

RELIGION AND THE PREVENTION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM: CURRENT DEBATES AND FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDAS

Peter Mandaville and Micah Musser

Contents

Introduction and Background . . . 2

Religion and Violent Extremism:
Areas of Consensus 2

*Religion Is Not a Primary Driver
of Radicalization*
*P/CVE and Religious Outreach
Will Endure*

Ongoing Debates About Religion
and Violent Extremism 4

Framing the Issue of P/CVE
*Religion, P/CVE, and the Role of
the State*
*Practical Problems in Religious
Engagement*

Practical Suggestions for
Policymakers 7

Further Research 9

Endnotes 10

About the Author. 9

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To explore the relationship of religion and preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE), the Berkley Center held a conference of leading experts from the United States and the United Kingdom to share their perspectives on the role of religion within P/CVE efforts. The major areas of consensus, points of disagreement, and recommendations for policymakers that emerged from the discussion, as well as questions requiring further research in the field of P/CVE, are captured in this discussion paper.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Religion has been a persistent point of focus in discussions about violent extremism over the years. Whether debating the sources of the problem or proposing solutions, analysts, policymakers, and practitioners have all recognized religion as a relevant component of the conversation—even if they have differed over how and when it matters. Thinking about the causes of violent extremism has undoubtedly grown more sophisticated over the years, with early debates about possible monocausal explanations—poverty, lack of democracy, radical interpretations of religion—giving way to a broad acceptance of the idea that violent extremism is a complex phenomenon with multiple contributing factors.

As a paradigm for policy and practice, countering violent extremism (CVE), or, we prefer to emphasize here, preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE), has undergone its own fair share of debate and evolution.¹ Most recently, followers of this space in the United States have been struck by the sharply differing policy approaches of the Obama and Trump administrations. The final two years of the Obama administration, dominated by the challenge of ISIS, saw enormous time and energy expended on an effort to define P/CVE as a major policy priority and to create global momentum around the issue. In stark contrast, the Trump administration has seemingly abandoned P/CVE in favor of an emphasis on what it terms “terrorism prevention” and a renewed focus on the “hard” tools of counter-terrorism (for example, military power, legal sanctions) as opposed to P/CVE’s focus on the supposedly “softer” societal factors that drive support for extremism groups.

Also noteworthy is a renewed focus by the Trump administration on the role of ideology, and Islamist extremism in particular, as a primary driver of violent extremism—a development which has prompted renewed discussion about the relationship between religion and violent extremism. To further explore the past and future relationship of religion and P/CVE, the Berkley Center held a conference of policymakers, practitioners, and leading researchers—including religion scholars—from the United States and the United Kingdom to share their perspectives on the role of religion within P/CVE efforts. This conference sought to identify areas of consensus, points of disagreement, recommendations for policymakers, and questions requiring further research as governments and practitioners seek to develop more effective P/CVE strategies. The major points that emerged from the discussion are captured in this discussion paper, along with possible future lines of inquiry in the field of P/CVE.

The final two years of the Obama administration, dominated by the challenge of ISIS, saw enormous time and energy expended on an effort to define P/CVE as a major policy priority and to create global momentum around the issue. In stark contrast, the Trump administration has seemingly abandoned P/CVE in favor of an emphasis on what it terms “terrorism prevention” and a renewed focus on the “hard” tools of counter-terrorism.

RELIGION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM: AREAS OF CONSENSUS

After nearly two decades of discussion and debate about the role played by religion as a contributing factor to violent extremism, a number of areas of consensus seem to have emerged among researchers and practitioners:

Religion Is Not a Primary Driver of Radicalization

Much scholarly research has examined the influence that religion exerts on violent extremism, and on some questions that research has achieved general consensus. Most research, for instance, has concluded that religion is usually not a primary driver of radicalization.² When religious beliefs do contribute to a person's willingness to embrace extremism, it is often only as a very late-stage factor interacting in complex ways with many other causal pathways. Structural and ideological causes of extremism are difficult to disentangle; moreover, there is no uniform pattern of radicalization anywhere. Religion and ideology may play a negligible role in one region but exert a more substantial influence on radicalization in another.³ Despite this variation, however, all participants agreed that it is important not to overemphasize the role of religion in promoting violent extremism.

