



Review Paper

Does People's Religion and Belief Affect Criminal Behaviour?

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Abstract

Unfortunately, taking religion seriously may lead to a tremendous deal of violence, and a solution to religious offences may save a great deal of suffering across the globe. The present study explains the relationship between religion and crime among religious followers. It also discusses the possible solutions to religious fanatics emerging among youths and religious followers. In the end, the article concludes with a positive note on how religious extremism should be ended.

Keywords: Religion, crime, extremism, violence.

Introduction

Even though millions of people are utterly unaware of this, hundreds of crimes are perpetrated every day tied to religion. According to historical sources, criminals have been engaged in religious activities from time. Some countries have opened their doors to asylum seekers, which is positive. However, in many nations, the court system falls short in safeguarding citizens against religiously motivated offences that end in criminal prosecution.

Unlike crime, which is a break of criminal law that is impacted by a society's proper conduct and violations of criminal law, religion imposes principles of correct behaviour as an integral component of informal social norms.

It positively affects individuals who abide by the law since the law's legitimacy is reinforced. Why? Because if people believe that the rules are fundamental, they are more likely to abide by them. "To the degree that criminal laws reflect the moral principles of a specific religion, extraordinary commitment to that faith should result in fewer violations of those criminal laws than weak (or non) religious adherence"¹. An examination of the available empirical evidence suggests that religion and crime are linked. Religious faith has been linked to a lower chance of criminal activity for more than four decades of empirical research on this topic²⁻⁴. Even if this association seems true, other research has revealed that religion has no significant impact on crime, leading some to believe that the religion-crime relationship is fiction⁵⁻⁸.

Nonetheless, religion is conceptualised by members of society, but it finally becomes a phenomenon that is transcendent and external to those who engage in it. By Durkheim, the classification of physical objects as sacred or profane (religious or non-religious) is an integral component of religion⁹⁻¹¹.

Religious feelings and ideas may be reinforced in society by deeming actual items sacred¹⁰. It's as though those who belong to religious communities are always on guard to spot the distinction between the sacred and the vulgar, and vice versa. Having a clear understanding of the distinction between sacred and profane helps members of religious groups avoid participating in acts and decisions that desecrate the sacred.

Rodney Stark points out that many empirical studies have indicated a significant negative correlation between religion and crime, while other studies have shown no correlation or a weak correlation.

According to Stark, moving away from a psychiatric explanation of religion may lead to clarity. Instead of imparting fear of hellfire or guilt, religion gains power over the individual as a community component and influences its adherents¹². In addition, recent incidents of religious-based violence have occurred across the globe, especially in India. Because of this, honest discussion of the relationship between religion and crime is essential. This article uses numerous examples to demonstrate the link between religious beliefs and criminal behaviour.

Religious Beliefs are a Matter of Opinion, Not the fact

A recognised definition of religion is a system of belief and a method of relationship and activity. Normative notions are found in almost every aspect of social action, and they are related to what should be done and why. Even though religious thinking is primarily concerned with what should be done, it also includes concerns of what exists and why it exists, such as the nature of the universe and man's position in it¹³. Being religious offers meaning to one's existence, but it also establishes standards by which one should behave oneself.

As defined by Durkheim, religion is "a cohesive collection of beliefs and behaviours relating to holy objects—things set aside and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unify one moral community—all those who adhere to them." For him, when it comes to religion, "evil or moral community" are intrinsically tied to the concept of religion as a whole¹⁴. Emile Durkheim, a French theorist, described religion as "a collection of beliefs and practices related to sacred things."

Crime and Its Prevention-based Laws

One way or another, the concept of crime is linked to the law. The law may be addressed in two ways. There can be no question that government has a primary responsibility to maintain law and order, given that the essential role of government is to protect the people from harm. The standards of conduct and the mechanisms that assure their observance are also part of social control, which is why it is included¹³.

The Connection between Religion and Crime

It is widely accepted that crime and religion played vital roles in forming human civilization at the time of its beginning. For millennia, the concept of brave leadership has been around. As a result, violence erupts as quickly as an exploding granite rock when a group of people chooses to reject men's beliefs in favour of their own religion or deity. Many atrocities are now being done under the banner of religion because some individuals refuse to accept others who have a different perspective. When a person's need for approval is not met, they will go to extreme measures to attain their goal. Sadly, criminal conduct should not be prevalent in all aspects of our lives. Despite the belief that religion may save humanity and foster peace, this is not the case. That's not the worst part; in certain circumstances, religion instructs devotees to die to spread its message. Hundreds of people have been killed in a single suicide bombing worldwide. As a side note, on September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States killed approximately 2,000 people due to Al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden's followers hijacking two planes. Seeing religious fundamentalism and criminal activities mixed together is a horrible experience.

