# Research Note

## Understanding Muslims' Support for Suicide Bombing in West Africa: A Replication Study

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### Abstract

*Support for Islamist violence among Muslims—howsoever varied—is theoretically and practically important because scholars have demonstrated that popular support for terrorism may explain where terrorist events occur even though the mechanistic details of this predictive utility are disputed. For this and other empirical and theoretical reasons, scholars from various disciplines and scholarly commitments have sought to exposit respondent-level determinants of support for Islamist political violence. One of the common variables that is used in these studies is support for Shari'ah (often referred to as "Islamic law"); however, scholars using this variable arrive at divergent conclusions. Recent studies of Pakistan and Bangladesh suggest one reason for this is the way in which scholars conceptualize and instrumentalize Shari'ah. This scholarship argues that Shari'ah should be decomposed into at least three components, support for: scriptural literalism, good governance and restrictions on women. Using 2009 data from Pew's Tolerance and Tension, we replicate the empirical estimation strategies of those scholars to extend this analytical framework to four West African countries (Ghana, Cameroon, Guinea Bissau and Liberia), which have been neglected by scholars of Islamist political violence. We find considerable support for this framework. Notably, in Ghana and Liberia, support for scriptural literalism coincides with support for religious violence. We find no correlation between religiosity and support for violence in any of the four countries. In Guinea Bissau, we find a puzzling positive relationship between secularism and support for violence.*

**Keywords:** Public Opinion, Islamist political violence, public support for Islamist violence, West Africa, Replication Study

### Introduction

The September 11 attacks, the spread of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, and other acts of Islamist political violence have pushed Muslims and their faith into the center of political debates across the world. Global publics have come to view Muslims in their own countries and abroad with fear and alarm, fueling Islamophobia and even deadly attacks on Muslims.[1] In many ways the presumption that Muslims support violence committed in the name of their faith is unfounded: data from Pew Research Center demonstrates that a majority of Muslims aver that "suicide bombings and other forms of violence against civilians in the name of Islam are rarely or never justified." However, in some countries, nearly one in four Muslims indicates that these acts of violence are at least sometimes justified, including 40% in the Palestinian territories, 39% in Afghanistan, 29% in Egypt and 26% in Bangladesh.[2]

This support for Islamist violence among Muslims—howsoever varied—is theoretically and practically important for several reasons. First, recently scholars have demonstrated that this popular support for terrorism may explain where terrorist events occur even though the mechanistic details of this predictive utility are disputed.[3] Second, several studies have found that favorable public opinion explains the success of terrorist movements. For example, they rely upon public support to legitimize their goals if not their means[4] and they can more easily extract financial and human resources from sympathetic populations.[5] Terrorist groups may take public opinion into consideration when making tactical or even strategic decisions.[6] For these and other empirical and theoretical reasons, scholars from various disciplines and scholarly commitments have endeavored to exposit respondent-level determinants of support for suicide bombings and other forms of Islamist political violence perpetrated by Islamist militant groups using both multi-national surveys and

country-specific samples as well as innovative survey techniques[7] to field these surveys.

Political scientists have studied the posited correlation between support for political violence and an array of respondent-level factors, including: knowledge of Islam;[8] perceived and actual socio-economic status; dimensions of education and human capital;[9] ethnicity;[10] facets of belief and practice such as religiosity;[11] exposure to violence;[12] among other individual-level factors such as attitudes towards American culture and U.S. foreign policy[13] and political dissatisfaction.[14] These various empirical inquiries have often reached indeterminate and/or discordant findings.

In this article, we dilate upon recent studies in which the authors sought to explain why various studies that link support for political violence and preferences for Shari'ah (often referred to as "Islamic law") arrive at divergent conclusions.[15] Fair, Littman, and Nugent[16] suspected that part of problem derives from the sub-optimal ways in which scholars *per force* conceive of and instrumentalize Shari'ah in these empirical studies. Using a unique dataset they collected from a national survey fielded in Pakistan, they argued that Shari'ah should be conceptualized into (at least) three components and instrumentalized accordingly: scriptural literalism such as support for Quranic physical punishments often referred to as Hudood Punishments (e.g. whipping, stoning, amputation, etc.); a demand for good governance (access to fair courts, diminished corruption, provision of public services); and restrictions on women. They found that while respondents who understood Shari'ah in terms of scriptural literalism (e.g. Hudood punishments) were more likely to support Islamist political violence, those who understood it as good governance or restricting women in public life were less likely to do so.[17]

Using data from Pew Research Center's 2011/12 World's Muslims Data Set, Fair, Hamza and Heller[18] next explored whether this framework explains support for suicide bombing in Bangladesh, which is another large Muslim-majority country in South Asia, that recognized Islam as the basis of law and had been part of Pakistan until 1971.[19] However, they also explicitly controlled for respondent attitudes towards secularism. In general, they replicated the major findings of Fair, Littman, and Nugent for Pakistan in that scriptural literalism positively correlated with support for suicide attacks while other dimensions of Shari'ah were not statistically significant. They also found that support for secularism is negatively correlated. These results may not be so surprising given the ostensible commonalties between Pakistan and Bangladesh. The question remains whether the instrumentalization of Shari'ah, proffered by Fair, Littman and Nugent, explains support for Islamist violence among Muslim polities that differ from Bangladesh or Pakistan geographically, demographically, politically, historically or in dominant sectarian commitments embraced by their polities.