Some noted that where official rhetoric broaches the topic of religion, it often emphasizes the negative role of ideology or theology in promoting radicalization while omitting reference to the ways in which religious adherence can discourage violent extremism. Reflecting this idea, one participant sounded a warning note by pointing out that while P/CVE experts and practitioners may have reached a consensus regarding the non-primacy of religion in radicalization, that same view was not prevalent among politicians—many of whom, he warned, continue to see political value in painting violent extremism as the product of a specific religious tradition, usually Islam.

P/CVE and Religious Outreach Will Endure

P/CVE strategies have become an increasingly important activity of Western governments since the early 2000s, participants agreed. Although the Trump administration's 2017 National Security Strategy dropped any reference to PVE efforts, its 2018 National Strategy for Counterterrorism includes a section on "Counter[ing] Terrorist Radicalization and Recruitment," which effectively reincorporates PVE into the strategic framework with a strong emphasis on countering negative ideologies.⁴ And as other governments around the world continue to dedicate resources to PVE programs of their own, the prevention of radicalization is likely to become a fixture of the international policy landscape for the foreseeable future.⁵

As the influence of P/CVE writ large has grown, so has the role of outreach to and engagement with religious communities and actors in public policymaking. Governments have acknowledged the importance of religious actors as part of civil society, and begun to build out and institutionalize capacity to engage with the religious sector. It is therefore to be expected that government engagement with religion includes questions of preventing violent extremism, particularly given the continued prevailing perception in some circles that religion represents a major dimension of the issue. Indeed, some participants noted that governments often have political incentives to emphasize religiously based narratives around violent extremism, whether as a reflection of rising Islamophobia, a relic of Cold War-era thinking regarding the significance of ideology, or an unwillingness to critique the policies and structural features of key regions such as the Middle East and Central Asia.

These problems, however, only underscore the consensus view that in the immediate future, governments will be likely to increase rather than decrease the attention paid to religion within the realm of P/CVE. The challenge is thus one of encouraging policymakers and practitioners to take a "right-sized" approach to religion that avoids the errors of either reducing the problem of violent extremism to religion, or neglecting religion's role entirely.

ONGOING DEBATES ABOUT RELIGION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Despite the areas of consensus identified above, participants also differed with each other over a number of key issues. Much of this comes down to the fact that the field of P/CVE continues to be plagued by definitional and conceptual disputes, and this lack of clarity is only compounded when sensitive questions of religion are involved. Normatively, speakers also clashed over the extent to which states should engage in the practice of shaping religious traditions. Finally, although many points garnered broad consensus, participants' perspectives diverged markedly on some practical questions.

Framing the Issue of P/CVE

A number of participants noted that many of the terms used by P/CVE practitioners lack clear definitions. Where, after all, are the distinctions between religion, theology, and ideology, especially when certain religious labels (such as "radical Islam") are so often described as problems of ideology? What exactly are we speaking of when we discuss "extremism," and does this imprecise term not sometimes impugn radical (in the sense of highly transformative) but non-violent theological stances? For both moral and legal reasons, several panelists highlighted the need to avoid over-using the label "extremist" as a means to silence or stigmatize certain forms of speech.

The field of P/CVE continues to be plagued by definitional and conceptual disputes, and this lack of clarity is only compounded when sensitive questions of religion are involved.

These disagreements become particularly problematic when one seeks to categorize religious actors. Governments, especially governments facing criticism from non-violent organizations with a religious identity, may label those groups as extremist in order to undermine their legitimacy or avoid engaging with their perspectives. The Egyptian government's current stance towards the Muslim Brotherhood is a case in point. These practices are harmful and amount to little more than the overt politicization of P/CVE and security-related designations to marginalize opposition voices and close civic space.

Nonetheless, participants also disagreed over the degree to which definitional clarity is necessary for P/CVE practitioners. While some suggested that the persistence of P/CVE without the creation of any coherent definitions was a recipe for imprecise and ineffective policymaking, others instead held that conceptual flexibility is necessary in any practical effort to reduce violent extremism. And while "extremism" may be difficult to defend adequately, it seems far easier to generate agreement on the meaning of "violent extremism," which some felt is the only definition in the field that ultimately matters.

Religion, P/CVE, and the Role of the State

Any attempt by a state to engage with a religious tradition will necessarily shape that tradition to some extent, and the converse is also true—religion will shape the state. Yet the process of shaping religious traditions raises important legal and moral questions regarding the establishment of religion and the degree of autonomy which religious traditions deserve. Conference participants were deeply divided over where to draw the line between acceptable state involvement and unacceptable privileging of certain traditions over others.

