holds statistically at the 99.9% confidence level, indicating that the p-value of the variable equals or is less than 0.01. Adding to this is the fact that the included control variable is a dichotomous variable. When exponentiating the regression coefficient for the constant, it illustrates that conflicts with a score of 1, i.e. the warring parties belong to different religious traditions or sub-traditions, are 37 percent more likely to conduct one-sided violence

8 Exponentiating the log transformed (+1) variable accordingly: \((\exp (2.071) - 1) \times 100 = 693.2751 \approx 700 \%\)
9 \((\exp (1.956) - 1) \times 100 = 607.0986 \approx 600\%\)
10 \((\exp (0.318) - 1) \times 100 = 37.4376 \approx 37\%\)
compared to conflicts were the warring parties share the same religious tradition or sub-tradition.

In model 3, *incompatibility type*, is controlled for and the relationship between this variable and the dependent variable is positive as well as it is statistically significant at a 90% confidence level. Since this variable is a dummy variable, it is of value to take the constant coefficient into consideration. Its regression coefficient equals the mean value of the dependent variable when all other variables are set to zero. In regard to the control variable in this model, *incompatibility type*, this illustrates that the mean value of one-sided violence is 0.589 in governmental conflicts (since a value of 0 indicate governmental conflict). As aforementioned, these numbers cannot be interpreted substantially in the original metric. When exponentiating the coefficient, it is illustrated that rebel groups in territorial conflicts are 80 percent more likely to conduct one-sided violence. This is not in line with the previously presented findings by Eck and Hultman (2007: 240) who found that rebel groups conduct more one-sided violence in governmental conflicts even though the difference to territorial conflicts were marginal. What is interesting is that the effect of the independent variable, both the high and the low value, in this model increases compared to the model 1 and 2, as well as the statistical significance remains at the 99.9% confidence level.

In model 4, the last control variable is included, *regime type*. In line with previous findings (See Eck & Hultman, 2007; Stanton, 2013), the relationship to the dependent variable is positive as well as statistically significant at the 99.9% confidence level. Thus, a one-unit increase on the polity-scale subsequently leads to an increase in one-sided violence conducted by rebel groups. This significance is compared to a zero-effect of the variable, yet the effect of the variable is rather low. Further, the relationship between the independent and the dependent variable still holds when controlling for regime type and is stronger compared to the three previous models.

In model 5, all variables of interest are included. The independent variable holds statistically significant at the 99.9% confidence level throughout the five models, indicating a p-value that equals or is lower than 0.01. It is interesting to observe that the regression coefficient for low *salience religious incompatibility* is lower in model 5, as compared to the previous models, while the regression coefficient for high *salience religious incompatibility* is larger in model 5, as compared to previous models. When controlling for other explanatory factors in model 5, the statistically significance of *regime type* decreases from the 99.9%

11 \((\exp(0.589)-1)*100 = 80.2185 \approx 80%\)
confidence level in model 4, to the 95% confidence level, holding all other variables constant. Incompatibility type loses its statistical significance in model 5, as compared to model 3. Moreover, when looking at the goodness-of-fit of model 5, more specifically the R² value, 13.6% of the variable in one-sided violence is explained by the variables in the model. Yet, it is not possible to appoint specific values of R² to any variable in the model and thereby it is not possible to predict which of the values explain most of the variation in the dependent variable (Kellstedt & Whitten, 2018: 197).

4.3 ROBUSTNESS TEST

Due to the somewhat problematic operationalization of the control variable regime type, using the Polity IV Index, another operationalization of this variable is introduced in order to further examine if the relationship between the independent and the dependent variable presented above holds. Subsequently, a robustness test will be conducted using data which stems from V-Dem dataset\(^\text{12}\) (Coppedge et al, 2019a; Pemstein et al, 2019). The result of this test is presented in Table 4. In broad terms, V-Dem uses five high-level democracy indices which illustrates certain components of democracy at the highest abstract macro-level (Coppege et al, 2019b: 39). For this thesis, the variable liberal democracy index (v2x_libdem) was chosen due to it being the most coherent with the presented theoretical framework. This variable measures to what extent the ideal of liberal democracy is achieved in the country, ranging from a score of 0 to 1. In short, indicators such as the protection of individual and minority rights, a strong rule of law, and the level of electoral democracy are considered (Coppedge et al, 2019b: 40). In comparison with Polity IV, this variable from V-Dem is narrower and more in line with the presented theory. It avoids the difficulty of interpreting and differentiate between the scores in the middle of the scale, as compared to Polity IV. Moreover, the variable tackles the concept of regime type from another angle as compared to Polity IV, since the starting ground and the measures have a heavy focus on liberal democracies. It should be noted that the sample, when including V-Dem as a control variable, is marginally lower compared to Table 3. This is due to missing data on a few countries in the V-Dem dataset during the given time period.