In this replication study, we examine whether this framework proffered by Fair, Littman and Nugent explains support for Islamist violence in countries that differ from Pakistan or Bangladesh historically, geographically, politically, socially, demographically and with respect to the Islamic interpretative traditions embraced by the populations. Here, we apply their concept to several Muslim-minority countries in West Africa, including: Ghana (population 28 Million, 18% of which is Muslim),[20] Cameroon (population 26 million, 21% Muslim),[21] Guinea Bissau (1.8 Million, 45.1% Muslim),[22] and Liberia (5 million, 12% Muslim).[23] Examining these countries is important both theoretically and practically. Most scholarly inquiries into support for Islamist violence dilates upon Muslims in Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East, North Africa as well as South and Southeast Asia. While scholars have also looked at support for Islamist violence in Africa, most works primarily focus on countries with Muslim majority or near majority populations. These four countries are all Muslim minority states, although Guinea Bissau has a large minority (45 percent). Also, studies tend to focus upon support in countries in which Islamist violence has taken place with some frequency. It is important to test Muslims' support for Islamist violence not only in countries where they have been influenced by exposure, but in those where such an occurrence is limited. Given the myriad differences between these countries on the one hand and Pakistan on the other, this is a hard test of the Fair, Littman and Nugent framework.

All four are Muslim-minority countries and with exception of Cameroon, these four countries have exhibited limited encounters with Islamist terrorism. Even then, the operation of such groups in Cameroon is a recent

development. With the data limitations from countries included in the Pew Research Center's surveys,[24] Cameroon, Liberia, Ghana, and Guinea Bissau were four countries that fit our research criteria and have not been investigated in this light thus far.

To do so, we leverage data from the Pew Research Center's 2009 *Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa* survey, which includes data from 25,000 Muslims and non-Muslims across nineteen countries.[25] As we discuss below, because these countries have small Muslim minorities, our analytical samples are small ranging between 245 and 373. Despite these small samples, our findings support the key elements of the Fair, Littman and Nugent framework. Consistent with that study, we find that in Ghana and Liberia, support for scriptural literalism coincides with support for religious violence while finding no correlation between religiosity and support for violence in any of the four countries. While Fair, Littman and Nugent did not examine secularism, Fair, Hamza and Heller did and found an inverse relationship between support for secularism and support for terrorism. We found no statistical relationship in three of the countries, but, in Guinea Bissau, we find a positive relationship. In all four countries, socio-economic status is insignificant.

We organize the remainder of this article as follows. First, provide brief background sketches of the four countries, focusing upon religion, ethnic and political challenges. Next, we provide an overview of the limited extent of Islamist militancy in the four countries in our sample to demonstrate that this is rare and recent phenomenon. Third, we review the extant scholarly literature that is germane to explaining individual support for Islamist violence. Fourth, we describe the data and analytical methods we employ in this study. Penultimately, we discuss the results and conclude with a discussion of the policy implications of our findings.

## Background on the Countries in our Sample

In this section, we provide a brief description of the countries in our sample focusing upon the ethnic and religious composition of the countries and major features of domestic politics, which may aid us in interpreting the results of our analysis. All four countries, while differing in many ways, have several features in common. They all evidence diversity with respect to ethnicity and creed. Christian and Muslim communities have evolved considerably in the last sixty years as Pentecostalism is supplanting older traditional denominations and Wahhabi versions of Islam displace traditional Sufi identifications. Thus in both traditions, the most zealous and stringent are becoming ever more prominent producing sectarian and communal conflicts in countries that are already vulnerable to conflict in nearby countries. All are young countries with about 60% of their populations under 25.

### Cameroon

Cameroon, with a population of 25.6 million, is a young country with 60% of the population under the age of 25. It also diverse with respect ethnicity and religious identifications. While no ethnic group is in the majority, "Cameroon Highlanders" are the plurality with 31%, followed by the Equatorial Bantu (19%), Kirdi (11%), Fulani (10%), as well as smaller groups (Northwestern Bantu, Eastern Nigritic among other African and non-African ethnic groups). The country is overwhelmingly Christian although Christians are divided among Roman Catholics who are 38.4% of the country, Protestants (26.3%) and other Christians (4.5%) while Muslims comprise 20.9% of the populations. The remainder are animist (5.6%), non-believers or others (4.2%). [26] According to a 2012 Pew study, among Muslims, 27% identify as Sunni, 3% as Shia, 40% as "just a Muslim," and 17 percent as "something else." Additionally, 12% identify as Ahmadiyya. Some 45 percent belong to a Sufi order, the most common of which is the 19th-Century Tijaniyyah Sufi order;[27] however as noted below this changing. In 2010, Pew found evidence of considerable communal distrust: more than half (57%) of Christians thought Muslims were violent and one in four (24%) of Muslims thought that Christians were violent.[28]

Johnson (2017) notes that in recent decades the religious landscapes of both Muslim and Christian communities have experienced profound changes which have the potential to profoundly disrupt social relations with potential for violence. On the Christian side, Pentecostal movements emerged in in French-speaking Cameroon in the 1960s. (Previously they were only in English-speaking Cameroon.) Established churches reviled the

Pentecostal churches. At the same time, Catholicism also underwent a "Charismatic renewal movement," in part in response to the spread of Protestant Pentecostalism. Christian churches began moving into new geographies in part due to the expanding mobility of their adherents who increasingly found themselves in places where no church existed from their denomination and who organized to establish them. Whereas established churches centered around denomination (i.e. Baptists, Reformed, Lutherans, Catholics, etc.), newer churches, which called themselves Evangelical or Pentecostal, were "individual enterprises under the leadership of a guide who called himself pastor, apostle, or prophet," many of whom had little pastoral training. In recent decades, Cameroon has been beset with religious television programming, which allows them to affiliate with a pastor perhaps thousands of miles away.[29]

