

# The Politics of Religious Favoritism

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*This project studies the relationship between religious minorities and religious favoritism—the extension of policy concessions to selective denominations. Why has religious favoritism endured as restrictions on religious practice have eroded? Why is favoritism prevalent, even in countries with high levels of religious competition?*

## Chapter Outline

### **Chapter 1: The Endurance of Religious Favoritism.**

This chapter introduces a distinction between two types of policies that limit religious liberty: those that restrict religious practice and those that positively endorse certain denominations over others. I then use cross-national data measuring these two types of policies to show that, while the majority of nations today do little to restrict the practice of religion, high levels of government favoritism have endured across countries with different religious traditions, degrees of governmental restrictions, and levels of religious competition.<sup>1</sup> I conclude the chapter demonstrating that this is particularly true in countries where the state and church were previously unified and where a wide array of state regulation historically sustained the monopoly of a particular religious organization.

### **Chapter 2: The Politics of Religious Favoritism.**

This chapter develops my theory of religious favoritism. Policy concessions to majority denominations are entrenched in church-state relations that make their elimination unlikely when the majority denomination retains political influence. I argue that as minority churches grow, the extent to which policy concessions remain exclusive to the majority denomination—rather than being extended to minority churches—depends on the *denominational specificity* of a given policy, defined as the degree to which minority churches can benefit from the policy extension. In turn, the *denominational specificity* of a policy determines minority churches' incentives to contest the positive endorsements enjoyed

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<sup>1</sup>See figure 1.

by majority denominations. When policy benefits are specific to the majority denomination, minority churches will have little to gain from extending these benefits to their denomination and will thus lobby to eliminate these concessions (I call this the *secularization strategy*). Conversely, when the denominational specificity of the concessions is low, minorities will lobby to extend the concessions to include their churches (the *pluralism strategy*).

### **Chapter 3: Cross-National Evidence**

This chapter provides descriptive evidence of my theory using cross-national, quantitative data. It documents within-country policy variation in the degree of religious favoritism across policies with different levels of denominational specificity.

### **Chapter 4: Religious Favoritism in Brazil**

This chapter describes the predictions of my theory in the Brazilian context, focusing on two policy domains that lie on opposite extremes of the policy specificity spectrum: tax exemptions and religious education in public schools. After introducing the Brazilian case, I provide qualitative evidence of my theory through an analysis of debates around these two policies at the national level. To study the debates about religious instruction in public schools, I analyze the policy positions of minority churches at a Public Hearing on this matter held by the Supreme Court in 2015. I provide evidence of the pluralism strategy for tax exemptions by analyzing the debate in the House around a law extending tax exemption benefits to evangelical pastors that was approved in 2016.

### **Chapter 5: Lobbying for Secularism: Religion Instruction in Public Schools**

This chapter provides evidence of the *secularism* strategy in the context of religious instruction in public schools at the municipal level in Brazil. I use a regression discontinuity design to show that the victory of a mayoral candidate supported by a minority church causes a *decrease* in the provision of religious instruction offered in the public schools of a given municipality.

### **Chapter 6: Lobbying for Pluralism: Tax Exemptions to Places of Worship**

This chapter provides evidence of the *pluralism* strategy in the context of tax exemptions to places of worship at the municipal level in Brazil. I will use the same regression discontinuity design I employ in chapter 5 to show that the victory of a mayoral candidate supported by a minority church causes an *increase* in tax exemptions to places of worship in a given municipality.

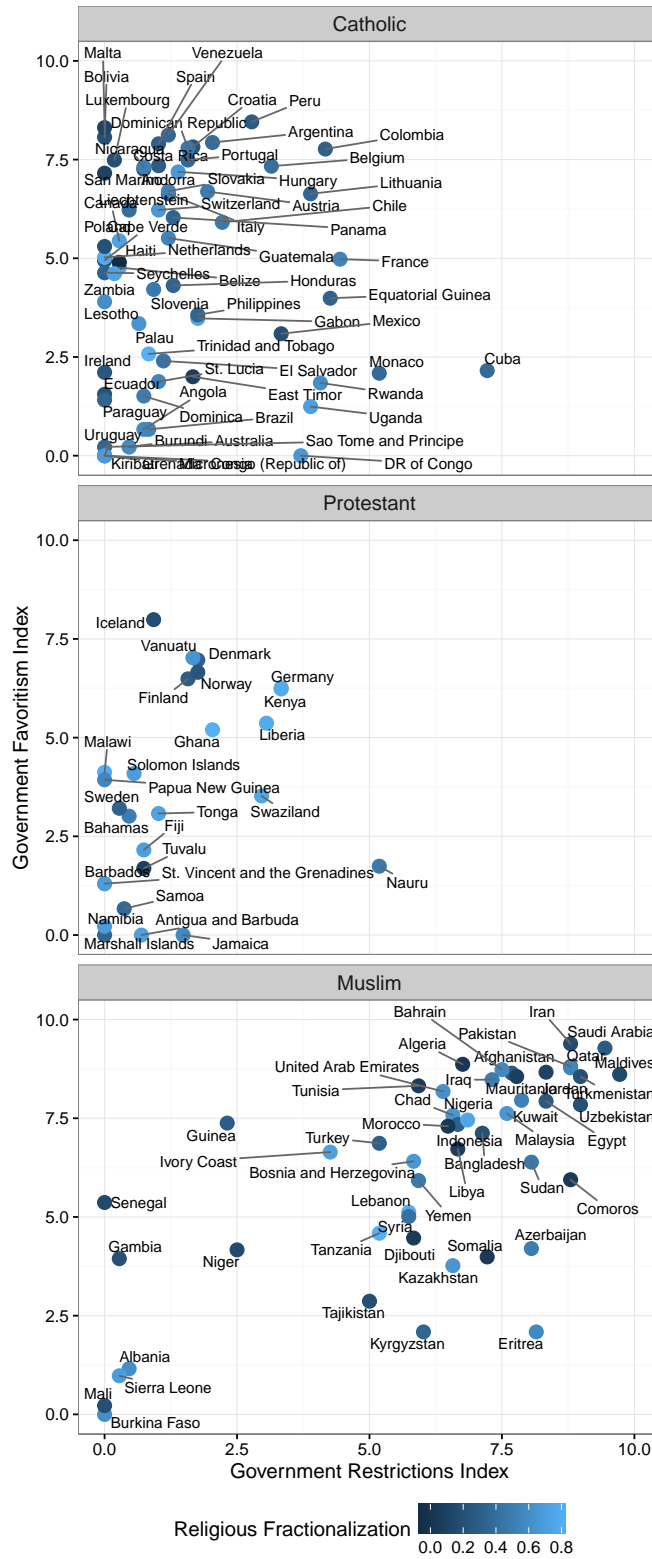
## **Chapter 7: Conclusion.**

I conclude by examining the contributions of the project to three agendas in political science. First, it advances the literature on the political origins of religious liberty. Second, it provides a more nuanced understanding of the varieties of church-state relations and the role of religious minorities in the development of these arrangements. Third, it extends the rich literature on religious influence in politics—currently focused on the influence of majority denominations—to the study of the political influence of minority groups.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Relatedly, my work also contributes to a growing literature on the political participation of evangelical denominations in Latin America.

Figure 1: Government Restrictions and Government Favoritism by Majority Religion.



Data from the *International Religious Freedom Dataset* shows averages for the 2001-2005 period. Both indexes go from zero to ten, where zero denotes no government restrictions or religious favoritism.