Religion, Pluralism, and Iconography in the Public Sphere: Theory and Evidence from Lebanon

Daniel Corstange

World Politics / Volume 64 / Issue 01 / January 2012, pp 116 - 160
DOI: 10.1017/S0043887111000268, Published online: 20 December 2011

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0043887111000268

How to cite this article:

Request Permissions : Click here
Contrary to the early expectations of secularization theory, religion appears to be increasing, rather than decreasing, in importance in the contemporary public sphere. This expansion influences not only the menu of basic rights that societies extend to their citizens but also their choices of institutions of governance. Religion’s extension into politics transcends particular doctrines, geographic regions, and levels of economic development, as is demonstrated by the worldwide proliferation of religiopolitical movements since the 1970s. Such movements include the Christian right in the United States, base ecclesiastical communities in Latin America, reformist and fundamentalist movements throughout the Islamic world, Sikh and Hindu activism in India, Buddhist monastic orders in Burma, Tibet, and Vietnam, as well as Jewish ultra-orthodox and national religious groups in Israel—all asserting the indivisibility of religion and politics. These worldwide trends toward “deprivatization” defy the expectation of religion’s retreat to the private sphere, prompting one scholar to ask, “Who still believes in the myth of secularization?”

But if it is not retreating, how, then, does religion manifest itself in the public sphere? This question is particularly relevant in multi-faith societies, where religion supplies a prominent idiom with which to articulate competing visions of an exclusive or an inclusive polity. As
highlighted by contemporary events in places such as Iraq, Lebanon, Sudan, Israel, Sri Lanka, and Northern Ireland, communal sectarianism uses nominal religious faith to define the boundaries between ingroups and out-groups engaged in political competition. Religion can, however, define an inclusive, ecumenical vision that taps overlapping ethical ideals and behavioral first principles common across doctrinal traditions. Depending on how people invoke it, religion defines boundaries or the means to crosscut them.

This article examines religion in the plural public sphere and, more specifically, countervailing narratives in public deliberation about sectarian and ecumenical visions of religion. Discourse is agenda setting, framing, and limiting the choice set of relevant social problems and their potential solutions—here, diversity and means to “solve” it, whether by emphasizing separation and exclusion or integration and pluralism. But whose discourse is relevant? As most empirical studies focus on elites as the producers of discourse, they consequently base their analyses on a very rared component of the public sphere. Yet regular people—the “real” public and the silent parties in most of our analyses of discourse—are active contributors to the public sphere as well. In contrast to prior work, this article systematically examines mass public discourse, with Lebanon, a religiously diverse developing world society, as its research venue. Empirically, I use a novel combination of original survey data and publicly displayed religious and political iconography to study the exchange of ideas about religion and pluralism among the mass public. I find that sectarian discourse expresses ethnocentrism and devalues pluralist governance, whereas ecumenical discourse endorses pluralist institutions and articulates an appeal for religious ideals to guide the ordering of the public sphere.

This article makes two broad contributions. First, it builds on a growing body of work that distinguishes between exclusive and inclusive interpretations of religion by showing how such distinctions set the agenda for public debate about pluralism and governance. The latter are central issues in developing world societies, where diversity is common and where institutions are still very much on the table. Second, it complements the existing literature on democratic deliberation in an empirically novel way and shifts the emphasis back to mass discourse.

The rest of this article proceeds as follows. Section I develops a theory of sectarian and ecumenical religion in the plural public sphere. Section

^2 Given sectarianism’s emphasis on ascriptive and cultural markers and its deemphasis on actual religious practice, sectarian competition follows many of the dynamics studied in the academic literature on ethnic politics. See Chandra 2006; Horowitz 1985; Makdisi 2000; Makdisi 2008; Melson and Wolpe 1970; Varshney 2002; Varshney 2007; Wilkinson 2005; and Wilkinson 2006.
II outlines competing forms of religious discourse in Lebanon, the article's empirical venue, and highlights the importance of shifting the focus from elite to mass deliberation. Section III describes how the article measures mass discourse via public displays of religious and political iconography. Section IV presents findings from the iconographic data. Section V concludes by discussing the theoretical implications of the article for religion in the plural public sphere.

I. RELIGION IN THE PLURAL PUBLIC SPHERE

Religion enters the public sphere in myriad ways, among them by framing public debate over political problems and by guiding people’s preferences over solutions to those problems. But religion’s influence on the public sphere is complex because people can invoke it for different purposes. It has what scholars have called a “Janus face,” serving as “the carrier not only of exclusive, particularist, and primordial identities but also of inclusive, universalist, and transcending ones.” Religion’s public role is consequently ambivalent and “constructs not only bellicose communal identities but also democratic civil society.” Here, I examine how both sides of the Janus face manifest themselves in plural societies. One endorses an exclusive, sectarian conception of religion that stimulates antagonistic particularisms. The other promotes an inclusive, ecumenical alternative capable of buttressing pluralist democracy.

As a social focal point, religion helps simplify a complex social reality by providing people with guidelines to categorize each other and construct differences “because people can believe they are very different when they are not.” Nonetheless, the guidelines can be ambiguous because religion, as scholars have long acknowledged, is a multidimensional phenomenon that encompasses aspects of group belonging, doctrinal beliefs, and ritual behavior. In defining both nominal social categories as well as their substantive content, religion supplies multiple dimensions on which people may construct difference—or similarity.

---

1 See Bellin 2008, 346; and Casanova 1994, 4; the latter supplies the longer quote.
2 Philpott 2007, 505.
4 A large body of research in social psychology investigates how and why people use categorical thinking to simplify the social perception process. See Brewer and Brown 1998; Huddy 2003; Leege et al. 2002; Macrae and Bodenhausen 2000; Monroe, Hankin, and Van Vechten 2000; and Tajfel 1982. Focal points, in turn, help people coordinate about which classificatory schemes to use. See Chwe 2001; Schelling 1960; and Wilkinson 2005. The quoted passage is Joseph 2008, 553.
Contextually, the presence or absence of multiple faith traditions helps determine which dimensions people privilege. In a stylized sense, nominal group belonging does not vary in homogeneous societies where one tradition prevails. Instead, people derive differences from alternative doctrinal interpretations and the degree of devotion with which they structure their lives according to religious principles. Provided that interpretive differences remain minor, piety and commitment define the main cleavage between the devout and the irreligious.

In societies with multiple faith traditions, however, people vary in both group membership and degree of religious devotion. Religion qua sectarianism emphasizes boundaries based on nominal religious affiliation and organizes politics along communal lines. In such settings, people are born into “community cults” that sacralize the community itself rather than the divine. So defined, communal in-groups become exclusive havens for ethnocentrism and particularized trust that does not extend to out-groups.

Counterintuitively, though, sectarianism uses a religious idiom to delimit differences, but deemphasizes doctrine and practice when defining the content of those differences. Political competition induces sects to define membership to be as inclusive as possible of putative in-group members and as exclusive as possible of out-group members. Hence, the optimal boundaries stress dimensions on which sects are internally homogeneous and avoid dimensions on which they are not. Yet because people vary in the degree to which they believe in or practice the tenets of their nominal religious faiths, defining membership according to some threshold of intrinsic belief or observable practice divides the sect by excluding the irreligious and nonpracticing.

---

8 Religious leaders competing for adherents sometimes differentiate their theologies by emphasizing minor doctrinal differences within broader faith traditions. Distinctions between “intramural” competition within the same family of traditions and “extramural” competition between families are usually endogenous to the intensity of the differences stressed, however. See Gill 2001; Iannaccone 1994; Jelen 1995; and Jelen and Wilcox 2002.

9 In Mahmood’s 2005 ethnography of a pietist mosque movement in Sunni-dominant Egypt, members frequently defined themselves in opposition to nonpious others. Participants in Deeb’s 2006 ethnography of a Lebanese Shia pietist movement, meanwhile, sometimes defined themselves in opposition to nonpious Shia when discussing their own community, and sometimes identified with pious Lebanese of all faith backgrounds when discussing Lebanese society as a whole.

10 Following Horowitz 1985, sectarian and communal dynamics closely parallel ethnic competition because of the emphasis on raw, ascriptive-like faith membership as the marker of group boundaries rather than the content of that faith. See Chandra 2004; Chandra 2005; Melson and Wolpe 1970; Philpott 2007; Varshney 2002; Varshney 2007; Wilkinson 2005; and Wilkinson 2006.

11 See Casanova’s 1994, 45–48, distinction between community cults based on “particularistic, ascriptive ties” and “universalistic” religious communities.

Consequently, sectarianism emphasizes ascriptive community markers and shared culture while de-emphasizing religiosity itself to construct religious identities that are “politicized, even secularized, as part of an obvious struggle for power.”  