Islam in Cameroon has also undergone considerable change over roughly the same time frame. In the early nineteenth century, Islam tended to be centered in the north which was dominated by ethnic Kirdi who were governed by the Fulanis who, while only one third of the population, were in political control. The first development in modern history took place in the 1970s when Ahmadou Ahidjo, a Fulani Muslim, became the head of state. This ushered in a period of "Fulanization," which has sometimes been associated inaccurately as "Islamization." During his tenure, traditional chiefs came under pressure to bring their Kirdi populations into the fold of Islam. This was more of a political move than a religious one. Many Kirdis abandoned Islam as soon as Ahidjo was out of power. As with Christianity, Islam began moving from the north to the south following the migration of Cameroonians for schooling or employment. In large cities, mosques became a visible focal point. The imams, who were doctrinally unified and recognized both by the worshipers and by the state, played what Johnson calls a "federating role for all Muslims, from the north as well as the south of Cameroon."[30] Wahhabism came to Cameroon in the 1980s due to the efforts of Arab Gulf State monarchies, which—enriched by their oil reserves—began to propound Wahhabism aggressively in Africa. Africans received scholarships in Islamic studies, which bequeathed to Cameroon a generation of new religious intellectuals, who differed from former faith leaders. Whereas mosques were previously founded with denominational unity, new Wahhabi institutions (mosques, papers, NGOs and proselytization organization) functioned autonomously. Finally, as happened with Christianity, Wahhabi Islam became increasingly available on television and the internet.[31]

Taken together, this democratization of both faiths has allowed very intolerant and zealous variants of Christianity and Islam to compete with and overtake more traditional denominations. Moreover, Cameroon is a conflict-prone regional environment, due to the attacks by Boko Haram and the political instability in neighboring Central African Republic. In light of these issues, Johnson worries that "Cameroon is exposed to risks of internal and external conflicts: religious intolerance finds a fertile terrain there because of ethnic cleavages and the latent resentments arising from social inequalities."[32]

*Ghana*

Ghana, with a population of 28.1 million, is also a young country with 57% of its citizens under 25. The largest ethnic group is the Akan, with 47.5% of the population. The next largest group is the Mole-Dagbon (16.6%), followed by the Ewe (13.9%), and several other smaller groups (Ga-Dangme, Gurma, Guan, Grusi, Mande.) The country is overwhelmingly Christian (71%), although there is considerable diversity (Pentecostal/Charismatic (28.3%), Protestant (18.4%), Catholic (13.1%), other (11.4%)). Muslims comprise 17.6% of the population while the remainder identify as traditional (5.2%), none (5.2%) or other (0.8%).[33] Among Muslims in Ghana, 51% identify as "Sunni," in the afore-noted Pew poll, 8% as Shia, 16% as "something else" and 13% as "just a Muslim." Slightly more than one in three (37%) identify as Sufi Muslims and the Tijaniyyah order is the most common.[34] Pew found high levels of inter-communal distrust with 61% of Christians believing Muslims are violent while only 11% of Muslims hold this view of Christians.[35]

As with Cameroon, Wahhabism became more common in Ghana in the 1980s through similar means, where it began to conflict with traditional Sufi adherents whose practices are reviled by Wahhabis. However, it first came to the country sometime around the 1940s. It spread through Quranic schools. The aim of these early

Wahhabis was the reform of Muslims who espouse un-Islamic practices, notably adherents of Sufi orders such as Tijaniyyah. This resulted in religious tensions that predate the oil-fueled expansion of Wahhabism in the 1980s: by the 1970s the Tijaniyyah was no longer the majority tradition.[36] As with Cameroon, while Wahhabism has undercut support for traditional Muslim practices, Pentecostalism and other forms of charismatic Christianity is also competing for influence among the country's Christian population. Given the effective use of religious media by both groups over several decades, both Wahhabi Islam and charismatic Christian movements are part of global religious flows.[37]

## Guinea Bissau

Guinea Bissau is the smallest country in our sample with a meagre 1.8 million. It too is a young country without about 60% of its population under 25. It is ethnically diverse with the Fulani being the largest (28.5%), followed by the Balanta (22.5%), Mandinga (14.7%), Papel (9.1%) and Manjaco (8.3%). Smaller groups such as the Beafada, Mancanha, Bijago, Felupe, Mansoanca, Balanta comprise the remainder. Of the four, Guinea Bissau has the largest percentage of Muslims (45.1%) while Christian make up 22.1%, animist 14.9%, while rest either identify as animist or with no religion.[38] Among Muslims, according to Pew, 40% identify as Sunni, 6% as Shia, 2% as Something Else or 36% as Just a Muslim. Forty percent identify with a Sufi order, of which the Tijaniyyah order is most popular.[39] Despite the fact that a majority of citizens identify with Islam or Christianity, politics in Guinea Bissau rely upon animism as the "traditional" faith.[40] There is little scholarly literature on the evolution of either Islam or Christianity in this country. Curiously, among the four countries studied here, there seems to be greater religious tolerance. Pew found in 2010 that only one in five Christians believed Muslims were violent while only 13 percent of Muslims believed Christians were violent.[41] The country also has a history of political instability (inclusive of civil war and multiple coups, the most recent of which occurred in 2012) as well as a shambolic economy, inadequate education infrastructure, pervasive corruption, endemic poverty, and various forms of criminality. Many families send their male children to study in Quranic schools in Senegal and Gambia where they are forced to beg.[42]

## Liberia

Liberia has a population of 4.8 million, which is extremely diverse ethnically with no singular ethnic group dominating. The Kpelle is the largest (20.3%) followed by the Bassa (13.4%); Grebo (10%); Gio (8%); Mano (7.9%) Kru (6%) in addition to several others that comprise fewer than 5% (i.e. Lorma, Kissi, Gola Krahn, Vai, Mandingo; Gbandi). With respect to religion, a majority (86%) are Christian while 12% are Muslim. The remainder are comprised of other faiths each of which are embraced by fewer than 1% of the population.[43] Of the Muslim population, 38% identify as Sunni, 9% as Shia, 10% as "something else," and 22% as "just a Muslim." Nearly one in 10 identifies as Ahmadiyya. Forty-five percent identify with a Sufi tradition, the most common of which is the Tijaniyyah order.[44] As with other countries in this study, Pew found considerable communal distrust with 43% of Christians believing Muslims to be violent in comparison to 20% of Muslims who viewed Christians as violent.[45]