Model 6 introduces the V-Dem regime type variable alongside the independent variable of interest. The control variable is holding statistical significance at the 99.9% confidence level which indicates a p-value equal to or lower than 0.01. The positive coefficient for the V-Dem variable, and the relatively low standard error in relation to the regression coefficient, indicates a strong and positive relationship to the dependent variable of interest. Moreover, when comparing this regression coefficient’s effect to the Polity IV regime type variable in model 8, the strength is substantially larger in model 6.

In model 7, all variables of interest are included and even though the regression coefficient for the V-Dem regime type variable is marginally lower compared to Model 6, the
relationship is still positive. In comparison to Model 8 and 9, Model 6 and 7 using the V-Dem variable have a higher $R^2$ and adjusted $R^2$ value which indicates that the variables in these models holds a higher explanatory power when explaining the variation in the dependent variable. As previously mentioned, the difference between Model 6 and 7, and Model 8 and 9, is the operationalization used for measuring regime type. Based on $R^2$, adjusted $R^2$ and the size of the regression coefficients, it is possible to draw the conclusion that the operationalization of the control variable *regime type* using the V-Dem dataset holds a stronger explanatory power when all other variables are held constant, when compared to the Polity IV dataset. Model 8 and 9 is similar to model 4 and 5 as presented in Table 3, though the two former models hold a substantially smaller sample as compared to model 4 and 5. It is interesting to note that the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable still holds statistical significance when conducting this robustness test.

### 4.4 DISCUSSION AND ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS

The results in Table 3 supports the proposed hypothesis (H1), meaning that an increase in *salience religious incompatibility* causes an increase in *one-sided violence*. Even though the positive covariation is established, there are insufficient results for explaining the potential causal mechanism that is at work. It is thus difficult to demonstrate potential support for the prosed theoretical framework in this thesis. The relationship between the independent and the dependent variable proved to be strong from the initial bivariate regression and throughout the models in both Table 3 and Table 4, and no specific control variable had any substantial effect on this relationship. Moreover, only one control variable stands out in its statistical significance in Table 3, *regime type*, which is in line with previous findings. The relationship between *regime type* and *one-sided violence* when all other variables are held constant is tested further in Table 4. *Regime type* is measured in another scale, yet the results still hold statistical significance and the effect of the variable increases and illustrated by the enlarged regression coefficient.

Furthermore, there is a low number of observations in the sample used in this thesis which affects the explanatory effects of the analysis, when assuming that the population of total cases is larger than the sample used. The observations of real interest, i.e. religious incompatibilities where religion is of high salience, represents a substantially small sub-set of the observations in the sample (See Table 5). As aforementioned, there is an over dispersion of the value 0 for the independent variable, i.e. conflicts with no religious incompatibility is more
common in the sample than conflicts that have a religious incompatibility. Thus, it is difficult to draw inference from the results presented in Table 3 and Table 4. Moreover, converting the independent variable to a factor variable lead to a comparison between religious conflicts with high salience (2) and conflicts with no religious component (0) to take place, as well as between religious conflicts with low salience (1) and conflicts between no religious component (0). It would have been of value to compare religious conflicts with high salience (2) to those religious conflicts with low salience (1). This could have been done by conducting an additional robustness test and creating a dummy variable out of the independent variable.

Table 5. Table of the independent variable’s values.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low salience of religion</th>
<th>High salience of religion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religious incompatibility (Yes)</td>
<td>0 (72%)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious incompatibility (No)</td>
<td>1 (8%)</td>
<td>2 (20%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adding to this is the fact that the RELAC dataset included different variables on the various dynamics which can be present in religious armed conflicts. Due to time and space constraints, only two of these variables where used to tailor the independent variable of this thesis. Several of these other variables, such as what type of claim was made and if the claim was made by a pluralistic movement, or by a religious or ideological movement (See Svensson & Nilsson, 2018b), could have been included to present a more nuanced picture of religion in armed conflicts as well as include different categories of the independent variable. This could have shed more light on the previously presented causal mechanism in the theoretical framework. Yet, religious identity was included as a control variable in order to somewhat facilitate more nuance in the analysis.