Theology may consequently play little role in sectarian conflicts when religion is merely “a source of communal loyalty and not a set of propositions about right authority.”  

People in multifaith societies vary not only in their nominal group belongings, however, but also in the content of their beliefs and their commitment to following them. Beliefs may appear to be the element with the clearest link to political attitudes, but religious doctrine is frequently ambivalent, ambiguous, or even agnostic about its own role in politics. Political theologies, derived from scripture, assert claims about religion’s proper role in regulating worldly concerns of governance. They can privilege either inclusive or exclusive propositions and are subject to reinterpretation and change.  

Moreover, many aspects of doctrine in fact have little to say about the administration of public affairs. Personal ritual obligations, for example, regulate private interactions between individuals and the divine, and religion’s prescriptions for personal practice are conceptually and empirically separable from views on politics.  

Although ambiguous, religious belief can crosscut nominal belonging in multifaith societies by loosely codifying a set of ethical and moral ideals to regulate interactions between people. Tocqueville, for example, observed that the “innumerable” religious groups in America “all differ in respect to the worship which is due to the Creator; but they all agree in respect to the duties which are due from man to man.” More generally, many scholars have noted that, doctrine-specific idiosyncrasies notwithstanding, religions provide the “core principles in all ages and places” that are largely shared across faith traditions.  

Illustratively, a venerable Lebanese Shia religious figure explains that “religiosity

---

14 Philpott 2007, 518.  
15 See Casanova 1994; Gill 2001; Philpott 2007; and Sachedina 2001. Informants in Deeb’s 2006 and Mahmood’s 2005 ethnographies of pietist movements repeatedly cite religious scholars who acknowledge alternative and widely accepted interpretative offerings.  
16 Echoing this ambiguity, public opinion research demonstrates that religion sometimes makes people pro-democratic or anti-democratic, sometimes tolerant or intolerant; it can have direct, indirect, or no influence on political views and it promotes very little attitude consistency overall among regular people. See Beatty and Walter 1984; Eisenstein 2006; Ginges, Hansen, and Norenzayan 2009; Hayes 1995; Jelen 1990; Jelen 1993; Jelen and Wilcox 1990, 1995; Layman 1997; Layman 2001; Layman and Carmines 1997; Tessler 2002; and Tessler 2003.  
means seeking out the vital elements in one’s religion, which inevitably coincide with the vital elements of another’s religion” in which the values espoused by different faiths “are very largely shared values.”

Most attempts to articulate the content of shared, faith-spanning ideals tend to devolve to the citation of positively valued but nebulous concepts such as brotherhood, tolerance, love, charity, mutual assistance, and good deeds. To illustrate, a former Lebanese prime minister declared that “Islam and Christianity are both calls to shared human values, among them love, respect, brotherhood, and so on,” which teach respect for humanity and make “exhortations to moral and human values” that “unify” people. Although there is little reason to doubt the sincerity of these statements, they are also palpably imprecise. Nonetheless, such imprecision can be salutary for bridging nominal differences.

By invoking abstract but ecumenical ideals, people from otherwise different faith backgrounds can derive the same core values organically from their own doctrines and defend them as authentic rather than imposed. By enabling members of different faiths to arrive at the same set of first principles, ecumenical imprecision provides leverage to bridge the inevitable nominal differences in application of those principles. Core religious values thus demonstrably become everyone’s core values, and only the applied means to achieve these ideals are subject to debate and accommodation, which exchanges an onerous existential dilemma—how to compromise on the uncompromisable?—for a lower-stakes one concerned with implementation.

Opposing sides in sectarian conflicts often cast their struggle in non-bargainable language that taxes the limits of democratic discourse, “an essential tool for community-building.” As the inclusive component of religion, however, ecumenicism asserts a shared, imagined community transcending the borders of the sect. In contrast to the divisive elements of sectarianism, the ecumenical aspects of the revealed religions can serve as a substitute for the secular religion of nationalism. Moreover, ecumenicism helps build a “sacred canopy” of shared ethical and moral principles under which democracy can operate. The two sides

18 Fadlallah 2001, 447.
21 Compare Uslaner’s 2002 emphasis on “moralistic trust,” in which people believe that others share the same fundamental moral values, enabling them to accept each other as members of the same moral community and therefore as people whose interests must be taken seriously even while not requiring agreement on specific issues.
of religion’s Janus face thus provide scripts that underscore contrasting visions of the polity and drive public debate about pluralism and how to manage diversity to different conclusions.

Can we hear echoes of these arguments in actual public deliberation? Religion enters the marketplace of ideas when people use it to justify both proplural and antiplural claims about the idealized polity. If the preceding discussion about sectarian and ecumenical scripts in the plural public sphere is valid, then it should produce observable empirical implications in both the discourse people use and the values underpinning their statements. First, what induces people to make sectarian or ecumenical public statements? Second, do these messages convey arguments about how to govern the plural public sphere? The implications of the above arguments can be distilled into two sets of probabilistic hypotheses about religion in public discourse.

The first set makes predictions about who engages in what kinds of political and religious discourse. As described above, sectarianism exploits nominal religious identities in a “politicized, even secularized” struggle for political power. Sectarian discourse is thus unambiguously political and should reflect ethnocentrism rather than religiosity. Religious discourse, by contrast, may or may not contain political content. Apolitical statements may simply express personal religious commitments, nothing more or less, and neither imply nor intend a political message. Alternatively, religious statements may also make claims about religious ideals guiding the ordering of the public sphere. Here, religious discourse takes on an ecumenical character and reflects religiosity but not ethnocentrism. More explicitly, the hypotheses are as follows:

Hypothesis 1. Ethnocentrism increases people’s use of sectarian discourse but not religious discourse.

Hypothesis 2. Personal piety increases people’s use of religious discourse but not sectarian discourse.

Hypothesis 3. Piety reduces the influence of ethnocentrism and increases people’s use of ecumenical religious discourse.

Some forms of discourse make statements with ramifications for how best to govern the public sphere. Hence, the second set of hypotheses makes predictions about what different types of discourse have to say about government institutions. Sectarian discourse emphasizes exclusion and devalues pluralism, and thus we should expect its proponents to favor authoritarian rather than democratic governance. Ecumenical discourse, by contrast, should support pluralism in the public sphere and its proponents should be more supportive of democratic governance than their peers. More explicitly, the hypotheses are:
Hypothesis 4. People who use sectarian discourse devalue pluralism and democratic institutions.
Hypothesis 5. People who use ecumenical discourse valorize pluralism and democratic institutions.

II. DISCOURSE IN THE PLURAL PUBLIC SPHERE

I use Lebanon, a multi-faith society in the developing world, as the empirical venue within which to examine Section I’s propositions about religious discourse in the public sphere. I begin with a brief review of religion and sectarianism in Lebanese public life and illustrate the intermingling of these concepts in elite discourse. I then motivate the theoretical importance of shifting registers from elite to mass discourse.

RELIGION AND SECTARIANISM IN LEBANON

Lebanon is one of the classic exemplars of diversity gone both right and wrong. Formerly lauded as the “Switzerland of the Middle East,” the country collapsed into a ruinous fifteen-year civil war in 1975. In this mosaic society composed of eighteen officially recognized religious sects, none a demographic majority, religion has been the country’s dominant social cleavage since before independence and has been institutionalized in its consociational governing arrangements.\(^{25}\) Sectarianism can of course take the explicitly political form of competition and cooperation between the religious communities. It also extends beyond politics, however, into the “nooks and crannies of everyday life” through routinized social practices that cultivate exaggerations of communal identity in the absence of a unified Lebanese identity.\(^{26}\)

Even those daily practices that are not directly political help perpetuate the salience of the communal identities on which the parties rely for political mobilization. In Lebanon, as in many other plural societies, political parties are almost entirely monosectarian in composition.\(^{27}\) Partisan political activity, as a major study contends, consists of sharp

\(^{25}\) See Akarli 1993; Hudson 1968; Makdisi 2000; Salibi 1988; and Weiss 2010. Lijphart 1977 cited Lebanon as an example of consociationalism in the developing world; his work was then critiqued after Lebanon’s collapse into civil war. See Dekmejian 1978; Hudson 1976; and Hudson 1977.

\(^{26}\) See Deeb 2006; Joseph 2008; Makdisi 2000; Salibi 1988; and Weiss 2010. The quotes and paraphrasals are from Deeb 2006, 13; and Weiss 2010, 11–15.