Many of these difficulties are particularly acute when dealing with the politics of "official Islam." Participants emphasized that it is important to understand that the history of Islamic theology is deeply intertwined with the history of political arrangements in the Middle East, and that much of the tradition's

theological development was driven by patronage support systems.⁶ To a certain extent, political power has always influenced theology and sought to encourage theological perspectives that could be amenable to political ends. But it is entirely unclear how this history should guide our ethical decision making in the present day, especially when one considers the dramatic difference in the degree of coercive power which can be exercised by the modern state as opposed to the more diffused centers of power in pre-modern politics.

And yet Muslim-majority states—particularly those where the ruling authorities derive some measure of legitimacy from religion—cannot simply set aside theological issues. Although it is standard in the West to expect a clear partition between church and state, in many Muslim-majority countries the more common expectation is that the state will play an active hand in shaping religious traditions. Parents want their children to be educated about Islam, and worshippers often want the state to sanction certain imams.⁷ At the same time, many citizens of Muslim-majority countries are quite uncomfortable with religious leaders adopting explicitly political roles, and appear instead to want their religious leaders to represent popular views to politicians.⁸ But it is broadly agreed that the state has some legitimate interest in overseeing at least some religious affairs, and the entry of Western governments may often disrupt the performance of these expected duties.

Although it is standard in the West to expect a clear partition between church and state, in many Muslim-majority countries the more common expectation is that the state will play an active hand in shaping religious traditions.

There are, in reality, two different levels of state engagement with religion, and the extent to which either is helpful for P/CVE is deeply contested. States must engage with the religious groups operating within their own borders, but it is unclear when this engagement begins to morph into a problematic attempt to guide theology. Should states in highly religious countries accede to democratic requests

to regulate some aspects of religious practice? Other participants observed that authoritarian states often use P/CVE projects to regulate religion in ways that strengthen the authoritarian regime, and since authoritarianism is a driving factor of violent extremism, religiously based P/CVE efforts may ultimately be self-defeating.

The second level is the engagement of the governments of countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom with countries in regions such as the Middle East and the religious traditions located within those states. Can these foreign governments proactively promote non-violent theological traditions without running afoul of their own commitments to avoiding state entanglement with religion? Importantly, because these two levels of state engagement—domestic and foreign—interact in complicated ways, a decision on the part of Western governments to avoid dealing with questions of religious substance may ultimately increase the degree of overall state entanglement with religion. Western governments, for instance, cannot contest the designation of certain groups as being "religious extremists" without making judgments about the legitimacy of their theological claims, but a failure to contest the designations of local governments may allow authoritarian regimes to unjustifiably police and stigmatize groups that do not in fact advocate for violent extremism.

At the same time, many citizens of Muslim-majority countries are quite uncomfortable with religious leaders adopting explicitly political roles.

The difficult question of where to draw the line between legitimate and illegitimate engagement is therefore further complicated by the myriad ways in which different states with different agendas interact

with and, at times, seek to co-opt religious traditions. Deep disagreement exists over how both regional and foreign states should formulate their policies of outreach to religious groups and actors.

Engaging ultraconservative figures may achieve short-term success in reducing violence, but if this engagement ultimately legitimates a broader agenda of intolerance towards, for example, women and religious minorities, then social conflict is only being deferred rather than addressed at root cause.

Practical Problems in Religious Engagement

On practical issues relating to state engagement with religion, participants largely agreed on the nature of the challenges, but disagreed on how to approach them. For example, there is broad consensus that engaging with religious leaders always poses a risk that those leaders will appear to have become co-opted by the state and will therefore lose their legitimacy. It remains unclear how to respond to this fact. Some participants suggested that states may best be served by conducting their outreach in secrecy so as to preserve the public image of religious leaders. Others instead held that there is nothing inherently

damaging about contact with the state, so long as religious figures can plausibly maintain and demonstrate that they have not been obligated to relinquish their freedom to criticize the state.