As previously mentioned, it is not religion per se that is seen as the cause of violence in this thesis. When analyzing the regression models, it is not possible to see how religion was used, yet this is not of interest to this thesis. It is rather what religion as a phenomenon can facilitate in different context that is of interest. Drawing from this, it could very well be that religion was instrumentalized in a conflict or by a rebel group while it was still viewed as being of high salience. This could mean that these groups attract opportunistic fighters which might lead to a principal-agent problem, which often leads to more one-sided
violence (Weinstein, 2005: 622). This in turn could lead to an increase in the dependent variable, *one-sided violence*. Even though Weinstein (2005: 598) discusses the principal-agent problem in relation to economic endowments, religious groups can often make promises to its members about the afterlife and eternal glory. It is therefore possible to assume that these grand promises attract opportunistic fighters in with reference to spiritual endowments. Additionally, using religion as a motivation could lead to rebel groups being able to recruit more soldiers. Recruitment on the basis of religion can ensure that the recruits are committed to the group’s collective and thereby ensure high retention (Nordås & Gates, 2014: 10). As well as this lays the basis for overcoming the collective-action problem. When the group’s military strength increases, one could assume that their independence from the civilian community increases (See Wood 2010; 2014; Salehyan et al, 2014). Thus, making the rebel group more likely to target civilians in order to ensure their support, or to clear sought after territory. These alternative explanations in relation to the presented results must, however, be further analyzed qualitatively in order to ensure what causal mechanism that is at work.
5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS
The purpose and aim of this study have been to establish a correlation between the independent variable and the dependent variable, namely if the religious salience of an incompatibility in a conflict affect the rebel group’s use of violence against civilians. The theoretical framework aimed at explaining this research question holds that religion can create a context in which certain in- and out-group attitudes are constructed. These attitudes can have a dehumanizing effect and lay the ground for out-group profiling where anyone outside the own group is viewed as the enemy. Religion in this environment can bolster the legitimization of violence in the name of God and could be seen as the link between conflicts and the warring parties’ behavior against the enemy. The hypothesis following this theoretical framework was; when religion is of high salience to the incompatibility of a conflict, the rebel group will conduct more violence against civilians. The relationship between these two variables was tested empirically through an ordinary least squares multiple regression. The results showed support for the hypothesis since the relationship between the independent and the dependent variable was both positive as well as it held statistical significance at the 99.9% confidence level (See Table 3 and 4).

Furthermore, this study has made use of the RELAC dataset by Svensson and Nilsson (2018a) and combined it with UCDP data on one-sided violence. Contributing further to the knowledge regarding the link between religion and rebel group’s use of violence in conflicts. Plausibly, this study has contributed to the disentanglement of the concept ‘religion’ and made some interesting policy implications regarding how religion should be treated in future research. Religion is a subject that is both present and relevant in most of today’s armed conflicts, and what is of research interest is the fact that religion both can provide ties that bind people together, while at the same time generate differences that divide (Gartzke & Gleditsch, 2006). Yet, religion still remains a normative and sensitive subject, and extensive research has been constrained by the lack of extensive data. This has however changed with the emergence of the RELAC dataset, which is used in this thesis. Conclusively, the possibilities for future research within the field of religious armed conflicts are immense, and its focal point should be on qualitative studies in order to fully capture the dynamics and variance that exists within the phenomenon of religion. By treating religion as the social phenomenon that it is it might be possible to examine what it is in the interpretation of a religious tradition that enables violence to take place and even to be legitimimized.
6. BIBLIOGRAPHY