\(^{27}\) Scholars have long acknowledged the overwhelming degree to which partisanship tracks sectarian affiliation. See Dhahir 2008; el Khazen 2000; el Khazen 2002; el Khazen 2003; Hashishu 1998; and Hudson 1968; for party case studies, see Entelis 1974, and Richani 1998. Within this project’s survey data (described in Section III), 97 percent of the sample’s Future Movement supporters are Sunnis, 96 and 100 percent of Free Patriotic Movement and Lebanese Forces identifiers are Christians, and 95 and 99 percent of Hezbollah and Amal supporters are Shia.
conflicts and maximalist demands, and “the principle of compromise . . . is absent from the partisan political heritage of Lebanon.” The parties engage in harsh polemics and rhetorical outbidding in which they exploit “sectarian solidarities” to “engage in a sectarian bidding war” over who can best defend the sect’s rights. 28 Hence, party politics promote the exclusivist, communal component of sectarianism, even if not all partisans are necessarily ethnocentric.

Not all Lebanese endorse this communal use of religion, however. 29 A few advocate secularism, others try to delink religion and sectarianism, and still others emphasize shared religious ideals to crosscut communal identities. Religion is thus intimately connected to several key dialectical dilemmas running through Lebanon’s modern history, aptly summarized by one scholar as “recognition and erasure, inclusion and exclusion, sectarian difference and national unity.” 30 Religion in Lebanon, in other words, is both sectarian and ecumenical.

Sectarian and ecumenical tropes recur throughout Lebanese deliberation about the role of religion in public life. Lebanon’s founding National Pact states that the country’s “supreme welfare” requires the “curing of sectarianism and the halting of its evils” which “poison the spirit of relations” between the confessional communities and articulates the ideal that “the hour in which we abolish sectarianism will be the hour of the most blessed national awakening in the history of Lebanon.” 31 The accord that ended the 1975–90 civil war reiterated these basic tropes, calling to free the parliament of the “shackles of sectarianism” and declaring its abolition to be a basic national goal. Successive ministerial statements from independence on reiterated these goals, with governments perennially committing themselves to “strive for a nation composed of a melting pot of sects not tyrannized by sectarianism.” 32

---


29 Many of Deeb’s 2006 Lebanese interlocutors expressed opposition to traditional, communal understandings of religion, a finding paralleled in Mahmood 2005. In either case, their informants repeatedly declared such communally oriented views to be “backward,” a term with stronger pejorative connotations in Arabic than in English.


31 These passages come from Prime Minister Riad al-Solh’s 1943 ministerial statement, widely acknowledged as the core public articulation of the unwritten National Fact that, along with the constitution, established Lebanon’s consociational framework. For the full text of the statement, see Malhah 2003, 32–46.

These tropes likewise pervade Lebanese elite discourse. Speakers decry the evils of sectarianism ad nauseam, describing it as a “disease,” “suicidal,” and an “18-edged sword to wound the nation” that inspires conflicts likened to “a tribal struggle or a war of children”—with the tribal metaphor’s insinuations of backwardness and chauvinism frequently recurring. In contrast, both clerical and secular speakers emphasize the stark difference between religion and sectarianism, noting that the “vital elements” of the different doctrinal traditions “inevitably coincide” in their espousal of values that “are very largely shared,” and that “the essence of religion contradicts chauvinism.”

Speakers underscore the positive influence of ecumenical religiosity when they contend that “nothing will make sectarianism, and the heretical holy war fought in its name, vanish more than the deepening of true religious belief... in Islam as in Christianity, and strengthening the religious virtues found in both creeds.” According to this inclusive discourse, Lebanon is “but a single family united by its belief in the one God” and “united also by its faith in the spiritual values that are the best foundation for this homeland.” Thus, in addition to a pervasive refrain decrying the chauvinistic excesses of sectarianism, an important discursive subthread draws a sharp distinction between sectarianism and religion, and particularly those aspects of religion that are conceptually ecumenical.

Whose Discourse?

A significant limitation of the statements cited thus far is that they derive from elite discourse, and from discourse sampled nonrandomly at that. Scholars of consociational democracy in general and Lebanese politics in particular will find this fixation on elites to be a staple of both theoretical and empirical studies. Consociationalism, in addition to telling a story about a particular constellation of power-sharing institutions, also emphasizes a “spirit of accommodation” among prudent community leaders who bargain with one another to achieve compromise.

33 The “18-edged sword” refers to the eighteen religious communities formally recognized by the state. The quoted passages come from a former prime minister (Hoss 2003, 9–12, 81–86, 104), eminent Shia clerics (Sadr 2000, 301; Fadlallah 2001, 447), and speaker of parliament Nabih Berri (Charbel 2008, 186). For scholarly use of the tribal metaphor, compare el Khazen 2000; Ghalib 1990; and Salibi 1988.

34 The former passage comes from the venerable elder statesman and publisher of Lebanon’s premiere daily al-Nahar Ghassan Tueni, “Tantahi as-`Azma` andama nantakhib ra`is an rasuliyyan.” In al-Nahar, April 2, 2007, and the latter from the former president of the republic Charles Helou (Weiss 2010, 233–34).

Mass constituents, meanwhile, are conspicuously absent from this story except as passive consumers of elite discourse and unquestioning followers of their leaders. We do not know whether the public debates over inclusion and exclusion waged on the floor of parliament or in the newspapers are waged in the cafés as well, and we are left to wonder whether the spirit of accommodation that purportedly exists among elites also extends to the mass level.

Many of the dynamics implied by theories of deliberation share a central interest in nonelites: the degree of equality in the environments in which they interact, how they debate with and learn from each other, and how their preferences change as a result. Yet, in a mismatch of concept and practice, the emphasis in empirical studies of deliberation tilts heavily, if not entirely, toward elites. Hence, many such studies examine discourse in parliaments or newspapers, debates among key thinkers, or negotiations between organizations or states, all of which are venues for elite speech that ignore mass discourse almost entirely. Data-collection imperatives privilege elite environments and speech acts above all else because they provide the only discourse that is recorded reliably and systematically. Nonelites, by contrast, rarely leave well-documented or well-preserved records of their discourse. To get at the discourse of nonelites therefore requires alternative, frequently ethnographic data-collection methods such as participant observation, semistructured interviews, and focus groups. These methods are particularly strong when construct validity has not yet been established and when establishing measurement validity is a nontrivial enterprise. But they are comparatively less well suited for systematic empirical tests due to sample selection and external validity concerns.

To make generalizable inferences about discourse, we would, in principle, wish to examine a random sample of speech acts from a random sample of speakers. But we must, in practice, cope with the reality that discourse is neither recorded nor preserved randomly—a phenomenon well appreciated by historians and historically oriented social scientists. Thus, at the elite level, we are often left to study “key thinkers” or “signal events”—almost never randomly chosen and based on source material that was certainly never randomly recorded or preserved—for which we usually define “key” and “signal” after the fact in part because related records survived when myriad others did not. When using

---

36 Chambers 2003; Delli Carpini, Cook, and Jacobs 2004; Steiner et al. 2004; and Thompson 2008.
37 For a summary, see Lustick 1996.
38 For examples, see Abed 1995; Choueiri 1996; Wedeen 1999; and Wedeen 2008.
ethnographic methods at the mass level, we likewise default to the intensive study of events, small collectivities, and speakers who, whatever other virtues they may have, are usually chosen purposively or arbitrarily rather than randomly. These constraints, then, restrict the inferences we may draw from them.

Although we might anticipate an affinity between mass surveys and mass discourse, analysts employ survey methods only infrequently. Although large, random samples can support generalizable inferences about speakers, surveys do not provide a methodological panacea because it is not clear how to handle speech *content* rather than acts. In the relatively few attempts to study deliberation via surveys, analysts examine relatively easily measured deliberative acts such as discussing politics with friends or trying to persuade someone how to vote—yet, as one recent review notes, “these data reveal nothing about the content or quality of these exchanges.” Measuring content is difficult in part because natural language is nuanced and contextual in ways that are difficult to capture with a standardized survey instrument that makes heavy use of closed-format questions with identical prompts for respondents. It is difficult to believe that such a format approximates the unprompted discourse that respondents themselves use, meaning that respondents speak not in their own words but rather in those of the survey designer.

More fundamentally, however, surveys do not replicate the relevant audience to which respondents ordinarily direct their discourse. Answers to survey questions are neither directed at nor observable by peers—in fact, survey best practices specifically enjoin us to assure respondents of their privacy and anonymity. But discourse is fundamentally a public act, and we are not actually interested in what people say *to a survey interviewer*; rather, we are interested in what they *say to each other*. Publicity, even in the curtailed or less risky form of minipublics, is a fundamental component of discourse. Consequently, answers to survey questions conducted in the context of the isolated and artificial interviewer-to-respondent dialogue are not particularly well suited to measuring discourse content. How, then, can we hope to take advantage

---

39 See Delli Carpini, Cook, and Jacobs 2004. Deliberative polls, probably the most well known application of survey methods to deliberation, measure levels of information and policy preferences but not the content of discourse. See Fishkin 1995; and Luskin, Fishkin, and Jowell 2002. The methodology is quasi-experimental but conflates several separable dynamics (information acquisition, the act of deliberating, and difficult to ignore testing effects) into one grand treatment. To the degree that the analysts are able to disentangle these manipulations, their data suggest that information gains rather than the act of deliberating are largely responsible for the salutary effects they describe (Luskin, Fishkin, and Jowell 2002, 480–83).
of the sampling benefits of surveys to study discourse when we cannot use actual survey questions to study discourse? As I argue below, we can study mass discourse about religion and politics systematically by augmenting standard surveys with unobtrusive measurements of publicly displayed religious and political iconography.

