



Nilay Saiya. *Weapon of Peace: How Religious Liberty Combats Terrorism.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. 200 pp. \$110.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-108-47431-3.

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In *Weapon of Peace: How Religious Liberty Combats Terrorism*, author Nilay Saiya makes a provocative yet compelling argument that religious liberty is one of the best antidotes to the worldwide scourge of religiously motivated violence. Within its relatively short length, the book is packed with thorough and carefully researched analysis of the patterns by which the denial of religious liberty tends to provoke or foment terrorism, whereas the preservation of religious liberty for all members of a society tends to defuse tension and stifle the emergence of terrorist movements.

As a reader predisposed to support religious liberty, I nevertheless approached this book with a critical eye. I wanted to believe that religious liberty reduces the impetus for terrorism. However, I wondered whether experiments in liberalization that enabled religious fundamentalist parties to come to power, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt during the “Arab Spring” or Hamas after Israel’s withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, might serve as counterexamples that could undermine the thesis.

Fortunately, Saiya has done an impressive job of marshaling data to back up his argument that religious liberty combats terrorism. Through nu-

merous case studies that document explicit connections between religious repression and outbreaks of religiously motivated terrorism, as well as statistical analyses that distinguish the effects of religious repression from other potentially confounding factors such as a country’s level of democracy, wealth, or military occupation, Saiya makes a strong empirical case for the benefits of religious liberty and pluralism, and the dangers of antireligious intolerance. He also recognizes that religious liberty is not something that can be achieved through law and governmental policy alone, but needs to be embraced as a social and cultural value if it is to flourish.

In the book, Saiya identifies two broad categories of religious repression, which he calls “minority religious discrimination” and “majority religious cooptation” (p. 41). In the former, governments and adherents of a country’s dominant religion persecute followers of other religions or minority sects. In the latter, governments with a more secular orientation may attempt to promote a version of religion that advances the interests of the state, but seek to control the religious practices of even the majority of citizens who notionally share their official religion. Both situations, which may exist simultaneously in a country, tend to

foster hostility between people of different religious groups that can fester down multiple pathways into violence. Religious repression and attempts to resist it may both manifest in terrorism—whether within the repressive country or beyond its borders. Saiya’s comprehensive approach also makes clear that, although some religions may be more likely than others to produce terrorism, none is entirely immune from doing so.

After convincingly explaining the mechanisms by which religious repression gives rise to terrorism—and, conversely, how religiously free societies such as the United States and Senegal tend not to incubate religious terrorists—Saiya concludes with ten thought-provoking recom-

mendations for US foreign policy. For example, based on his research findings, Saiya cautions against relying too heavily on promoting electoral democracy on the assumption that elections will automatically result in a free and peaceful society. Rather, he argues, we should recognize that religious liberty inherently tends to benefit national security and the growth of civil society, and we must not neglect it in the quest to establish democratic governance.

For anyone interested in studying the nexus between religious repression and terrorism, or seeking arguments and data to make the case for the benefits of religious liberty, I strongly recommend this book.

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