



# State Suppression: State Religion as an Explanatory Variable for Religious Intolerance

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## Religious Freedom in Islam

The Qur'an is the basis of Islamic law. The Qur'an has conflicting advice on religious freedom. Verse 2:256 says, in part, "There shall be no compulsion in" joining Islam. However, verse 58:6 says, in part, "Those who oppose God and His Messenger will be subdued....The unbelievers will have a demeaning punishment." This conflicting information means a country's individual interpretation of Shari'a, not its Muslim population size, will determine whether or not the country abuses religious minorities.

## Religious Freedom in Lebanon

Lebanon is about 30% Christian, 35% Sunni Muslim, and 35% Shi'a Muslim. Their government is a confessional democracy. Each religious group receives seats in parliament proportional to their population size (Leb. Const. art. 24). Although civil service positions should have a similar demographic makeup, Lebanon bans quota-based affirmative action (Leb. Const. art. 12).

Lebanon is legally secular, and the Constitution grants full religious freedom (Leb. Const. art. 9). However, blasphemy and religious hate speech are felonies (Leb. Penal Code arts. 473 & 474).

A small number of activists and populations claim Lebanese Christians are facing a genocide. This appears to be untrue. Christians in Lebanon are among the safest and most protected religious groups in the entire Middle East. Furthermore, population estimates indicate Christians are actually overrepresented in the Lebanese Parliament because the government uses outdated demographic data.

## Introduction

This paper was a qualitative study of state-sponsored religious intolerance in three countries: Iran, Indonesia, and Lebanon. The literature generally says there is a positive correlation between number of Muslims in a country and amount of religious intolerance. I argue this proposition is reductive. The Islamic World is very diverse and every country has its own interpretation of Islam. I find that, after studying Lebanon's, Iran's, and Indonesia's constitutions, this diversity is reflected in the legal and social realities in each country. For that reason, I believe it is smarter to use the existence of a state religion as the explanatory variable in these studies, not the size of the Muslim population.

## Religious Freedom in Iran

Iran is a theocracy with 99% of their population being Muslim, almost all of whom are Shi'as (Iran Const. art. 1). This means Iran bases its governing structure on the literal text of the Qur'an. Furthermore, Islam's Constitution says the Qur'an is the ultimate arbiter of all legal, political, and social issues (Iran Const. arts. 1, 2, & 4). Consequently, Shari'a law is the law of the land (Iran Const. arts. 4 & 170). Iranian courts may not apply any law that violates the Qur'an (Iran Const. art. 170).

Twelver Shi'aism is Iran's official religion. Other Islamic sects have full religious freedom (Iran Const. art. XVII). Constitutional amendments may not alter Twelver Shi'aism's status as the state religion (Iran Const. art. CLXXVII). Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians are the only legally recognized religious minorities (Iran Const. art. XIII). They may practice their religion freely, unless it violates the law and/or constitutes an affront to Islam (Iran Const. arts. XIII & XIV).

Different religious groups get different legal protections in Islam. For example, killing a Muslim is a capital crime, but killing a non-Muslim is not.

## Lebanon

- Muslim majority country.
- No state religion.

## Iran

- Muslim majority country.
- State religion is Shi'a Islam.

## Indonesia

- Largest Muslim population in the world.
- State is pantheistic.

## Religious Freedom in Indonesia

Indonesia has the largest Islamic population in the world. They are about 87% Muslim. The rest of the population is a mixture of Christians, Hindus, and Buddhists. Indonesia is a pantheistic state. Indonesians have full religious freedom, and there is no state religion (Indon. Const. art. 24, cl. 1 & 2). However, Indonesia's government is "based upon the belief in the One and Only God," (Indon. Const. art. 24, cl. 1).

Religious hate crimes and hate speech are punishable by fines and/or imprisonment. Atheistic evangelism is also illegal (Indon. Penal Code arts. 156; 156a, §§ a-b).

Human rights groups disagree on the degree to which the government has protected religious minorities. Some have given their government awards, while others have harshly criticized the government's failure to control sectarian violence.

## Conclusion

We should avoid using Muslim population size as the explanatory variable for the amount of religious persecution in the state. While the cases here illustrate that principle, I posit that Islam's status as the state religion causes that trend. Countries who take Shari'a seriously enough to make Islam the state religion have a strict interpretation of the Qur'an. Therefore, future scholars include "state religion" as a variable when measuring religious intolerance in a country.