

Why Religious Freedom Matters Especially Now

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Imagine a social force, a potent “X factor”
that promotes...

political stability

international peace

democracy

civil liberties

tolerance

citizen loyalty

economic opportunity

gender equity

Empirical research shows this to be...

religious freedom

Religious freedom matters because religion matters

- Ontological reality
- Surprising global resurgence of religion
- Demographic trends: “God’s Century”
- Suppression is destabilizing

Religious freedom matters because religious diversity matters

- Default condition of religion is diversity
- Enhanced by globalization
- Peter Berger: “Everyone is everywhere”
- Enforced uniformity produces grievances/hostilities

Religious freedom matters as a universal human right

“All Human Beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood”

-Universal Declaration of Human Rights: UN 1948 Preamble

“Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. This right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance.”

-Universal Declaration of Human Rights: UN 1948 Article 18

Components of the Universal Declaration on Religious Freedom

- Inherent dignity
- Equal worth
- Reason
- Conscience
- Community

Religious freedom matters because it is under siege

- 75% of world's population live under high restrictions on religious practice, Pew Research Center
 - Government favoritism, theocracy, discrimination, and persecution
 - Social hostilities, intimidation, mob violence
- Elite Amnesia

Religious freedom is pivotal to the kind of world we want to live in

- Enduring democracy
- Flourishing economics
- Interreligious amity – “American Grace”
- International peace

- *Justice demands it; violations disrupt the social order*

What is special about modern research?

- Unprecedented global data
 - Pew Research Center's Global Restrictions Reports
- New analytical tools
 - Measuring restrictions
 - Scores for each and every country's government and society
 - Sophisticated methodologies
- Global collaboration
 - Georgetown University Religious Freedom Project

Religious Freedom and Democracy

- “First Freedom” in the American Founding
- Central to the history of democratization
- Highly correlated with success of modern democracies

The Catholic Church: A Natural Experiment

- Pre-Vatican II: Catholic countries mostly authoritarian
- *Dignitatis Humanae* (1965)
- Post-Declaration on Religious Freedom: Last great wave of democratization on Earth



Religious Freedom and Flourishing Economics

- Early thinkers: “Persecution is bad for business.”
- The Netherlands: Punching Above its weight in the 17th Century
- American colonial experience
 - Struggles Against Persecution
 - Economic success of pluralism

Seven Ways Religious Freedom Contributes to Sustainable Development

1. Fosters respect
2. Reduces corruption
3. Engenders peace
4. Encourages broader freedoms
5. Develops the economy
6. Overcomes over-regulation
7. Multiplies Trust

What predicts GDP growth?

- Tax rates?
- Tariff rates?
- Population size?
- Government expenditures?
- Public debt?
- Foreign investment?
- Corruption levels?

Of 25 factors just four prove significant:

- 5-year GDP growth
- Monetary freedom
- Religious restrictions
- Religious hostilities

Religious Freedom and Women's Empowerment

- Strongly correlated with gender equality
- Religious “Voice and exit” empowers women in traditional societies (Rebecca Shah's research on Dalit women in India)
 - Microenterprise participation
 - Domestic abuse reports
 - Children's education
 - Increased family savings

Religious Freedom and National Security

- Cultivates loyalty to the state
- Prevents destabilizing strife
- Addresses the security challenges of the 21st century (religious fanaticism & terrorism)

Religious Freedom Security Threats

“Every nation that represents a security threat to the United States is an egregious violator of religious freedom.”

“Not a single nation that respects religious freedom poses a security threat.”

Every major war the US has fought in the last 70 years featured an opponent that engaged in systematic religious persecution.

Ideology of militant religious movements is *defined* by hostility to religious freedom and pluralism.

Religious Freedom as a Weapon of Peace

- Timeless ideas, global data, sophisticated research:
 - Lowers religious violence at home -- channels healthy energies
 - Reduces likelihood to export violence
 - Undermines despotism
 - Cultivates peaceful relations with other nations

- Research by Nilay Saiya (SUNY)