As elsewhere Pentecostalism has grown rapidly in Liberia, driven by many of the same dynamics noted above. The Pentecostal churches have sought assert to themselves as the most salient and efficacious church for Liberians.[46] Less is known about the changes within the Muslim community apart from the fact that Muslims suffered various forms of exclusion and discrimination and that, during the 1980s, Muslims benefitted from scholarships to study in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. During this time, Liberian Muslims began forging closer ties to Muslims elsewhere in West Africa, such as Guinea and Sierra Leone. In post-conflict Liberia, Muslims remain politically marginalized and the object of mistrust. While Liberia's civil war (1989-2003) which rendered some 250,000 persons refugees and while internally displacing another half million is generally viewed as non-religious in nature, there were religious overtones. For example, Christians sought to use the war to attack and wipe out Muslims largely because of the belief that Liberia is a Christian country and Muslims should go elsewhere, such as Guinea.[47]

## *Overview of Islamist Terrorism in West Africa*

Prior to 9/11, West Africa was mostly free of terrorist threats and Islamist militancy. The rise and spread of such groups in the region have occurred more recently compared to the rest of the continent.[48] According to the U.S. Department of State, the primary Islamist militant group operating in the region is Nigeria-based Boko Haram and its offshoot, Islamic State-West Africa (IS-WA). While its stronghold is Nigeria, it is also active in Chad, Niger and Northern Cameroon where it conducts terrorist attacks, targeted killings, and kidnappings. In Cameroon, most Islamist militancy and terrorism is concentrated in the Lake Chad Basin, which involves Northern Cameroon, and along the Cameroon-Nigeria border.[49]

Both Boko Haram and IS-WA reject modern geographical boundaries and seek to restore the caliphate. For Boko Haram, this means restoring the boundaries of the Sokoto Caliphate encompassing Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, and Burkina Faso. Abubakar Shekau's 2010 reorganization of Boko Haram has led to religious and sectarian cleansing of Christian areas and establishing Islamic rule extending to Cameroon's bordering villages. [50] Weak border security, instability, and existing conflict in the Lake Chad basin has only continued to fuel the insurgency.

In addition to Boko Haram and its offshoot IS-WA, influence from other regional terrorist groups is continuing to spread and only increasing the likelihood of spillover conflict in neighboring states. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Ansar Dine, and the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) are three active Islamist groups in the region who pose such a threat. AQIM originated in Algeria and is active in Mali, Niger, Libya, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia. Ansar Dine is primarily active in Mali, and MUJAO, operates in Mali, Niger, Algeria and Burkina Faso.[51] Terrorist threats from within these countries as well as those across the continent have severe and diverse ramifications. Particularly, Islamism in Nigeria and Mali increases the risk of Islamist terrorism spreading across the region. Additionally, the region's permeable borders, potential affiliation among terrorist groups, creation of illicit financial networks to support these groups, and political and economic instability raises concerns for the entire West African region.[52] (See Tables 1 and 2, which depict the number of terrorist attacks and resulting casualties in Cameroon, Liberia, Ghana, and Guinea Bissau from 2009 to 2016.)

**Table 1.** Total Events

| Country | Year | | | | | | | |
|---------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
|         | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 |
| Cameroon | 1 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 67 | 82 | 54 |
| Ghana | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Guinea-Bissau | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Liberia | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |

**Source:** In-house manipulation of data from the Global Terrorism Database. National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). (2017). Global Terrorism Database [Data file]. Retrieved from https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd.

**Table 2.** Casualties (Fatalities and Wounded)

| Country | Year | | | | | | | |
|---------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
|         | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 |
| Cameroon | 0 | 7 | 4 | 0 | 7 | 806 | 1411 | 569 |
| Ghana | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Guinea-Bissau | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Liberia | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

**Source:** In-house manipulation of data from the Global Terrorism Database. National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). (2017). Global Terrorism Database [Data file]. Retrieved from https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd.

## Why Some Muslims Support Islamist Violence: What the Literature Says

Here, we review the extant literature on support for Islamist violence to generate testable hypotheses about the lineaments of respondent support for terrorism. Generally speaking, the literature explores the following explanations for support for violence: the Clash of Civilizations and the derived notions of scriptural literalism, religiosity and piety; commitments to secularism; and socio-economic status. We review these concepts in turn below.

### Clash of Civilizations

To explain support for Islamist violence, scholars frequently mobilize Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis which posits a fundamental conflict between the Christian West and the so-called Islamic World and asserts that support for terrorism derives from embracing Islam.[53] Empirical studies are discordant. Tessler and Robbins;[54] Esposito;[55] Tessler and Nachtwey[56] find little association between simply believing in Islam and supporting violent politics; however, Weinberg, Pedazhur, and Canetti Nisim[57] as well as Ginges, Hansen, and Norenzayan[58] do find support for the asserted causal relationship between Islamic piety and political violence. When analysts have found correlation between embracing Islam and violence, the relationship seems to be driven by a particular understanding of Islam (e.g., for example, beliefs about the efficacy or compulsory nature of individual militarized jihad).[59] Other studies have found that adherence to specific sectarian traditions predict support for Islamist militant groups.[60] At least two scholars have presented limited evidence that individuals with greater knowledge of Islam, obtained through Quranic study groups and other pietic practices, are better able to resist the arguments of militant thought leaders and thus less likely to support Islamist militant politics.[61]