7. Appendix A

7.1 R-Script

### Final R-script for C-thesis ###
### Amanda Löfström, Peace and Conflict Studies C, Fall 2019 ###

```r
setwd("~/Desktop/Data_Cthesis")

library(stargazer)
library(plyr)
library(tidyverse)
library(tidyselect)
library(ggplot2)
library(knitr)
library(openxlsx)
library(xlsx)
library(readxl)
library(utils)

RELAC_18 <- read_excel("RELAC_18.xlsx")
UCDP_OSV.18 <- read_excel("UCDP_OSV.18.xlsx")
Polity_IV <- read_excel("Polity_IV.xls")
V.Dem <- read.csv("V.Dem.csv")
# Reading in the three datasets that I will use in this thesis when collecting my variables of interest.

### First step is to merge RELAC together with UCDP OSV in order to retrieve my sample for the thesis! ###

### RELAC data ###

RELAC_Updated <- RELAC_18%>%
  filter(year>=1989 & type_of_conflict==3)
names(RELAC_Updated)[names(RELAC_Updated) == "side_b_id"] <- "actor_id"
RELAC_Updated$actor_id <- as.numeric(RELAC_Updated$actor_id)
class(RELAC_Updated$actor_id)
# First, renaming the variable 'side b id' to 'actor id' in order to be able to merge the data with UCDP OSV.
# Second, only including type '3' conflicts - that is intrastate armed conflicts.
# As well as sorting out that are older than 1989, in order to be able to merge the data with UCDP OSV.
# Converting the 'actor id' character variable to a numeric variable.

RELAC_Merge <- select(RELAC_Updated, dyad_id, conflict_id, side_a, gwno_a, side_b, actor_id, incompatibility, year, type_of_conflict, RelID, RelIncomp, SalienceRel)
# Lastly, creating a scaled down version of the dataset which is ready to be merged with UCDP OSV.
```
# Recoding this variable in order to be able to later aggregate the data. Variable can only take on value 1 and 2 (3 is not applicable in intrastate-conflicts, thus recoding it to 0 and 1)

### UCDP OSV ###

UCDP_OSV_Updated <- filter(UCDP_OSV.18, year<=2015 & is_government_actor == 0)
OSV_Merge <- select(UCDP_OSV.18, actor_id, year, best_fatality_estimate)
# First, filtering out conflict after 2015 - this in order to match RELAC data.
# Second, only including values of '0' - meaning that OSV conducted by governments is sorted out. Only rebels are included.
# Lastly, creating a scaled down version of the dataset which is ready to be merged with RELAC.

### Merging RELAC and UCDP OSV ###

RELAC_OSV <- left_join(RELAC_Merge, OSV_Merge, by = c("actor_id", "year"))
RELAC_OSV[c("best_fatality_estimate")][is.na(RELAC_OSV[c("best_fatality_estimate")])] <- 0
# First, doing a left join with UCDP OSV. Meaning that R will return all rows from RELAC, and all columns from RELAC and UCDP OSV. Rows in RELAC with no match in UCDP OSV will have NA values in the new columns.
# Second, setting every NA of OSV to 0. Will discuss the problems with this in the thesis.

length(unique(RELAC_OSV$dyad_id))
length(unique(RELAC_OSV$conflict_id))
# My sample is thus 299 dyads in 145 conflicts.

### Aggregating "my" dataset ###

Aggregated_Data <- aggregate(cbind(RELAC_OSV$RelIncomp, RELAC_OSV$RelID, RELAC_OSV$best_fatality_estimate, RELAC_OSV$SalienceRel),
by=list(dyad_id = RELAC_OSV$dyad_id, incompatibility = RELAC_OSV$incompatibility),
FUN=sum, na.rm=TRUE)

names(Aggregated_Data)[names(Aggregated_Data) == "V1"] <- "RelIncomp"
names(Aggregated_Data)[names(Aggregated_Data) == "V2"] <- "RelID"
names(Aggregated_Data)[names(Aggregated_Data) == "V3"] <- "Best_OSV"
names(Aggregated_Data)[names(Aggregated_Data) == "V4"] <- "SalienceRel"
names(Aggregated_Data)[names(Aggregated_Data) == "V5"] <- "Incompatibility"
# First, aggregating the data for each dyad, one observation per dyad. 299 observations.
# Second, renaming the variables after the aggregation to correct names.

Aggregated_Data$RelIncomp[Aggregated_Data$RelIncomp >0] <- 1  
Aggregated_Data$RelID[Aggregated_Data$RelID >0] <- 1  
Aggregated_Data$SalienceRel[Aggregated_Data$SalienceRel >0] <- 1  
Aggregated_Data$Incompatibility[Aggregated_Data$Incompatibility >0] <- 1  

# The data includes dummy variables, which when summing the variables up reflects a wrong number. The dummy variables are static, thus meaning that anything above 1 when adding them together simply equals 1, and 0 = 0 (except for the OSV values).