Both religious and legal rules instruct individuals on how to conduct themselves in certain situations, despite their different origins and levels of importance in society. When someone breaks a legal law, they are classified as a criminal; however, they are classified as sinners when someone breaks a religious rule. Consequently, the link between criminal and sinful action is crucial to understanding the relationship between religion and illegal activity.

The theory of culture, status, and opportunity concern the distinctions in value, culture, class and opportunity. These differences force people to question the social standards they live by, and as a consequence, they become more abrasive and aggressive. According to these theories, criminal conduct is

exacerbated by these social structures. Hypotheses that explain crime in several ways may be found under this category. Class culture theories claim that crime is a natural development of underclass living, whereas "status frustration theories" argue that crime is a collective response to the difficulty of meeting middle-class status requirements. According to "opportunity theories," crime results from a mismatch between goals and ways of accomplishing them¹⁵.

Furthermore, the degree to which the sources of law and religious principles agree is significant. Individuals are compelled to behave by the game's rules as a result of this link. Both religion and the legal system exert similar social pressure on people, despite their differing pressure kinds. Every individual on the planet has the potential to commit a crime at some point in their life. A feeling of belonging to society due to socialisation lessens the possibility that individuals would engage in criminal behaviour.

As a consequence of their compliance, adherents of conventional society enjoy a slew of advantages, and they are not at risk of losing these advantages due to illegal conduct. Generally speaking, religions and cultures have many similarities. Religious individuals may be able to build a pretty strong relationship with moral concepts^{16,17} that condemns criminal activity¹⁸.

The Horrible Face of Religious Fanatics

In Paul Marshall's opinion, the world is now seeing several cases of religious persecution. Religious crimes are prevalent worldwide, from Islamic countries to communist countries. There is direct official persecution in Saudi Arabia, where any non-Islamic or dissident Islamic religious expression is illegal, which suggests government persecution¹⁹. Worship services have been highly limited, and Christian meetings have been banned entirely. One might expect death if they decide to leave the Islamic faith in Saudi Arabia¹⁹. In the twenty-first century, it's unthinkable to discover countries where the government is in control of religious persecution. However, that is precisely what has occurred. Consider Saudi Arabia, a theocracy where one's life would be in danger if one was not a religious member that governs the nation's ways. As a severe and sad fact, this isn't the only country where religious freedom is under attack. When the government is actively engaged, how can such crimes be prevented? In the face of these challenges, millions of individuals remain entirely oblivious to what is happening.

That more than 200 million people in more than 60 nations are being denied their fundamental human rights because they are Christians is incomprehensible. Surely this can't go on forever. Whatsoever one's religious convictions, everyone should be aware of what is going on in their immediate surroundings. Human rights must be implemented in these countries' legal systems, which must take a stand and clean up their civil laws.

Religious crimes may be perpetrated in various ways, depending on your faith, gender, and skin tone. "Religious crimes perpetrated inside their own borders," as described by Marshall in his article "The Current State of Religious Freedom," are committed by many countries. In nations like China, Tibet, and Vietnam, Buddhists live under communist governments based on atheistic ideas. Communism has resulted in religious persecution in various nations²⁰. In any situation, the time and place in which one finds oneself play a role in determining the outcome. Despite the country's Muslim majority, Turkey's present government strongly restricts peaceful Muslim expression, even though the country's past is rooted in Islam²⁰. Startling to observe the political persecution that has pushed many countries with long religious history to change their beliefs is something to see. After the government takes over, who will be able to make any meaningful changes? '

Sixty-six per cent of these attacks have occurred after 2009, with Muslims being the primary demographic. Even though they account for a mere 2 per cent of the population, Christians were found to be victims in 17 per cent of these incidents. Only 16% of the occurrences involved Hindus, even though they account for the vast bulk of the population. One out of every four hate crimes inspired by religious prejudice in 2018 was sparked by a community disagreement, according to Fact Checker.in. The offenders justified their attacks by stating that the attacks were required to protect animals in 15% of the cases, and interfaith links were used as a pretext in 77% of the cases.