Two studies have argued that it is not embrace of Islam that explains support for Islamist violence; rather it is the embrace of scriptural literalism.[62] Ciftci, O'Donnell, and Tanner[63] assess multiple variables on support for al-Qaeda and determine that strong correlation exists between literalist interpretations of Islam and support for al-Qaeda. They conclude that a belief in literalist interpretations of Islam rather than religiosity accounts for respondent support for al-Qaeda's violence. This accords a similar finding of Fair, Littman and Nugent who, based upon their review of extant literature, argue that it is not support for Shari'ah per se that best accounts for individual support of Islamist violence in Pakistan; rather the way in which support for Shari'ah is instrumentalized. They argue that support for Shar'iah should be decomposed into three concepts: support for Islamic scripturalism which includes support for physical punishments often called Hudood (whipping, stoning, amputation); support for good governance and restrictions upon women. They test their supposition formally using unique data collected from a large, nationally representative survey of Pakistan and find that only support for Hudood punishments explains support for violence. Fair, Ali, and Heller extend the Fair, Littman and Nugent findings to Bangladesh and conclude that there is no statistically significant relationship between piety and support for violence, but scriptural literalism does lead to significant correlations to support for violence. These studies give rise to two testable hypotheses:

>**H1:** Respondents who embrace literalist interpretations of Shari'ah will be more supportive of Islamist violence.

>**H2:** Religiosity is not correlated with tolerance of terrorist activities like suicide bombing.

### Commitments to Secularism

Fox,[64] in his study of whether secularist policies in state constitutions are consistent with observed relations between the state and religion, finds that constitutional clauses on the separation of state and religion influence state sponsorship of the religion. However, most states do not fully meet the standards of separation of religion and state. While many scholars have studied the relationship between religiosity and support for violence,

there remains limited scholarship on the relationship between secularism and support for Islamist violence. In an expansion of his previous work, Fox[65] investigates the discrimination of religious minorities in Muslim-majority states. While a majority of the states in the Middle East contain some form of religious freedom legislation, religious minorities still face high levels of discrimination. He concludes that discrimination is most present in states with autocratic regimes or which present a single state religion. Fair, Hamza, and Heller directly examine the relationship between support for secularism for Islamist violence. Using data from the *Pew Research Center's World's Muslims Survey*[66] to measure support for Islamist violence in Bangladesh, they find a negative relationship between support for secularism and support for Islamist violence. This gives rise to our third hypothesis, namely:

**H3:** Secularism is negatively correlated with support for Islamist terrorist attacks like suicide bombing.

*Socioeconomic Status*

The notion that poverty and support for terrorism share a causal and positively correlated relationship has long been debated and disputed by many scholars. Previous studies have found little evidence linking poverty or education to support for terrorism.[67] Ethan Bueno de Mesquita[68] in his study of the relationship between economic conditions and terrorist mobilization finds that while poorer economic conditions correlate with increased terrorist mobilization, terrorists themselves are not likely to be poorer or less educated than the populations from which organizations recruit. This is because during periods of economic depression, the opportunity costs of participating in militancy for persons with higher "human capital" endowments is lower relative to periods of economic growth. This means that there are more higher-quality persons who want to be a terrorist than groups have need for personnel. Thus, militant organizations have the luxury of "hiring" better qualified persons who are available in the pool of potential recruits during economic retrenchment.[69] Under these demand-constrained conditions, terrorist groups can select the best persons available. When economies perform poorly, more educated or skilled persons become available relative to better times and the opportunity costs for higher quality persons to join a terrorist group decline. This may explain why terrorists tend to be better educated relative to the populations from which they come even while the overall economic well-being of the country or community may be relatively underperforming.[70]

Empirical tests of the relationship between socioeconomics and support for Islamist militancy produce either mixed or countervailing evidence for the claim, depending on the country studied or the specifics of the model employed. For example, Shafiq and Sinno found that in Indonesia and Jordan, the wealthiest respondents are most supportive of suicide bombing that target civilians while in Pakistan the wealthiest respondents were least supportive. However, in Jordan, Morocco, and Turkey, support for bombings against civilians were comparable across income quartiles. When they examined support for suicide attacks against Westerners in Iraq, a different set of patterns emerged. In Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, the wealthiest were less supportive of the tactic while the richest in Pakistan were most supportive. They found no obvious pattern between per capita income quartile and support for such attacks in Morocco.[71]

In contrast, Sirgy, Joshanloo, and Estes[72] posited that support for political militancy is influenced by one's sense of economic ill-being and a strong sense of Muslim religiosity. The authors test a quality of life model and conclude that Muslims that are economically deprived and live in politically unfree states tend to support Jihadist terrorism as a solution to problems such as corruption, crime, social conflict, poverty, and unemployment.[73]

These studies are typical of the literature in which various authors find that the relationship between income and support for suicide bombings varies across the countries studied and the targets of the attacks. Inputs into socio-economic status such as education produce similarly divergent results, as one would expect.[74]

Given these varied divergent empirical findings, we posit the below Null hypothesis.

**H4:** Socio-economic status will not be related to support for Islamist violence.

### Analytical Methods and Data

This is principally a replication study of Fair, Littman and Nugent, who used a unique dataset derived from a survey they fielded in Pakistan, and extended by Fair, Hamza, and Heller using publicly available data from Pew. For this reason, it would have been optimal to use Pew's "World's Muslims Data Set," which was used by Fair, Hamza and Heller. Unfortunately, that dataset did not include the countries of interest investigated in this effort. For this reason, both to test the above-posited four main hypotheses and in-turn conduct our replication study, we employ data from the Pew Research Center's *Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa*[75] for which Pew fielded surveys between December 2008 and April 2009 using face-to-face interviews of individuals between the ages of eighteen and ninety-seven across nineteen countries in the respective national languages. We use survey samples for four Muslim-minority countries, namely: Liberia, Cameroon, Ghana, and Guinea Bissau.[76] While the sample sizes range from 1,000 respondents (in Guinea Bissau) 1,503 respondents (in Cameroon), these samples include both Muslims and non-Muslims. In this study, we only employ responses from Muslim survey participants. This resulted in survey samples that range from 245 respondents (for Cameroon) to 373 (for Guinea Bissau). We provide information about the samples used in this study from each country in Table 3, below.