III. MEASURING DISCOURSE VIA ICONOGRAPHY

This article examines public discourse about religion and pluralism in the public sphere. Such a debate centers on public, peer-to-peer communication, so our data should focus on the same. Yet views confided to a survey interviewer—a private audience of one—cannot capture the relevant communication dynamic because such views are neither observable by peers nor meant for public consumption. The point here is to highlight not the attitudes expressed in a survey bubble but rather their public articulation as they enter the marketplace of ideas. To resolve this public-private dilemma, I marry unobtrusive measurement techniques to an otherwise standard survey instrument.

ICONOGRAPHIC DISCOURSE

In addition to discussions in cafés, workshops, conferences, and clubs, the Lebanese also engage in public discourse through iconography. To measure this exchange of ideas, I take advantage of the Lebanese practice of publicly communicating their affiliations by displaying religious icons and political symbols outside their homes for peers and passersby to see.40 As one travels around the different quarters of the cities or among the mountain villages, one is first struck by the variety of religious images displayed above thresholds and in windows such as Quranic verses, the Hand of Fatima, crucifixes, and figurines of the Virgin Mary. Second, one sees a wide array of party flags, militia symbols, and posters of political leaders.

To illustrate, Figures 1–5 reproduce some examples of these items. Figures 1 and 2 depict clearly religious icons: the former a statue of the Virgin Mary outside a home in the city of Sour, and the latter a figurine of a saint outside a home in the town of Jbeil. In addition to statues and images of the Madonna and the saints, crosses and crucifixes displayed by doors are common but not universal fixtures of Christian households. Quranic inscriptions, meanwhile, are similarly common among

40 To clarify: I am referring not to private displays inside the home but rather to public displays on the exterior of a dwelling (for example, over a door, in a window, on a balcony, in the yard) that are visible from public spaces.
Muslim households, occasionally intermingled with items such as the Hand of Abbas (a Lebanese variant on the Hand of Fatima).

Figure 3 reproduces a political poster displayed in Beirut that expresses loyalty to the son and political heir of assassinated prime minister Rafik al-Hariri. It depicts the elder Hariri in soft focus, flanked on the right by his son Saad and on the left by the prime minister at the time, a longtime Hariri loyalist. The poster reminds observers of the elder Hariri’s central role in reconstructing postwar Lebanon by declaring that “Hand in hand we’ll finish the task of developing Lebanon” and urging “Loyalty to Shaykh Saad al-Hariri.”

*I`mar*, which I gloss as “developing,” is also used for “(re)construction.”
martyred party figures; still others emphasize ongoing political disputes. As a prominent anthropologist has observed, people often use these political icons as “weapons in a continuous turf war” to declare political loyalties and stake out territorial claims.⁴²

Figure 4, from a mountain village in Kesrouan, depicts two Christian party flags sewn together to emphasize their political alliance. Likewise, supporters of the two main Shia parties occasionally sew their
Figure 3
“Hand in Hand We’ll Finish the Task of Developing Lebanon—Loyalty to Shaykh Saad al-Hariri” (Beirut)

Figure 4
Free Patriotic Movement and Marada Movement Flags Sewn Together (Kesrouan)
two flags together, print the insignia of one party on the other’s colors, or blend the two colors together. More generally, mixing party colors, especially across sects, provides a visually arresting way to make a symbolic point. In the 2009 election campaign, for example, one Christian party ran a campaign against a rival, Hezbollah-allied Christian party by depicting the Lebanese flag with an orange cedar (the rival’s color) on a Hezbollah-yellow background (Figure 5). These images played on Christian fears that Hezbollah’s Christian ally was selling out the country to the Shia and their Iranian backers.

Studying the message content of iconography recalls Václav Havel’s famous parable of the greengrocer as well as Wedeen’s study of contemporary Syria, both of which highlight the rampant dissimulation found in the totalitarian environments of communist Europe and Syria under President Assad. Havel’s greengrocer displays a poster bearing the slogan “workers of the world unite!” and Wedeen’s Syrians exhibit images of the president not out of conviction, but, in Havel’s words, “simply because it has been done that way for years, because everyone does it, and because that is the way it has to be.” Havel and Wedeen make the forceful point that the content of the message need not mirror the superficial content of the iconography displayed. Yet neither makes the claim that there is no attempt to communicate with such exhibitions—merely that the messages differ from the guileless ones on display.

43 “Color” (Lawn) even has an idiomatic meaning that refers to diversity. “Single-colored” or “monochromatic” areas, for example, are those demographically dominated by a single sect, while those that are “multicolored” are mixed, multisect areas.

44 The two parties were the Lebanese Forces targeting the Free Patriotic Movement. Figure 5 is the billboard version that depicts the Lebanese flag under the words “Second Independence” (referring to the 2005 Cedar Revolution) next to the orange-on-yellow version under the words the “Third Republic” (implying the overthrow of the current second republic).

45 Havel 2008; Wedeen 1999.

46 Havel notes that the greengrocer’s disinterest in the ideology espoused by his poster “does not mean that his action has no motive or significance at all, or that the slogan communicates nothing to
Yet there are two important points of departure between this article and the environments studied in Havel and Wedeen. First, although dissimulation may be rampant under totalitarianism, it does not follow that such behavior is necessarily the norm elsewhere, particularly in relatively open environments such as Lebanon’s. Second, by using private answers to the survey questions that are not observable to peers, we may also subject people’s public statements to empirical validation—an option not available to either Havel or Wedeen for obvious reasons. We can, in other words, corroborate propositions about what messages the Lebanese are transmitting through iconography with what we know from the survey data.

One further objection to consider is that the iconography displayed outside the home may not necessarily speak for the individual interviewed for the survey. Although one might question the degree to which these images reflect the opinions of the actual respondent rather than those of the head of household, there are plausible reasons to believe that this limitation is not an insurmountable problem in practice. First, as we observe in societies all over the world, religious practices and political affiliations correlate strongly within families, albeit not deterministically. Second, families continue to be particularly close-knit and play central roles in Lebanese social life to the degree that local scholars frequently describe characteristics such as partisanship as “inherited” and state that party rolls expand primarily due to “biological growth.” Thus, to the extent that we believe that behaviors and attitudes correlate within a household and even that people discuss religious and political matters at the dinner table, we can plausibly expect that the iconography will provide valid, if somewhat noisy empirical indicators of discourse.

Survey Measurement and Summary Statistics
The data used in this analysis come from an original mass attitude survey conducted in Lebanon in the fall of 2005. Chronologically, the survey fell roughly between the pullout of the Syrian armed forces in anyone.” The message is one of obedience and a desire to be left in peace and is directed at the green-grocer’s superiors and at potential informants.

Readers can likely call to mind acquaintances whose beliefs differ from those of their families, and who can likely differ fairly easily. But consider why this is so easy to do: because such individuals are in some sense oddities who deviate from the norm, and that makes them remarkable in a way that nondeviants are not. We call such individuals the “black sheep” of the family precisely because they stand out from the much larger number of interchangeable white sheep. Hence, this claim is probabilistic (“we expect many white sheep”) and not deterministic (“with the occasional black sheep”).

the spring of 2005 and the summer 2006 Israel–Hezbollah war during a relatively stable period in post-Syria Lebanese society. Beirut-based MADMA Co. administered the face-to-face surveys with one thousand respondents drawn from a stratified sample of Lebanese adults across all provinces and religious communities.49

To gather the iconographic data, I instructed interviewers to record, after each interview, whether respondents had any political items (“such as political party flags, campaign posters, or militia symbols”) or religious items (“such as pictures of religious leaders, Quranic inscriptions, or crosses”) displayed outside their homes. Although we observe variation in the particulars of form and content of the iconography on display, we can gain useful empirical leverage by making this broad distinction between religious icons and political symbols. Although in principle there could be some ambiguity about how to handle Hezbollah figures that have both religious and political roles, I follow Deeb’s lead in distinguishing between religious figures with clear roles in a political party and those who are nonpartisan.50 Hence, for example, images of Hassan Nasrallah—both a religious scholar and secretary-general of Hezbollah—count as political rather than religious icons.