United Nations and Other Organisations Interventions to Religious Persecution

The United Nations has played a significant role in ending religious persecution throughout history. Three key issues have been noted in the United Nations' section on religious crimes. Indonesian Islamic Indonesia annexed a Catholic former Portuguese territory immediately after independence in return for help to the Palestinian people, according to the United Nations' current section on religious persecution. Lately, there has been discussion about the findings of the special committee set up to examine Israeli acts that harm the human rights of Palestinians and other Arabs living in the occupied territories. The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the former Yugoslavia war crimes tribunal have been identified as contributory factors to criminal activity in the United States of America. Several issues that should not be a part of our daily lives include terrorism, climate change, etc. As time goes on, new technological and scientific developments are being developed. Conflicts are erupting because of religious persecution, and new governments are being founded. Because of the United Nations' limited powers, it has not been able to totally tackle the question of religious crimes.

For decades, the United Nations has recognised the role played by cultural components as a fundamental contributor to religious persecution. Accordingly, sovereignty has a massive effect on

how religion is seen. A person's only recourse in a theocratic society is to abide by the dictates of their country's government and religious authorities. As Castelli²¹ points out, the political debate may arise due to religious persecution. The fight against religious persecution is supported by tens of thousands of other organisations.

The Voice of the Martyrs, or VOM as it is more often known across the world, is one of the thousand organisations that may be recognised by its members. Every year, according to this Christian ministry, tens of thousands of Christians worldwide are abused, killed, imprisoned and tortured because they are Christian. A considerable number of Christian churches worldwide participate in VOM's missionary work. It's interesting to know that Richard Wurmbrand was behind the creation of VOM. During World War II, Mr Wurmbrand was imprisoned for 14 years in Romania because of the Soviet Union's control. While in prison, he decided to form this organisation to help others who were being persecuted since he was incredibly touched by what had happened.

Solutions for Religion-based Crimes

It is essential to look at the most recent examples of religious persecution to prepare for the future, even if there is still hope for an end to religious persecution shortly. No, they couldn't have been prevented. What should be done once they've happened?

It is one way to prevent religious crimes from happening if future law enforcement personnel are educated in detail about the fundamental rights of individuals, including religious freedom as one of our most basic rights. "To include schools throughout the globe in the fight against intolerance and bias against people because of their religious or philosophical beliefs would develop tolerance and respect for religion and a rising regard for human rights," the statement reads²². People would no longer have to wonder what to do in the aftermath of these crimes if these principles and concepts were implemented in all educational systems across the globe. We are preparing for the future and developing a better society free of religious offences by teaching law enforcement officials. The best way to end religious persecution is to educate people worldwide about what is happening and help individuals who have been harmed by religious persecution. We must interact with them as global citizens to let them know we are here to help.

Conclusion

According to Marshall, taking religion seriously may lead to a tremendous deal of violence. Since faith and culture are shaped by differing perspectives on human existence, they begin to clash with one another²⁰. This means that it makes no difference whether or not a nation has historically been founded on a particular religion, to the best of my knowledge. The government, like the times, is subject to change. As a result,

there is no genuine protection or religious freedom, even though religious freedom is an essential component of the human rights guide's recommendations. One can only hope that nations would adhere to the United Nations' stance on human rights and implement the human rights guideline in full. Many painful moments for a large number of individuals all around the world might be avoided in this manner.

One may conclude that it is past time to adequately address the worldwide threat posed by religious persecution after considering the most notable recent instances of religious persecution, whether they could have been avoided, and what should be done in their wake. People's lives should be respected regardless of their religious affiliation or whether or not they believe in any religion at all; they should be allowed to select whatever religion they want without fear of being persecuted or killed. Many global problems are now being addressed, but religious crimes should not be one of them; religion should calm down and bring peace and comfort among people rather than provoke criminal activity. A solution to the abolition of religious crimes would be for us, as citizens of the globe, to take a stance for religious freedom and for countries to join together and respect one another. Education is the most effective method to begin. To reduce the number of people across the globe who are persecuted because of their religious views, it is necessary to educate future law enforcement officers on the horrible reality of religious crimes. Adoption of the United States' criminal justice system against religious offences is essential for nations worldwide. For individuals all around the globe to gain fundamental human rights and respect for whatever belief they may have, regardless of their religious affiliation, it is something that has to be put in place. Due to religious crimes, many people have lost their legs, limbs, and even their lives or the lives of their family members. However, it is not too late for nations to become aware of this and take steps to stop it, even if it is just a grain of sand in the oar. Instead of being in vain, their sacrifice would draw attention to the bravery that many people have shown in standing up for what they believe in, even when others do not comprehend it. To maintain justice against these religious offences, the proper judicial system must be in place.

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