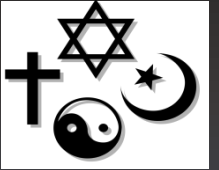
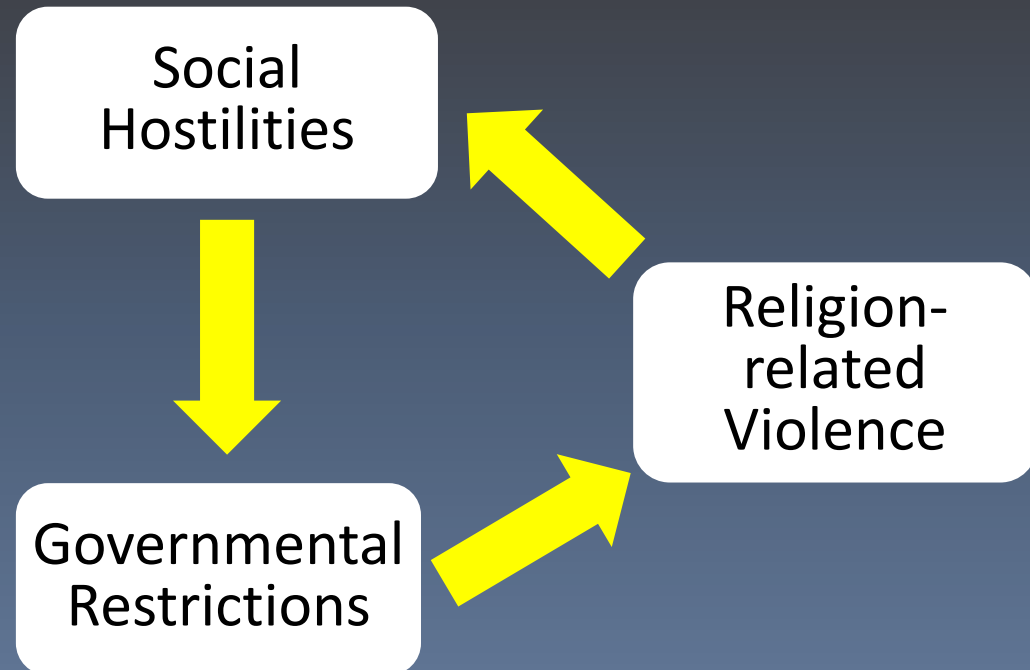
- Reprise Immanuel Kant?

Interaction of Social Forces and Public Policies:

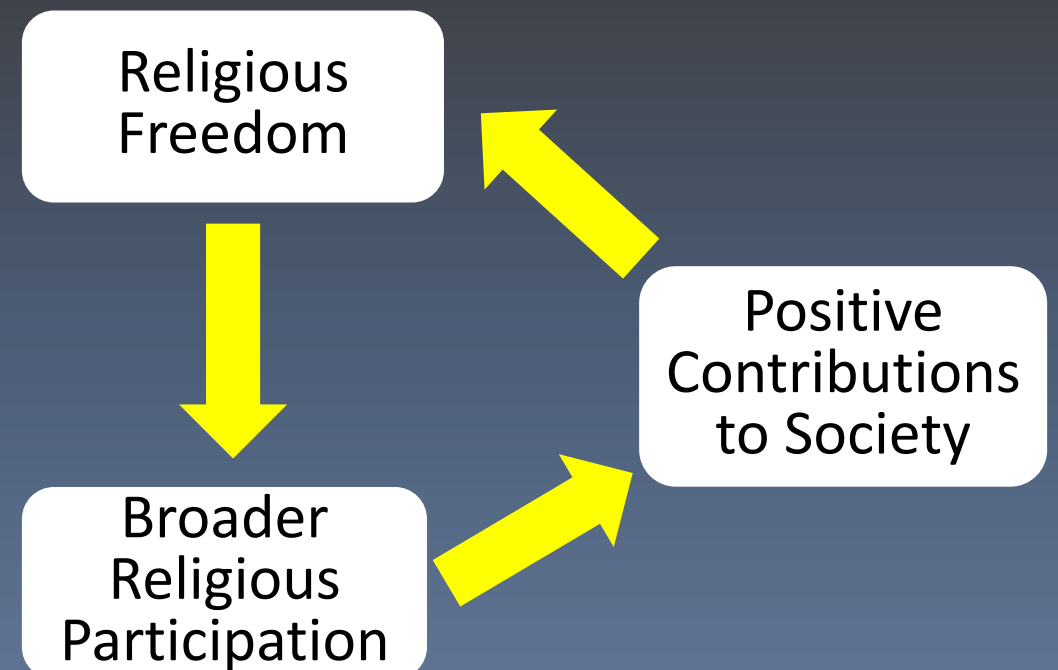
Grim and Finke, *The Price of Freedom Denied*



Religious Violence Cycle



Religious Freedom Cycle



Our Summons

- **Rekindling commitment to religious freedom**
 - In our policies and our lives
- **Addressing the crucible of the 21st Century**
 - Living with our differences in a shrinking world