### Incorporating Polity IV dataset into "my" data frame ###

Polity_Relevant <- select(Polity_IV, ccode, country, year, polity2)  
    filter(year>=1989 & year<=2015)  
Polity_Relevant$year <- as.numeric(Polity_Relevant$year)  
class(Polity_Relevant$year)  
names(Polity_Relevant)[names(Polity_Relevant) == "ccode"] <- "gwno_a"  

# Here I have only years from 1989 and above. Only relevant variables. Recoding the variable from ccode to gwno_a to match my data frame.

RELAC_Downsize <- select(RELAC_Merge, dyad_id, year, gwno_a)  
# Downscaling the merging RELAC with gwno code to match it with Polity

Dyad_Start_Gwno <- aggregate(RELAC_Downsize$year, list(dyad_id = RELAC_Downsize$dyad_id, gwno_a = RELAC_Downsize$gwno_a),function(x) min(x))  
names(Dyad_Start_Gwno)[names(Dyad_Start_Gwno) == "x"] <- "year"  

# Aggregating the data down so that each dyad gets a start date, and then a gwno_a code that belongs to that dyad/conflict.

Polity_2.0 <- select(Polity_Relevant, gwno_a, year, polity2)  
# Scaling down the polity dataset to relevant variables.

## DYAD_Test <- merge(Dyad_Start_Gwno, Polity_Relevant, by = c("gwno_a", "year"), all.x = TRUE) ##  
# Merging this way causes 11 values on polity2-variable to be missing. This is due to the fact that the values of gwno_a is different in RELAC and Polity IV due to different coding on cases for example as Soviet/Russia and Former Yugoslavia/Serbia.  
# This is fixed manually in Excel by hand coding these 11 values to be able to merge correctly, creating the data frame called "Polity_2.0". See the correct code below: ##

DYAD <- merge(Dyad_Start_Gwno, Polity_2.0, by = c("gwno_a", "year"))  
# Merging Polity with data frame on dyadid and startyear called Dyad_Start_Gwno. Merging on gwno_a and year. In the data frame
called 'Polity_2_0' the 11 values of gwno_a is corrected (see comment above)

My_data <- left_join(Aggregated_Data, DYAD, by = NULL)
# Here I have my data with all of my variables. Still 299 observations (that is individual rebel groups, one observation per conflict dyad).

### Refining the data frame and creating my own IV ###

My_data$IV_Thesis <- 0
My_data$IV_Thesis[My_data$RelIncomp == 0 & My_data$SalienceRel == 0] <- 0
My_data$IV_Thesis[My_data$RelIncomp == 1 & My_data$SalienceRel == 0] <- 1
My_data$IV_Thesis[My_data$RelIncomp == 1 & My_data$SalienceRel == 1] <- 2
# Creating the ordinal IV of interest in 'my_data' by combining religious incompatibility and salience of religion.

The.data <- select(My_data, dyad_id, RelIncomp, RelID, Best_OSV, SalienceRel, incompatibility, polity2, IV_Thesis)
# Exporting the data with relevant variables. Losing the year/Gwno_a code.

The.data$Log_OSV <- The.data$Best_OSV +1
The.data$Log_OSV <- log(The.data$Log_OSV)
# Log transforming the OSV due to skewed distribution, adding +1 and creating a new column with the new values.

The.data$incompatibility[The.data$incompatibility == 2] <- 0
# Setting incompatibility variable to be able to perform regression on it as a dummy variable.

### Regression and descriptive statistics ###

stargazer(The.data, type = "html", title = "Descriptive Statistics", summary = TRUE, median = TRUE,
          omit.summary.stat = c("p25", "p75"), out = "descriptive_stat.html")
# Descriptive statistics for all variables in 'the.data'. Exporting this to html file and editing it in Word to make it look nice

# Creating a new family on fonts including Times New Roman

myhist <- hist(The.data$Best_OSV, breaks=12, col="grey",
                family = "Times",
                xlab = "Best Estimate",
                main = "Distribution of One-Sided Violence",
                xlim=c(0,10000),
                ylim=c(0,275),
                las=1)
# Creating a histogram over best-OSV in order to illustrate skewness of data.