This disagreement intersects with a larger one. Attendees could not find consensus on either a) the types of religious leaders who can perform the most effective interventions to prevent violent extremism, or b) the value of religious leaders issuing statements and declarations condemning violence. Engaging ultraconservative figures may achieve short-term success in reducing violence, but if this engagement ultimately legitimates a broader agenda of intolerance towards, for example, women and religious minorities, then social conflict is only being deferred rather than addressed at root cause. At the same time, engaging with only moderate (that is, state-friendly) figures sends a clear message that the state prefers quietist and compliant religious voices, making religious actors able and willing to criticize the government (in addition to violent extremists) seem more credible. One promising suggestion was that new data-driven efforts to illuminate the religious landscape in local regions may provide tools to empirically identify the ideal interveners for a specific problem.

Some participants criticized what they termed an emerging "declaration culture" in which certain governments in the Middle East and elsewhere sponsor international conferences and summits where religious leaders gather to issue statements condemning violence and enjoining tolerance. For example, while the 2016 Marrakesh Declaration achieved wide condemnation of ISIS violence and argued for the protection of religious minorities as a core dimension of Islamic law, it did little to engage more conservative groups (such as Salafis) or to translate promising words into concrete actions. As one participant asked, "Are these declarations and the messages from these summits on tolerance even reaching anyone relevant?" At the same time, other participants defended the legitimacy of these declarations, suggesting that the value they contribute is not in the statements themselves, but in the norms they help to establish and in the discussions and negotiations that occur between religious leaders, governments, and civil society behind closed doors and on the sidelines of the pageantry.

The ethics and efficacy of intervening to shape everyday religious practice are even more fraught than the ethics of intervening to guide theological principles.

Assessing the empirical factors likely to lead to radicalization presented another thorny problem. Participants disagreed over whether certain religious education practices—for example, an emphasis on rote memorization—could be empirically linked to higher risks of radicalization. Even if certain types of religious practice could be successfully linked through empirical analysis to a higher risk of violent extremism, it is unclear how P/CVE practitioners should respond. If anything, the ethics and efficacy

of intervening to shape everyday religious practice are even more fraught than the ethics of intervening to guide theological principles. It was broadly agreed, however, that greater religious literacy can reduce susceptibility to violent extremism. More specifically, analysis of profiles of violent extremists who cited religious motivations for their actions show that many of these individuals often lacked a basic grounding in religious teaching. This raises the question of whether and how governments could make the promotion of religious literacy an important goal of P/CVE efforts beyond existing efforts by some states to train and certify religious leaders.

Finally, participants were divided on the question of how governments should allocate funds for P/CVE projects. All agreed that P/CVE funds have been used to justify spending on unimportant or trivial projects. Some participants suggested that P/CVE efforts should have no funding attached to them, both because diverting funding to P/CVE reduces the funding available for policy tools better equipped to address the underlying causes of violent extremism (for example, localized conflict, deficits in governance quality, certain forms of socioeconomic deprivation), and because funding in the P/CVE space may encourage rent-seeking among religious figures looking to find a means to bolster their own status and political influence. Other participants, however, noted instead that P/CVE funding may make certain communities visible to governments that otherwise would be underserved. Muslim communities in the United Kingdom, for instance, were traditionally deeply underserved in the allocation of community development resources, but this disparity has been partially rectified by the granting of P/CVE funds to these communities—even if, as others pointed out, the community comes to be defined first and foremost in terms of security risk.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

Participants articulated broad consensus on a number of strategies that can promote effective engagement between P/CVE practitioners and religious organizations and actors, as well as a number of clear pitfalls that should be avoided:

(a) When pursuing outreach to religious communities, it is critical that governments do not "start and stop at the theological." Violent extremism is driven by numerous factors, including psychological difficulties and a lack of livelihood opportunities, and an exclusive emphasis on religion will ultimately fail to address many of its underlying causes. Moreover, when practitioners do engage multiple topic areas in their P/CVE efforts, they may still treat these areas—economic development, religious outreach, public health—as conceptually distinct. In reality, religious actors are often also political actors or economic agents. Even efforts to address theology, then, cannot treat religious leaders as simply theologians but must be attentive to the way in which those leaders are positioned across different sectors in their respective societies.