**Table 3:** Information about Country-Specific Survey Samples

| Country Name | Total Sample Size | # of Non-Muslims in Sample | # of Muslims in Sample | Margin of Error Among Muslims |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cameroon | 1,503 | 1,209 | 245 | ±9 points |
| Ghana | 1,500 | 1,148 | 339 | ±7 points |
| Guinea Bissau | 1,000 | 619 | 373 | ±7 points |
| Liberia | 1,500 | 1,040 | 279 | ±8 points |

Enumerators asked respondents numerous survey items that pertained to respondent religious beliefs and practices in effort to gauge respondents' knowledge of and attitudes toward other faiths. The survey effort also sought to assess respondents' levels of political and economic satisfaction; concerns about crime, corruption and extremism; positions on issues such as abortion and polygamy; as well as views of democracy, religious law and the place of women in society.

*Instrumentalization*

Because this is principally a replication study, we used the same survey questions as employed by Fair, Hamza, and Heller. Fortunately, Pew tends to use the same questions in their multi-country survey efforts over many years, enabling us to follow their instrumentalization procedures unless otherwise noted. We acknowledge that while the questions are identical or nearly identical in the English versions of the respective questionnaires, respondents may interpret the questions differently in these varied political and/or temporal contexts. Equally important to note is that these survey items may take on different connotations or denotations once translated into the relevant languages in each country depending upon the translation choices of Pew's implementing partners. Taken together, while we may believe we are asking the same question of respondents in different countries in different years, the questions may differ in subtle ways or be understood by respondents to be different. Unfortunately, because Pew does not provide the translations of their questionnaires, we are unable to verify the translations Pew uses, even if we could muster the requisite linguistic expertise to do so.

In order to test H1, we created a Hudood index similar to that in Fair, Hamza, and Heller. This index includes seven survey questions which reflect an individual's support for literalist interpretation of Islamic or Shari'ah

law as the official legal code in their country and the approval of punishments in accordance to Shari'ah law. The index ranges from 0 to 1, where "0" indicates little support of Hudood laws and "1" indicates the most support. To construct the Hudood index, we use survey questions 54, 55, 95a, 95b, 95c, 95d, and 95e, which we provide in Appendix 1.

In order to test H2, we create a Religiosity index. This index includes six questions that measure the respondent's self-reported commitment to religious practices. The index has values between 0 and 1, with "0" indicating the least amount of commitment to religious practices and "1" indicating the maximum possible. The To construct the Religiosity index, we employ survey items 42, 64, 65, 66a, 68j, and 68k from the survey, which we detail in Appendix 1.

To test H3, we create a Secularism index that measures the respondents' support for secularism. The index ranges from 0 to 1, with "0" corresponding with the least amount of support for secularism and "1" corresponding with the most support. We derive the Secularism index from questions 12a and 14 from the survey, which we detail in Appendix 1.

In order to test H4, we would prefer a direct measure of respondent income. Unfortunately, Pew's *Tolerance and Tension* Survey[77] does not include any question about actual income. Thus, per force, we use a survey item (Question 101) that proxies income in that it measures the respondent's self-perceived economic status. This question asks respondents to rank their self-perceived economic status as being "very bad", "somewhat bad", "somewhat good", and "very good". We recoded this variable to have a range of 0 to 1, with "0" corresponding to low ("very bad") and "1" corresponding to high ("very good"). It turns out that Fair, Hamza, and Heller had empirical concerns about the way in which Pew collected income data in the survey the employed and thus used the same question to study the linkages between economic status on the one hand and support for Islamist violence on the other.

Finally, we derived our dependent variable from Question 88 which asks: "Some people think that the tactic of using arms and violence against civilians in defense of their religion is justified. Other people believe that, no matter what the reason, this kind of violence is never justified. How about you? Do you personally feel that the tactic of using arms and violence against civilians in defense of your religion can be often justified, sometimes justified, rarely justified, or never justified?" As noted by Fair, Hamza, and Heller, this question is sub-optimal in several respects. First, it conflates the goal of defending one's faith with the tactic of "using arms and violence against civilians." Second, the goal is highly emotive: defending Islam.

*Methodology*

We use the below basic model specification:

$$Y_i = \alpha + YX_i + \varepsilon$$

Here, i refers to the respondent, $\alpha$ is a constant, $\varepsilon$ is an error term and X refers to a vector of respondent-level characteristics, including the study variables as well as the control variables employed by Fair, Hamza and Heller namely: education level, access to internet, and gender. We estimate the models for the four countries separately using ordered logistic regressions. Doing so permits the coefficients on study variables to change for each country. Survey responses listed as "don't know" or "refused" were treated as missing, which further reduces national sample sizes in the regressions. We have placed the descriptive statistics for the dependent and independent variables for Cameroon, Ghana, Guinea Bissau and Liberia in Tables 4 through 7 respectively. We provide the regression results in Table 8.