Table 1 cross-tabulates the sample’s display of religious and political icons and reports both percentages and raw counts of the different combinations. At an overview level, these data reveal that the two iconographic choices are connected to each other ($\chi^2 = 147.33$, $p < .01$). Just over half of the sample chooses to remain silent by displaying neither religious nor political symbols. The other half of the sample exhibits one form or the other, and nearly 20 percent displays both. Half of respondents exhibiting religious icons display them alone, and the other half display them alongside political symbols. For those exhibiting political images, meanwhile, twice as many display them alongside religious icons as display them alone. These data suggest that there is considerable variation in the iconographic choices that regular Lebanese make. How can we account for this variation in public messages?

### IV. Findings in the Iconography

Here, I connect respondents’ public, iconographic statements with the private information they reveal in their survey responses. I begin by in-

---

49 The response rate was 70 percent, which did not vary significantly between communities. Due to small community subsample sizes, I do not utilize Druze or Alawis in these analyses.

50 Deeb 2006, 49–55. The distinction turns out to be a nonissue in the data, however: the vast majority of items coded as religious for Muslim households were Quranic inscriptions.
vestigating the variation in icon choices evident in Table 1 according to measures of ethnocentrism and religiosity. This first part of the analysis helps to establish that the different iconographic configurations transmit comprehensible public statements about sectarianism, religious commitment, and a role for religious ideals in the public sphere. I then connect these iconographic displays to attitudes about governance. This second part of the analysis demonstrates that people’s preferences over democratic and autocratic institutions reflect the inclusive and exclusive content of their publicly articulated iconographic choices.

EXPLAINING ICONOGRAPHIC DISPLAYS

As described in Section II, Lebanese parties promote the exclusive component of sectarianism through communal outbidding in the context of secularized group competition. Hence, we might expect party flags, political posters, and the like displayed on their own to reflect ethnocentrism but not religiosity (hypothesis 1). Religious discourse, meanwhile, may be apolitical or may make claims about how to order the public sphere (hypotheses 2–3). In either case, religious icons should reflect personal piety. What, though, about joint displays of religious and political iconography? Such a statement is arguably more complex than the sum of its parts. Parties may promote sectarianism, but it does not follow that all partisans are sectarians. Meanwhile, religious devotion in private life may or may not extend to public life. Here, I contend that the joint display is a message that ecumenical religious ideals should guide the conduct of the plural public sphere (hypothesis 3). For it to be such a guide, it must reflect engagement with public life. To articulate religious ideals, it should reflect piety. For those ideals to be ecumenical, it must strip politics of its ethnocentrism.

---

**Table 1**

**Sample Display of Iconography** ($\chi^2 = 147.33, p < .01$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Political No</th>
<th>Political Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religious no</td>
<td>53 (N = 532)</td>
<td>10 (N = 101)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious yes</td>
<td>18 (N = 174)</td>
<td>19 (N = 192)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>71 (N = 706)</td>
<td>29 (N = 293)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 provides a sample display of iconography, highlighting the variation in icon choices according to measures of ethnocentrism and religiosity. This table reflects the analysis that different iconographic configurations transmit comprehensible public statements about sectarianism, religious commitment, and the role for religious ideals in the public sphere.
I measure the ethnocentric component of sectarianism with Chauvinism, a composite indicator of responses to two questions about interpersonal trust. The former asks respondents how trusting they are of their Lebanese peers in general. The latter asks about trust in members of their own sect in particular. People who trust cosectarians more than other Lebanese get the indicator (22 percent) and all others do not (78 percent).51

As discussed previously, scholars have long conceptualized religion as a multidimensional phenomenon with elements of belonging, belief, and behavior.52 Most applied work operationalizes belonging in a straightforward fashion with denominational affiliation. I follow suit with Shia and Sunni indicators, making Christians the reference category. Meanwhile, scholars often measure the belief dimension with proxies for doctrinal conservatism. Here, I employ Conservative, a thermometer-style measure scaled 0–1 with higher numbers indicating greater religious conservatism (sample mean .46, standard deviation .28).53

The behavior dimension, in turn, helps to capture my arguments about personal piety. Applied work frequently operationalizes the dimension of behavior and commitment with measures of personal ritual practice such as the frequency of prayer or attendance at religious services.54 Such measures, however, are difficult to employ in a multifaith

51 Compare, for example, Usulaner's 2002 and Jamal's 2007 discussions of trust and ethnocentrism. The first question reads, “Let me ask you about how trustworthy you feel people are in general. Which of these two statements do you agree with most?” and the second reads, “How about just members of your own sect? Which of these two statements do you agree with most?” Respondents receive analogous response choices and are asked to indicate which of the two they agree with more, and whether they agree strongly or just somewhat: (1) “You can never been too careful with people (in our country) these days,” and (2) “Most people (in our country) are generally trustworthy.”

52 For a discussion of religion’s multidimensionality, see Eisenstein 2006; Layman 2001; and Layman and Carmines 1997. For applied measurement in the American context, see the same as well as Beatty and Walter 1984; Jelen 1990; Jelen 1993; and Layman 1997. For applied measurement in Middle Eastern contexts, see Ginges, Hansen, and Norenzayan 2009; Tessler 2002; and Tessler 2003.

53 In the American context, common proxies for conservatism include the belief in biblical literalism and acknowledging a born-again religious experience. See Eisenstein 2006; Layman 2001; and Layman and Carmines 1997. The original text of the more general Conservative question reads, “on a scale from 1 to 100, where 1 is very conservative and 100 is very liberal, where would you put yourself on religious matters?”

54 Layman 2001, 56–57, reviews how scholars conceptualize the dimension of religious behavior according to ritual activity, private devotionalism, and the subjective salience of religion (that is, its perceived importance) and how they operationalize commitment via measures of worship attendance, personal prayer, and religious salience. Nonetheless, other evidence suggests that public displays of religiosity via attendance at communal religious services serves to enhance in-group solidarity and should be kept separate from religious devotion (Ginges, Hansen, and Norenzayan 2009). Attendance at services likely conflates religiosity and the maintenance of sectarian loyalties; I therefore use alternative measures that do not invoke the sectarian confound. For additional emphasis on the subjective salience measure, which I operationalize here with Comfort, see Guth and Green 1993; Tessler 2002; Tessler 2003; Tessler 2005; and Tessler and Gao 2008.
venue such as Lebanon due both to the diversity of doctrinal prescriptions and to the sensitivity of discussing private religious practices.\textsuperscript{55} Instead, I use a measure of the subjective salience of religion and replicate a question from prior surveys that asks people how much Comfort and strength they receive from religion. In practice, I use a dichotomized version in which people who report taking “very much” comfort from religion get the indicator (61 percent) and those who report lower levels do not (39 percent).\textsuperscript{56}

Theoretically, I have distinguished between apolitical religiosity that focuses on one’s relationship with the divine and religion as a guide to the ordering of the public sphere. Hence, in addition to its salience in their personal lives, I also measure the degree to which people draw political guidance from religion. To do so, I construct a composite behavioral indicator that captures the degree to which people Consult with religious leaders on political matters relative to nonpolitical matters. In tandem with Comfort, it provides a means to distinguish the influence of religion as a guide to personal affairs from religion as a guide to public affairs. The measure scales from -1 to 1 (sample mean -.06, standard deviation .37). Positive scores indicate that people consult on political issues more than on nonpolitical issues, and negative scores indicate the reverse.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{55} Doctrinal diversity creates a scaling issue because of different standards across confessional communities for diligent ritual practice, for example, the number of obligatory prayers per day varies according to whether one is a Shia, Sunni, or Christian, making raw counts difficult to compare across communities. Further, fully 10 percent of the sample refused to answer questions about the frequency with which they attend mosque/church, read the Quran/Bible, or pray. Moreover, the more educated and the more religious (as measured here by Comfort and Conservative) are systematically less likely to give answers. Among those who do respond, Comfort correlates positively with frequency of prayer ($r = .41$), reading of the Quran/Bible ($r = .32$), and attendance at religious services ($r = .20$), which increases confidence in the validity of Comfort.

\textsuperscript{56} The Comfort question reads, “Do you find that you get comfort and strength from religion?” which is measured on a 4-point scale. I dichotomize the measure in application due to an aggregate skew toward the religious end of the scale (“very much,” 61 percent; “some,” 25 percent; “a little,” 9 percent; “very little, none,” 4 percent). The results are robust to using the original, 4-point scale and alternative dichotomization between those who take at least “some” comfort and those who take “little” or less.