(b) If outreach to religious communities is to be a key approach in P/CVE efforts, it must be sustained over time and not treated episodically. Often, governments will respond to religiously-motivated violence by

A common pitfall facing P/CVE practitioners relates to simple shortsightedness with respect to the various ways in which security-related activities can be politicized, co-opted, and adapted to serve a wide range of agendas. It is important for policymakers to consistently scrutinize the unanticipated consequences of their efforts, because states who engage with religion become participants in the construction of religion, whether they intend to do so or not.

dramatically increasing their investment in outreach programs and forging valuable connections with religious figures. If these programs are not sustained over time and the connections allowed to lapse, this policy approach may ultimately serve to alienate religious adherents by signaling to them that the government regards them in purely instrumental terms—as useful props—and lacks interest in their concerns or awareness of their deeper capacities. At the same time, significant expansion of P/CVE efforts focused on religion may constitute little more than religious regulation or violation of religious freedom under another name.

(c) The field of P/CVE is relatively recent and concepts of effective state engagement and partnerships with religion and religious actors have only begun to be developed systematically over the last decade. Several participants expressed concern that the field as a whole has not drawn sufficiently from previous approaches developed for addressing social conflict through religion and religious actors. For instance, the 1990s saw the development of robust theory and practice in the field of religious peacebuilding, but the lessons drawn from these efforts have not been strongly connected to the current emphasis on P/CVE.⁹

A common pitfall facing P/CVE practitioners relates to simple shortsightedness with respect to the various ways in which security-related activities can be politicized, co-opted, and adapted to serve a wide range of agendas. It is important for policymakers to consistently scrutinize the unanticipated consequences of their efforts, because states who engage with religion become participants in the construction of religion, whether they intend to do so or not. A few specific pitfalls identified by participants included the following:

(a) Governments undertaking P/CVE projects in states in which groups defined as extremist are present cannot simply assume that the local government—even where that government is a direct P/CVE partner—has the prevention of violence as its primary goal. Some states may at times seek to co-opt P/CVE efforts to promote certain forms of politically palatable religious practice, thereby becoming a convenient pretext for religious regulation.

(b) State engagement may undermine the standing of religious actors as it may cause leaders to appear to be co-opted by the state, thus discrediting them in the eyes of those most prone to radicalization. Both governments and religious leaders themselves—blinded by the temptations of praise and funding—often fail to properly gauge the extent of this effect. Religious leaders can only retain legitimacy—especially in the eyes of disaffected segments of a population—if they remain free to openly criticize the state while simultaneously rebuking violence. States that pursue outreach to religious communities as part of their P/CVE agendas should resist the impulse to impose restrictions on what religious leaders can say.

(c) Intuitively, governments who wish to engage with religion generally reach out to those who occupy positions within official hierarchies. Doing so, however, can often bypass figures who play significant if more informal roles in shaping people’s understanding of religion. For example, in many societies and religious traditions, women and younger religious leaders play key roles in religious communities even if they do not hold official titles or occupy the most prominent representational positions. State engagement, if it is only directed toward older male figures, can serve to validate the notion that men are the only relevant leaders for religious communities while simultaneously failing to connect with more effective voices.

State engagement, if it is only directed toward older male figures, can serve to validate the notion that men are the only relevant leaders for religious communities while simultaneously failing to connect with more effective voices.

FURTHER RESEARCH

Both the points of convergence and divergence in the views of participants in this conference represent the culmination of nearly two decades of scholarly development and practical experience. Those we brought together also recognized that there are many important questions which remain unanswered—areas where more research could serve to improve our understanding of the underlying realities and better guide our attempts at policy interventions. These include:

- A better understanding of how P/CVE efforts that incorporate state engagement with religion have affected violent extremism is needed. Do P/CVE efforts often serve to increase religious regulation and promote authoritarianism or sectarianism, and if so, has this measurably increased the prevalence of violent extremism? Or can reductions in radicalization be directly attributable to P/CVE efforts, and in particular the efforts of religious actors? Do P/CVE interventions that involve religious actors have discernibly different effects when compared to “non-religious” P/CVE approaches?
- To what extent can a more granular examination of religious leaders and actors provide more nuanced understandings of religious dynamics in certain settings, especially in terms of moving beyond national and officially endorsed religious structures? When and how do sources and figures of religious authority matter with respect to everyday life decisions and to how people make sense of the issues and problems they confront?
- How do specific forms of religious education relate to radicalization? If there is a general correlation between religious literacy and lower rates of radicalization, are there programs that can effectively improve religious literacy and discourage violent extremism (while avoiding the stigma of “governmentally-approved religion”)? What can we learn by looking comparatively at how religious education is approached in different settings and varying methods for incorporating P/CVE-related themes into pedagogy?