The.data$incompatibility[The.data$incompatibility ==2] <- 0
The.data$IV_Thesis <- as.factor(The.data$IV_Thesis)
IV.Order <- ordered(The.data$IV_Thesis, levels = c("0", "1", "2"))
table(IV.Order)
# Coding the incompatibility-variable as a dichotomous (0,1) in order to conduct regressions.
# Turning the main IV to a factor variable in order to better interpret it in the regression.

data.frame <- read.xlsx("The.data", "~/Desktop/Data_Cthesis", sheetName = "The Data",
colnames = TRUE, row.names = TRUE, append = FALSE)
#Exporting data frame to excel in order to save it to my computer.

line1 <- lm(Log_OSV ~ IV_Thesis, data=The.data)
line2 <- lm(Log_OSV ~ IV_Thesis + RelID, data = The.data)
line3 <- lm(Log_OSV ~ IV_Thesis + incompatibility, data = The.data)
line4 <- lm(Log_OSV ~ IV_Thesis + polity2, data = The.data)
line5 <- lm(Log_OSV ~ IV_Thesis + RelID + incompatibility + polity2, data = The.data)

regression1 <- stargazer(line1, line2, line3, line4, line5, align = TRUE, type = "text", title = "Results")
# First regression of my IV, DV, and CV's.

regression1 <- stargazer(line1, line2, line3, line4, line5, dep.var.labels = "Log OSV", column.labels = c("M1", "M2","M3", "M4", "M5"), align=TRUE, type="html", out="Regression1.html")
# Saving the above regression as an html-file.

table(The.data$IV_Thesis)

### ROBUSTNESS TEST WITH V_DEM DATA MERGE ###

New_Vdem <- select(V.Dem, year, COWcode, country_id, v2x_libdem)
NEW_VDEM <- New_Vdem%>%
    filter(year>=1989 & year<=2015)
# Selecting out relevant variable for merging as well as filtering out years, only keeping 1989-2015.

data.frame <- read.xlsx("The.data", "~/Desktop/Data_Cthesis", sheetName = "The Data",
colnames = TRUE, row.names = TRUE, append = FALSE)
#Exporting data frame to excel in order to save it to my computer.

DATA_THESIS$Log_OSV <- DATA_THESIS$Best_OSV +1
DATA_THESIS$Log_OSV <- log(DATA_THESIS$Log_OSV)
# Adding a log transformed variable of Best OSV
DATA_THESIS$incompatibility[DATA_THESIS$incompatibility == 2] <- 0
# Setting incompatibility variable to be able to perform regression on it as a dummy variable.

DATA_THESIS$incompatibility[DATA_THESIS$incompatibility == 2] <- 0
as.factor(DATA_THESIS$IV_Thesis)

# Coding the incompatibility-variable as a dichotomous (0,1) in order to conduct regressions.
# Turning the main IV to a factor variable in order to better interpret it in the regression.

DATA_THESIS$IV_Thesis <- as.factor(DATA_THESIS$IV_Thesis)
IV.Order.Rob <- ordered(DATA_THESIS$IV_Thesis, levels = c("0", "1", "2"))
table(IV.Order.Rob)

# Converting the categorical IV to a factor variable to facilitate comparison.

L1 <- lm(Log_OSV ~ IV_Thesis + v2x_libdem, data=DATA_THESIS)
L2 <- lm(Log_OSV ~ IV_Thesis + RelID + incompatibility + v2x_libdem, data = DATA_THESIS)
L3 <- lm(Log_OSV ~ IV_Thesis + polity2, data = DATA_THESIS)
L4 <- lm(Log_OSV ~ IV_Thesis + RelID + incompatibility + polity2, data = DATA_THESIS)

Roboustness1 <- stargazer(L1, L2, L3, L4, align = TRUE, type = "text", title = "Results")
# Robustness test comparing the effects of V-dem instead of Polity IV.

Roboustness1 <- stargazer(L1, L2, L3, L4, dep.var.labels = "Log OSV", column.labels = c("M6", "M7","M8", "M9"),
align=TRUE, type="html",
out="roboustness.html")
# Saving the above regression as an html-file.

### End of script ###