\textsuperscript{57} The question text reads, “Have you ever consulted a religious leader about any of the following issues?” Respondents answered yes or no to each of the following: “marriage,” “inheritance,” “education,” “politics,” and “economic matters.” This battery measures people’s actual behavior and thus their revealed preferences for religion as a guide for public life. Such revealed preferences are arguably more reliable indicators of underlying dispositions than responses to questions about hypothetical scenarios, which often yield “top of the head” opinions. To construct the composite indicator, I first average the four non-“politics” responses (sample mean .23). The Consult scale subtracts this average from the response on “politics” to provide a measure of consultations on politics scaled by consultations on nonpolitical matters. This relational procedure is sometimes used to compensate for survey response sets—as applied here, the tendency to consult with religious figures for everything at the same level, indicating that religion is no more important in politics than in anything else. Compare Jelen 1993; and Wilcox, Sigelman, and Cook 1989.
Lastly, I include a set of basic controls. Demographics include indicators for Female sex and Rural residency alongside a five-point Education attainment measure with a median of secondary school completion (rescaled 0–1). Electricity, an indicator for material well-being, provides a count of the hours per day the electricity is off in respondents’ homes and serves as an alternative to more commonplace income questions, which many respondents refused to answer.58

Partisan measures whether or not people support a political party (89 percent) or not (11 percent).59 This indicator provides a check that the two types of icons really are conceptually different from one another rather than manifestations of the same underlying concept. In particular, we should expect partisanship to encourage people to display political icons but not to influence their decisions to display religious iconography that articulates personal piety.

Finally, I capture community and neighborhood influences with Diversity, which is a sectarian fractionalization index of the respondent’s administrative district. Local diversity could plausibly spur more frequent displays of political iconography to the degree that they serve as markers in local turf wars. Moreover, the mixed districts tend to be more competitive electorally, which in turn could stimulate sectarian group competition.60 The variable scales from 0–1, with lower values indicating more homogeneous districts and higher numbers indicating more heterogeneous districts (sample mean .41, standard deviation .24).61

People may choose from one of four iconographic configurations: (1) neither type (in effect, a null message); (2) religious icons but not political; (3) political icons but not religious; or (4) both types. Given this nominal choice, I model the observed outcomes via multinomial logistic regression with the null message (no iconography of either type) as the baseline comparison. This procedure does not impose an order or

58 The sample mean and standard deviation are 7.98 and 5.41 hours and enter the model with a square-root transformation. Theoretically, we should expect material deprivation to have declining influence on behavior as the amount of deprivation increases—for example, the impact of the difference between the first and second hour is greater than between the fifteenth and sixteenth. Practically, the transformation helps ameliorate outliers in the raw data.

59 I derive the indicator from an open-response question that reads, “Please tell me what political party, political movement or gathering, or political leader you feel closest to politically.” I postcoded respondents according to whether they cited a political party or movement, a prominent leader in such a movement, nonparty organizations, or no one.

60 On turf wars, see Deeb 2006. For compelling evidence in support of the common claim that electoral competition stimulates ethnic identification, see Eifert, Miguel, and Posner 2010.

61 I construct a standard Herfindahl index as Diversity = 1 - \( \sum p_i^2 \), where \( p_i \) is the proportion of the population that belongs to group i (in this case, Shia, Sunnis, and Christians, calculated at the district/caza level). The substantive interpretation of the index is the probability that any two randomly selected individuals will be from different sectarian communities. These calculations are based on voter roll data published in the Lebanese daily al-Safir on April 26, 29, and 30, and May 10 and 12, 2005.
rankings on the choices and compares the decision to send each of the other three types of messages against the decision to send no message. Table 2 reports the results. To ease interpretation, Figure 6 translates the estimated effects to a probability scale and plots differences in both absolute terms (6a; more commonly reported) and relative terms (6b; arguably more intuitive). The horizontal bars represent the 95 percent confidence intervals, with the vertical hashes indicating the 90 percent level.62

Overall, these data support the expectations laid out in hypotheses 1–3. First, the Chauvinism effect supports the contentions in hypotheses 1 and 3 that restrict ethnocentrism to sectarian discourse. As Figure 6 demonstrates, Chauvinism helps account for the decision to display political imagery (grey squares) but not religious icons (white circles). In relative terms, chauvinists are an estimated 128 percent more likely than their peers to exhibit party flags, posters of leaders, and the like. In contrast, Chauvinism does not detectably influence the decision to

---

Table 2: Explaining Iconographic Displays (Multinomial Logit)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Political Icons Only</th>
<th>Religious Icons Only</th>
<th>Both Icon Types</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>s.e.</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-3.88</td>
<td>0.96**</td>
<td>-1.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shia</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>-0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunni</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>-0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>0.64*</td>
<td>-1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-0.37</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-0.45</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>-0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>-0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity</td>
<td>-0.28</td>
<td>0.14*</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisan</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>0.75**</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chauvinism</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>0.27***</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>2.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consult</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ln(L)</td>
<td>-768.25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>844</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p < .01***, p < .05**, p < .10*
Figure 6
Differences in Iconography Displays

(a)
Absolute Differences in Probability Points

[iConsult, Comfort, Conservative, Chauvinism]

[Legend: ■ Political, ○ Religious, ♦ Both Types]
display religious iconography, and its explanatory power disappears entirely when accounting for the display of religious and political icons together (black diamonds). Substantively, the compound “religion guiding politics” message lacks ethnocentric content.

Second, these findings show that piety increases people’s use of religious discourse, in terms of both apolitical statements and statements with political content (hypotheses 2 and 3). Substantively, moving from a standard deviation below the mean on Conservative to a standard deviation above it increases the chances of posting religious iconography alone by an estimated 139 percent in relative terms; moving from low to high Comfort increases the chances by 38 percent. Intriguingly, both religiosity indicators also help account for people’s decisions to display religious and political icons together, but the effects are substantively much stronger. The same increase in Conservative increases the chances of displaying both types of iconography together by more than sixfold, and Comfort increases the chances more than threefold (552 and 235 percent, respectively). Hence, religiosity helps explain people’s decisions to insert religious content into their iconographic messages, but it explains considerably more about the more complex message with political content.

Finally, these data suggest that people use the compound iconographic message to express the importance of religion as a guide for the conduct of the public sphere. In particular, people who are more inclined to Consult with religious leaders about politics are no more or less likely to display either religious or political icons by themselves (white circles and grey squares). They are, however, significantly more likely to display both types of iconography together (black diamonds). Moving from a standard deviation below the mean on Consult to a standard deviation above it increases the chances of displaying both types together by an estimated 34 percent in relative terms. The compound message thus articulates a claim that religious ideals should guide politics.

Evidence from one of the control variables, Partisan, supports the characterization of “religious icons only” as apolitical. People citing a party identification are no more likely than nonpartisans to display religious icons alone (an indetectable 1 percent more in relative terms). In contrast, they are an estimated 45 percent more likely to display religious icons alongside political ones, and 300 percent more likely to display political icons alone, both effects of which are easily detectable at the 95 percent confidence level.

One might wonder if the display of religious icons reflects a culturally based or religiously motivated decision. The evidence cited so far favors religious motivations; additional analyses suggest that culture is not the driving force. People from single-sect families (defined as both parents and all four grandparents coming from the same sect) are no more or less likely than their peers to display any given combination of icons. Another survey question asks, “If you were to read a book on the history of Lebanon, would you be more interested in the parts on the history of your own sect, or in the parts
Iconographic displays are public messages; the private information contained in people’s survey responses suggests that the different combinations of icons articulate statements with different content. Political icons, displayed by themselves, express a great deal of ethnocentrism but are empty of religious content—making them the iconographic articulation of exclusive sectarianism. Conversely, religious icons displayed alone express personal religiosity but no ethnocentrism. Such icons appear to be apolitical statements of religious conviction when displayed by themselves. When paired with political iconography, however, they articulate a proactive role for religion in the public sphere. Accordingly, religion is a guide not only for private lives but for public ones as well.

Institutional Ramifications

What does this discourse have to say about governance? Here, I examine whether or not people’s institutional preferences are consistent with their iconographic statements. To the degree that communal sectarianism is the exclusive and antiplural facet of religion, we might expect individuals articulating this view in the public sphere to favor authoritarian solutions to governing a diverse polity (hypothesis 4). To the degree that ecumenicism is the inclusive component of religion that valorizes pluralism, we should expect its public champions to endorse democracy and oppose autocracy (hypothesis 5).

To test these propositions, I rely on a battery of standard questions, borrowed from the World Values survey, that ask respondents to assess democracy and four types of autocratic institutions on a four-point scale according to how appropriate they would be for Lebanon:

- Having a strong head of government who does not have to bother with parliament and elections (Strong Leader),
- Having experts, not government, make decisions according to what they think is best for the country (Experts Rule),
- Having religious leaders make decisions for the country according to religious law (Clerics Rule),
- Having the army rule (Army Rules),
- Having a democratic political system (Democracy).