As scholars, policymakers, and practitioners continue to debate the comparative importance and relationship between ideological or ideational factors versus structural factors—such as politics, economics, and social forces—as drivers of, and solutions for, violent extremism, the question of where and how religion fits into the picture will continue to be a central element in this broader discussion. Moreover, at a time of heightened identity politics and resurgent populism around the globe, debates about religion have taken on a new and often polarizing salience. We hope that by establishing a baseline of expert knowledge on the intersection of religion and violent extremism, future research and policymaking in this area can proceed in constructive new directions and begin to fill in some of the knowledge gaps and deficits in effective practice identified above.

Endnotes

- 1 On the distinction between countering and preventing violent extremism, see Geoffrey Macdonald and Luke Waggoner, “From countering to preventing violent extremism,” openDemocracy, November 22, 2016, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/from-countering-to-preventing-violent-extremism/>.
- 2 See for example studies such as Anne Aly & Jason-Leigh Striegher, “Examining the Role of Religion in Radicalization to Violent Islamist Extremism,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 35:12, 2012, pp. 849-862; and Anneli Botha & Mahdi Abdile, “Radicalisation and al-Shabaab recruitment in Somalia,” ISS Paper 266, Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 2014, <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/Paper266.pdf>.
- 3 On the various and varying roles played by religion as a contributing factor in violent extremism, see Peter Mandaville and Melissa Nozell, “Engaging Religion and Religious Actors in Countering Violent Extremism,” United States Institute of Peace Special Report 413, August 2017, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2017/08/engaging-religion-and-religious-actors-countering-violent-extremism>.
- 4 “National Strategy for Counterterrorism of the United States of America,” October 2018, pp. 21-22, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/NSCT.pdf>.
- 5 Eric Rosand and Emily Winterbotham, “Current Global CVE Agenda is a Mixed Bag, But Don’t Throw It Out,” <https://www.justsecurity.org/60991/current-global-cve-agenda-mixed-bag-dont-throw/>.
- 6 Jocelyne Cesari, *The Awakening of Muslim Democracy: Religion, Modernity, and the State*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- 7 On the issue of popular approval and trust in official religious institutions, see A. Kadir Yildirim, “The New Guardians of Religion: Islam and Authority in the Middle East,” <https://www.bakerinstitute.org/media/files/files/25ca754a/cme-pub-luce-intro-031119.pdf>.
- 8 For survey research showing levels of popular support for religious leaders becoming involved in politics, see the Pew Research Center’s report on “The World’s Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society,” <https://www.pewforum.org/2013/04/30/the-worlds-muslims-religion-politics-society-overview/>.
- 9 For an overview of the field of religious peacebuilding, see Atalia Omer, R. Scott Appleby, and David Little (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Religion, Conflict, and Peacebuilding*, Oxford and New York: 2015. For a recent assessment of the field’s relevance for P/CVE, see Lisa Schirch (ed.), *The Ecology of Violent Extremism: Perspectives on Peacebuilding and Human Security*, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018.

COPYRIGHT

©2019 Georgetown University Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs

About the Author

Peter Mandaville is a Berkley Center senior research fellow and a Brookings Institution nonresident senior fellow. He is also a professor of international affairs at the Schar School of Policy and Government at George Mason University, where he previously served as co-director of the Ali Vural Ak Center for Global Islamic Studies and of the Center for Global Studies. From 2015 to 2016 he was a senior advisor in the U.S. Department of State's Office of Religion and Global Affairs.

Micah Musser is an undergraduate student in Georgetown College, class of 2019, majoring in government with a focus on political theory. He is also minoring in economics and in environmental studies. He serves as a research assistant at the Berkley Center.

ABOUT THE BERKLEY CENTER

The Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University seeks a more just and peaceful world by deepening knowledge and solving problems at the intersection of religion and global affairs through research, teaching, and engaging multiple publics.

Two premises guide the center's work: that a comprehensive examination of religion and norms is critical to address complex global challenges, and that the open engagement of religious and cultural traditions with one another can promote peace. To this end, the center engages students, scholars, policymakers, and practitioners in analysis of and dialogue on critical issues in order to increase the public understanding of religion.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This white paper was made possible through the support of the Henry Luce Foundation as part of its Henry R. Luce Initiative on Religion in International Affairs. The views expressed in this paper do not necessarily reflect the views of the foundation.