**Table 4**: Descriptive Statistics for Cameroon

| Variable | N | Mean | Std. Dev. | Range | Percentiles | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | 10% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 90% |
| Dep. Var. | 237 | 0.2518 | 0.3590 | 0-1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.6667 | 1 |
| Hudood | 235 | 0.5951 | 0.2400 | 0-1 | 0.2857 | 0.4286 | 0.5714 | 0.8571 | 0.8571 |
| Religiosity | 232 | 0.9122 | 0.1023 | 0-1 | 0.75 | 0.8333 | 0.9583 | 1 | 1 |
| Secularism | 236 | 0.3298 | 0.2999 | 0-1 | 0 | 0 | 0.1667 | 0.5 | 0.6667 |
| Income | 233 | 0.3577 | 0.3374 | 0-1 | 0 | 0 | 0.3333 | 0.6667 | 1 |
| Gender | 245 | 0.6735 | 0.4699 | 0-1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Education | 244 | 0.2541 | 0.3026 | 0-1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.5 | 0.5 |
| Internet | 245 | 0.1429 | 0.3506 | 0-1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |

Source: In-house calculations of Pew Data

**Table 5**: Descriptive Statistics for Ghana

| Variable | N | Mean | Std. Dev. | Range | Percentiles | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | 10% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 90% |
| Dep. Var. | 320 | 0.3667 | 0.3909 | 0-1 | 0 | 0 | 0.3333 | 0.6667 | 1 |
| Hudood | 315 | 0.6340 | 0.2801 | 0-1 | 0.2857 | 0.4286 | 0.5714 | 1 | 1 |
| Religiosity | 317 | 0.8996 | 0.1141 | 0-1 | 0.7083 | 0.8333 | 0.9167 | 1 | 1 |
| Secularism | 333 | 0.3293 | 0.2707 | 0-1 | 0 | 0 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 0.6667 |
| Income | 216 | 0.4475 | 0.3407 | 0-1 | 0 | 0.3333 | 0.3333 | 0.6667 | 1 |
| Gender | 339 | 0.5811 | 0.4941 | 0-1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Education | 338 | 0.3018 | 0.3723 | 0-1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.5 | 1 |
| Internet | 338 | 0.1893 | 0.3924 | 0-1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |

Source: In-house calculations of Pew Data

**Table 6**: Descriptive Statistics for Guinea Bissau

| Variable | N | Mean | Std. Dev. | Range | Percentiles | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | 10% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 90% |
| Dep. Var. | 353 | 0.4750 | 0.3828 | 0-1 | 0 | 0 | 0.6667 | 0.6667 | 1 |
| Hudood | 304 | 0.5832 | 0.2509 | 0-1 | 0.2857 | 0.4286 | 0.5714 | 0.7143 | 0.8571 |
| Religiosity | 311 | 0.9061 | 0.1249 | 0-1 | 0.6667 | 0.8333 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Secularism | 348 | 0.2356 | 0.2550 | 0-1 | 0 | 0 | 0.1667 | 0.5 | 0.5 |
| Income | 318 | 0.4109 | 0.3576 | 0-1 | 0 | 0 | 0.3333 | 0.6667 | 1 |
| Gender | 373 | 0.5147 | 0.5005 | 0-1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Education | 362 | 0.3688 | 0.3350 | 0-1 | 0 | 0 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 1 |
| Internet | 362 | 0.1685 | 0.3748 | 0-1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |

Source: In-house calculations of Pew Data

**Table 7**: Descriptive Statistics for Liberia

| Variable | N | Mean | Std. Dev. | Range | Percentiles | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | 10% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 90% |
| Dep. Var. | 254 | 0.3110 | 0.4084 | 0-1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.6667 | 1 |
| Hudood | 234 | 0.6020 | 0.2366 | 0-1 | 0.2857 | 0.4286 | 0.5714 | 0.8571 | 1 |
| Religiosity | 232 | 0.9249 | 0.1071 | 0-1 | 0.7917 | 0.8333 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Secularism | 258 | 0.2138 | 0.2577 | 0-1 | 0 | 0 | 0.1667 | 0.5 | 0.5 |
| Income | 258 | 0.5129 | 0.3590 | 0-1 | 0 | 0.3333 | 0.6667 | 0.6667 | 1 |
| Gender | 279 | 0.6237 | 0.4853 | 0-1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Education | 277 | 0.2924 | 0.3395 | 0-1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.5 | 1 |
| Internet | 276 | 0.1812 | 0.3858 | 0-1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |

Source: In-house calculations of Pew Data

**Table 8**: Regression results: Support for Suicide Attacks

| | Cameroon | Ghana | Guinea Bissau | Liberia |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | b/se | b/se | b/se | b/se |
| Hudood | 0.143 | 2.228** | 1.040 | 2.382** |
| | (0.636) | (0.704) | (0.692) | (0.772) |
| Religiosity | 0.0573 | -0.147 | -2.515 | -0.543 |
| | (1.536) | (1.612) | (1.485) | (2.007) |
| Secularism | -0.0309 | 1.203 | 2.332** | -1.239 |
| | (0.498) | (0.652) | (0.816) | (0.690) |
| Income | 0.803 | -1.025 | 0.673 | -0.540 |
| | (0.472) | (0.564) | (0.504) | (0.508) |
| Gender | 0.0369 | 0.494 | 0.390 | -0.501 |
| | (0.335) | (0.362) | (0.348) | (0.361) |
| Education | 1.039 | 0.172 | 0.535 | 1.580** |
| | (0.570) | (0.533) | (0.541) | (0.567) |
| Internet | -0.159 | -1.545* | 0.177 | -0.544 |
| | (0.476) | (0.623) | (0.487) | (0.513) |
| Constant | -1.256 | -1.515 | 1.547 | -0.962 |
| | (1.421) | (1.509) | (1.372) | (1.826) |
| N | 203 | 175 | 192 | 176 |
| Pseudo R-Squared | 0.033 | 0.194 | 0.089 | 0.093 |
| DEPVAR Mean | 0.245 | 0.352 | 0.505 | 0.318 |
| * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001 | | | | |

## Results and Discussion

As the coefficients in Table 6 evidence, we generally find support for H1, which hypothesized that respondents who embrace more literalist interpretations of Shari'ah will be more supportive of Islamist violence. For Ghana and Liberia, the Hudood index is statistically significant and positive at the 0.01 confidence level. Cameroon and Guinea Bissau do not exhibit a statistically significant relationship even though the coefficients for both are zero. Because of our small sample size, we cannot rule out the possibility of a false negative (rejecting the

hypothesis when it is true) for Cameroon and Guinea Bissau.