Most respondents answered “both equally”; those answering “my own” do not differ in their iconographic choices, and those answering “other sects” were modestly more likely to display religious icons alone. Intriguingly, cosmopolitan social networks appear to contribute to people’s choice of the “religion guiding politics” message: people with greater foreign language capacity and/or with family living abroad are no more or less likely to display either type of icon alone, but are detectably more likely to display both types together.
Table 3 summarizes the responses to these items as proportions of the sample and highlights two key points. First, views on democracy are, unsurprisingly, almost universally favorable: some 92 percent of the sample declares it to be a “Very Good” option for Lebanon. Second, views on the various autocratic options are largely negative—the modal response to each is “Very Bad”—but with much wider variation, which indicates that there is no clear consensus among the Lebanese over these institutions. Put together, nontrivial numbers of people simultaneously approve of democracy without also rejecting autocracy entirely. To capture this dynamic, I create a summary indicator for people who are unreservedly Pluralist: those who expressed the most favorable attitudes toward democracy as well as the least favorable attitudes toward each of the four autocratic options. Visually, the indicator collects those respondents whose views fall precisely into the shaded cells in Table 3. On this metric, 43 percent of the sample is unreservedly pluralist, whereas the remaining 57 percent is not.

Previously, I examined religious and political iconography as dependent variables. Here, I use the display of Religious and Political icons (and an interaction between them to capture the compound message) as the key explanatory variables helping to account for people’s institutional preferences, alongside the same set of controls used before. The main model uses binary logistic regression to examine the summary Pluralist outcome. For completeness, I also provide estimates for each

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>institutional preference</th>
<th>Very Good</th>
<th>Somewhat Good</th>
<th>Somewhat Bad</th>
<th>Very Bad</th>
<th>All Grey Cells</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>1 (N = 6)</td>
<td>6 (N = 62)</td>
<td>92 (N = 906)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Leader</td>
<td>52 (N = 564)</td>
<td>29 (N = 280)</td>
<td>5 (N = 44)</td>
<td>9 (N = 84)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experts Rule</td>
<td>51 (N = 491)</td>
<td>21 (N = 199)</td>
<td>17 (N = 163)</td>
<td>11 (N = 102)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerics Rule</td>
<td>54 (N = 519)</td>
<td>22 (N = 208)</td>
<td>21 (N = 203)</td>
<td>4 (N = 35)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Army Rules</td>
<td>70 (N = 684)</td>
<td>18 (N = 177)</td>
<td>9 (N = 89)</td>
<td>3 (N = 25)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pluralist</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>57 (N = 560)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of Pluralist’s constituent parts: support for democracy and opposition to each of the authoritarian institutions.65 Hence, all variables point in the democratic direction (propluralist, prodemocracy, anti-authoritarian).

Table 4 reports estimates for each of the models. For ease of interpretation, Figure 7 translates the effects to a probability scale for the main Pluralist results—findings for the constituent parts are qualitatively similar. Black squares indicate predicted probabilities, grey diamonds indicate absolute differences, and solid connector lines indicate those differences that are statistically detectable at the 95 percent confidence level. Overall, the findings confirm that people’s institutional preferences are consistent with their iconographic rhetoric in the ways predicted; the findings thus provide strong support for hypotheses 4 and 5.

Consistent with theoretical and empirical work that highlights the indeterminacy of religion in politics, the religiosity message by itself offers little leverage in explaining differences in opinion over institutions. Religious alone has no detectable influence whatsoever on Pluralist views or on Democracy or three of the authoritarian options. The only partial exception is that it yields a mild decrease in opposition to Clerics Rule. Hence, religious iconography on its own does not communicate much of anything about how best to govern society.

Consistent with hypothesis 4, meanwhile, communal sectarianism appears to have strongly antipluralist and proauthoritarian influences. As Figure 7 reveals, Political alone drops Pluralist views by an estimated .10 probability points—roughly 30 percent in relative terms (compare the top-left and top-right cells). Meanwhile, the estimated decrease in support for Democracy (and the decrease in opposition to each of the autocratic options) is similar in magnitude. On its own, then, political iconography, which articulates the more exclusivist, ethnocentric ideas behind sectarianism, communicates a consistent message that devalues pluralism and endorses authoritarian solutions to govern society.

Consistent with hypothesis 5, however, these findings suggest that religiosity mitigates the normatively disquieting influences of sectarianism. The estimate on the interaction term between Religious and Political is always positive, large, and highly statistically significant for the summary Pluralist model and for each of its component parts. As the bottom-right cell of Figure 7 reveals, people displaying both religious and political iconography hold the most Pluralist views by a wide margin.

65 Consistent with the construction of the summary indicator, I dichotomize Democracy as “Very Good” versus other responses, and the four autocracy indicators as “Very Bad” versus other responses. For the latter, the substantive takeaway stays the same when using alternate procedures, including binary models comparing “Very/Somewhat Bad” to “Very/Somewhat Good” and ordinal models using the original, raw scale. Results available upon request.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Support Pluralist</th>
<th>Support Democracy</th>
<th>Oppose Strong Leader</th>
<th>Oppose Experts Rule</th>
<th>Oppose Clerics Rule</th>
<th>Oppose Army Rules</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>b</strong></td>
<td><strong>s.e.</strong></td>
<td><strong>b</strong></td>
<td><strong>s.e.</strong></td>
<td><strong>b</strong></td>
<td><strong>s.e.</strong></td>
<td><strong>b</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-4.35</td>
<td>0.43***</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>0.69***</td>
<td>-2.46</td>
<td>0.37***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shia</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.22*</td>
<td>-1.85</td>
<td>0.43***</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunni</td>
<td>-0.34</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>-0.43</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>0.39***</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>0.38***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.17***</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.32**</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.16***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>0.40***</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>0.73*</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>0.37***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>-1.66</td>
<td>0.45***</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.10***</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.16**</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.08***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisan</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>-0.58</td>
<td>0.28**</td>
<td>-1.49</td>
<td>0.33***</td>
<td>-0.75</td>
<td>0.26***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious × Political</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>0.39***</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>0.64***</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>0.37***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ln(L)</td>
<td>-493.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-542.8</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>915</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>893</td>
<td>903</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p ≤ .01***, *p ≤ .05**, *p ≤ .10*
Compared with their silent and apolitically religious peers (top-left and bottom-left cells), people displaying both types of icons are more likely to hold Pluralist views by an estimated .16 and .17 probability points—roughly a 40 percent increase in relative terms. The difference from their sectarian counterparts (top right) is even starker: an estimated .25 probability points, or more than 80 percent in relative terms. The differences for each of the component parts are similarly large. These findings demonstrate that people articulating the joint “religion guiding politics” message are in fact the most committed proponents of pluralism and the strongest opponents of authoritarianism.

DISCUSSION

The analysis presented above examines ordinary people’s public, iconographic statements alongside nonpublic information contained in their survey responses. It does so in order to investigate both different
manifestations of religion in mass discourse and what that discourse has to say about ordering the public sphere. Of course, other environmental and individual-level factors beyond ethnocentrism and religiosity influence people’s iconographic choices and their institutional preferences. I briefly detail some of these considerations here.66

Individual socioeconomic characteristics influence iconographic choices and institutional preferences in varied ways. In terms of material deprivation, poorer people display more religious and fewer political icons on their own. The former finding is consistent with the long-standing trope of religion as a refuge from poverty, whereas the latter (perhaps) is consistent with tropes that wealthier people have more resources with which to participate politically. Yet material deprivation has no observable effect on the decision to display both types of icons together; the “religion guiding politics” message does not appear to express class politics. All else equal, however, poorer people consistently prefer democratic over authoritarian governance—unsurprising to the degree that we would expect poorer people to prefer institutions with better (for them) redistributive implications.67

Education, meanwhile, has no detectable influence on choices to display either type of icon alone. The better educated are, however, much more likely than their peers to send the “religion guiding politics” message by posting both kinds of icons together. This finding suggests that well-educated people are not simply more articulate than people with fewer educational resources; we might otherwise expect them to send the other messages more frequently as well. Rather, they tend to choose one particular message to articulate. In addition, the better educated consistently hold more pluralist views than their less educated counterparts.68

66 An intriguing empirical extension to this work would utilize multistage and/or multilevel modeling techniques to trace the influence of the model’s other covariates on ethnocentrism and religiosity as well as assess potential conditioning environmental effects. What determines people’s a priori levels of ethnocentrism and religiosity is, however, a different question from the one this paper asks—namely, how people articulate these views given that they have them. Properly addressing the former question would likely require much more information about family history of religious observance and sectarianism, their experiences in the civil war, their residential and educational choices, and more information about social networks. Such a series of analyses is, however, beyond the scope of this article and awaits future work.