Turning to H2, which hypothesized no correlation between religiosity and support for Islamist violence, we similarly find no relationship consistent with the findings of the study we replicate here. (Again, we cannot rule out the possibility of a false negative.)

With respect to H3, which hypothesized a negative relationship between secularism and support for Islamist violence, we find no statistically significant relationship in Cameroon, Ghana, and Liberia. However, Guinea Bissau exhibits a positive and statistically significant relationship at the 0.01 confidence level. This result for Guinea Bissau diverges from the findings of Fair, Hamza and Heller which found a significant and negative relationship for Bangladesh. (Fair, Littman and Nugent did not include a secularism variable in their model for Pakistan.) With the data limitations on hand, it is impossible in this effort to fully understand this finding. As the afore-noted description of Guinea Bissau details, this country differs from the other three in several key ways. First, it has the largest percentage of Muslims over all. Second, this also means that our sample is somewhat larger than the others. Third, despite the importance of Islam and Christianity, animism still retains considerable salience.

Finally, H4 hypothesized that socio-economic status is not related to support for Islamist violence. Consistent with H4, we found no evidence for such a correlation, with the above-given caveat.

We controlled for education, internet access, and gender. Education was only a significant variable in Liberia, which exhibited a positive relationship between higher levels of education and support for violence. Access to internet and gender were both statistically insignificant in all four countries.

### *Conclusion and Implications*

Public support for Islamist violence in Sub-Saharan and West African countries remains largely neglected by scholarship. Scholars seem to take interest in countries only after terrorism has become a notable challenge and they tend to focus upon Muslim-majority countries. This is unfortunate because there is likely utility in understanding the lineaments of support for violence in countries where such violence is relatively low or new. Equally important, there is an urgent requirement to better understand whether the lineaments of public support among Muslims in Muslim-minority countries differs substantially from those who live in Muslim-majority countries. With the exception of Guinea Bissau, which is 45.1% Muslim, all other countries have a Muslim population of 20% or less.

Unfortunately, there are no other extant datasets that permit the kind of evaluation that we have done here. However, these data are sub-optimal. While Pew's national samples were somewhat large, given the percentage of Muslims in each of these countries, we require analytical samples that are much larger or samples that are drawn exclusively from Muslims. (Note that it made no sense to include non-Muslims in our regressions, because non-Muslims did not answer the questions that form our various indices.) We hope that this research note will galvanize scholars to focus more attention on Muslim-minority countries and those which have not yet experienced Islamist violence. This latter point is important because once violence commences, respondents' views of violence may change. Respondents' views may harden as a result of exposure to violence and become more supportive. Alternatively, support may decline as they themselves experience the costs of violence.

Despite these empirical challenges, our findings provide considerable support for the framework offered by Fair, Littman and Nugent to understand the relationship between support for Islamic law on the one hand and Islamist violence on the other.

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*Appendix 1: Creating the Indices for Hudood, Religiosity, and Secularism*

| Index Name | Description | Survey Questions Used |
|---|---|---|
| **Hudood Index** | This index is based on seven questions and measures individuals' support for Hudood laws. Coded values range from 1 to 0 with the higher values corresponding to support for Hudood laws. Missing values, "Don't know", and "Refused" answers were coded as 0. | **Q54:** Which comes closest to your view? The Koran is the word of God, OR the Koran is a book written by men and is not the word of God?<br><br>**Q55:** Would you say that the Koran is to be taken literally, word for word, OR not everything in the Koran should be taken literally, word for word?<br><br>**Q95a:** Do you favor or oppose making shar'ia, or Islamic law, the official law of the land in our country?<br><br>**Q95b:** Do you favor or oppose giving Muslim leaders and religious judges the power to decide family and property disputes?<br><br>**Q95c:** Do you favor or oppose the death penalty for people who leave the Muslim religion?<br><br>**Q95d:** Do you favor or oppose punishments like whippings and cutting off of hands for crimes like theft and robbery?<br><br>**Q95e:** Do you favor or oppose stoning people who commit adultery? |
| **Religiosity Index** | This index is based on six questions and measured religiosity of individuals. Coded values range from 1 to 0 with the higher values meaning that the individual is more religious. Missing values, "Don't know", and "Refused" answers were coded as 0. | **Q42:** How important is religion in your life – very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not at all important?<br><br>**Q64:** People practice their religion in different ways. Outside of attending religious services, do you pray several times a day, once a day, a few times a week, once a week, a few times a month, seldom, or never?<br><br>**Q65:** *(For those who answered "several times a day" to Q64)* Do you pray all five salah every day, or not?<br><br>**Q66a:** Please tell me how often you read scripture outside of religious services? Would you say at least once a week, once or twice a month, several times a year, seldom, or never?<br><br>**Q68j:** Do you give zakat, that is give a set percentage of your wealth to charity or the mosque?<br><br>**Q68k:** Do you fast, that is avoid eating during the daytime, during the holy month of Ramadan? |
| **Secularism Index** | This index is based on two questions and measures secularism. Coded values range from 1 to 0 with the higher values corresponding to support for secularism. Missing values, "Don't know", and "Refused" answers were coded as 0. | **Q12a:** In your opinion, should religious leaders keep out of political matters - or should they express their views on political questions?<br><br>**Q14:** How do you feel about this statement: It's important to me that political leaders of our country have strong religious beliefs. Do you completely agree, mostly agree, mostly disagree or completely disagree with it? |

### Notes:

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