67 Recall that Electricity is a count of the average number of hours per day the respondent’s household goes without electricity, so higher numbers indicate more material deprivation. Based on the estimates from Table 2, an increase in Electricity deprivation that spans the sample interquartile range—six versus twelve hours off—makes people an estimated 18 percent more likely in relative terms to post religious icons alone and 23 percent less likely to post political icons alone. Based on the estimates from Table 4, The same amount of change in Electricity makes people an estimated 45 percent more likely to hold Pluralist views.

68 Moving from a standard deviation below the mean on Education to a standard deviation above—roughly, between someone who has not finished secondary school and someone with a college degree—makes people an estimated 46 percent more likely in relative terms to display both types of
A large body of research has found that higher socioeconomic status endows people with greater resources on which to draw when participating in the public sphere. The varied dynamics presented here imply that participation through nonstandard (or at least nonstudied) channels such as iconography nuances the stylized socioeconomic stories we commonly tell.

The social environment also appears to influence both iconographic choices and preferences over governance. Religious iconography, whether alone or in conjunction with political icons, appears to be more of an urban phenomenon than a rural one, although the urban-rural divide does not appear to find much independent expression in institutional preferences. These data suggest both that people living in socially diverse areas display more political icons and fewer religious ones than people living in homogeneous areas and that diversity has no detectable influence on the decision to display both types together.

We must use caution in interpreting these results, however. The connection between diversity and religious icons vanishes when using an alternative indicator of neighborhood (as opposed to district) diversity, but the connection to political icons remains. Both diversity indicators appear to be sensitive to the inclusion of controls for geographic region, however. The Diversity effect on political icons likely reflects both their use in turf wars as discussed previously and the fact that mixed areas tend to be the most electorally competitive, which in turn stimulates sectarian group competition. More broadly, these findings suggest that people are not systematically deterred from speaking their mind in mixed company.

Net of the other factors considered in the models, simple community membership offers less explanatory power than one might expect, given the centrality of the sects in Lebanese politics. Nominal group

icons together. The same amount of change in Education makes people an estimated 45 percent more likely to hold Pluralist views.

Compared with their counterparts in the rural villages, city dwellers are an estimated 31 and 42 percent more likely to display religious iconography alone or in conjunction with political icons, respectively.

Moving from a standard deviation below the mean on Diversity to a standard deviation above makes people an estimated 58 percent more likely to display political icons alone and 39 percent less likely to display religious icons alone. When substituting a dichotomous mixed Neighborhood indicator for Diversity, I estimate coefficients of .63 (.34) for political icons only, .27 (.20) for religious icons only, and .17 (.32) for both icon types together. The effect of neighborhood heterogeneity on political icon display is remarkably similar in magnitude to the Diversity effect (61 percent increase). When including controls for peripheral provinces outside greater Beirut (that is, indicators for the North, South, Bekaa, and Nabatieh), the district diversity effect on religious icons barely retains statistical detectability (p = .09) and loses it on political icons (p = .22). The neighborhood diversity effect likewise loses statistical detectability on the political icons (p = .33). Meanwhile, the main effects of interest are robust to inclusion of the geographic regions in the model.
membership provides minimal leverage in explaining iconographic choices. The only detectable between-community difference is that Sunnis are less likely than their peers to display religious iconography by itself; otherwise, people look the same on the basis of their sect. Neither do between-sect differences on institutional preferences follow clear-cut patterns, but the summary Pluralist measure tentatively suggests that Shia are, in fact, the most pluralist in orientation and Sunnis the least, with Christians in between.

Evidence, however tentative, that Shia are more pluralist than their peers may appear surprising, given the community’s association with Hezbollah, a party whose democratic commitments are frequently questioned. Additional analysis reveals that self-identified Hezbollah supporters do not differ from other Lebanese in their choices of icons—they are neither more nor less likely than their peers to articulate any particular iconographic statements. Consistent with the skepticism with which many people view the party’s democratic bona fides, however, Hezbollah supporters are detectably less pluralist than their peers. Intriguingly, however, netting out the effect of Hezbollah support makes the Shia effect itself more clearly propluralist. Moreover, the same basic connection between iconographic discourse and institutional preferences described above continues to hold. In summary, then, the Hezbollah story is an important subplot in Lebanese politics, but it does not trump all others.

In principle, an interesting extension to this work could examine within-communal and within-regional variation in greater depth. Unfortunately, such an analysis is beyond the reach of these survey data due to the restricted sample size and therefore must be left for future research. In practice, community subsamples turn out to be too small to support such an analysis reliably: the estimates vary considerably between different model specifications and the estimation procedure sometimes fails to converge. These estimation difficulties indicate that the models ask too much of the limited information to use.

Shia are modestly more likely to offer Pluralist responses than their Christian counterparts, who in turn are modestly more likely to do so than Sunnis (some 18 and 16 percent more likely in relative terms, the first just detectable at the 90 percent confidence level and the second just missing detectability).

When adding an indicator for Hezbollah supporters to the multinomial logit model reported in Table 2, I estimate coefficients of .26 (.40) for political icons only, .38 (.33) for religious icons only, and .03 (.47) for both icon types together .(20 ≤ p ≤ .40). All other estimates remain qualitatively unchanged.

Hezbollah supporters are an estimated 39 percent less Pluralist than their peers in relative terms. Once we factor in the Hezbollah effect, however, Shia are some 48 percent more likely to give pluralist responses than Christians and 70 percent more likely than Sunnis.

Speaking of his party’s recruiting successes, Hezbollah’s deputy secretary-general has noted that interest in party membership increased greatly due to the successes of its resistance to Israeli occupation of the South, but also that some aspirants “have found that the membership conditions form an objective barrier. They believe in the party’s resistance activity but are not committed to its Islamic thought, or they believe in the party’s political movement but do not observe Islamic practices and behavior” (Qasim 2002, 87–88). Although Deeb’s 2006 ethnographic informants connected their piety
Finally, what can we make of the null message? Silence can itself be a public statement, at least potentially, so it is also worth considering those people who choose to post no iconography whatsoever. The null message may, of course, simply reflect disinterest in public affairs, in which case nonposters may not intend any active message with their silence. Yet silence can also represent a principled refusal to sanction a hegemonic idea. Sectarianism, and the preeminence of the sects over the nation, is Lebanon’s hegemonic idea—but not all Lebanese accept this premise. One open-response question probing subnational identification asked respondents to which social group, besides being Lebanese, they felt they belonged. Fully 10 percent of the sample refused to classify themselves accordingly and answered with a variant of “just Lebanese” or “only Lebanese.” Systematically, these individuals were only about half as likely as their peers to display any form of iconography, choosing silence instead. In effect, they refused to sanction or utilize a discourse that offers no idiom to express the centrality of the nation or Lebanon itself.

V. Conclusion

Religion is a multidimensional phenomenon that includes elements of group belonging, doctrinal beliefs, and prescribed behavior. It provides both nominal social categories and the content with which to fill them, and consequently it offers multiple dimensions on which people may construct difference or similarity. Nominal belonging does not vary in to their support for Hezbollah, many other party supporters are not particularly pious. On the basis of my survey data, Hezbollah identifiers are modestly more likely than their Shia peers to take comfort from religion but are no more or less likely to hold conservative religious views, to consult with religious leaders on political matters, or to be chauvinistic. Results available upon request. When including the Hezbollah indicator in the Pluralist equation, the coefficient estimates on Religious, Political, and the interaction term are -.04 (.21), -.56 (.27)**, and 1.49 (.39)***. The same basic pattern holds even when restricting the sample to Hezbollah supporters only, although with a magnified sectarian effect. When reestimating the Pluralist model on this subsample, the estimates are -.46 (.44), -1.77 (.48)***, and 1.20 (.73)*.

Although plausible, I am unable to test this proposition reliably because of the unexpectedly high nonresponse rate (20 percent) on the survey’s main political interest question. With this caveat in mind, I find no evidence of an interest effect either with this indicator or others that could plausibly proxy for interest indirectly.

76 Although plausible, I am unable to test this proposition reliably because of the unexpectedly high nonresponse rate (20 percent) on the survey’s main political interest question. With this caveat in mind, I find no evidence of an interest effect either with this indicator or others that could plausibly proxy for interest indirectly.

77 When adding a Lebanese Only indicator to the model reported in Table 2, I estimate coefficients of -.82 (.51) for political icons only (p = .11), -.96 (.39)** for religious icons only, and -1.74 (.68)** for both icon types together. Substantively, Lebanese Only respondents are an estimated 81, 95, and 104 percent less likely to display these three different combinations of iconography (first effect detectable at the 90 percent level, the latter two at the 95 percent level). The text of the open-response question is: “We have spoken to many Lebanese and they have all described themselves in different ways. Some people, for example, describe themselves in terms of their religion, some in terms of where they live, and others describe themselves in economic terms, such as working class, middle class, or a farmer. Besides being Lebanese, which specific group do you feel you belong to first and foremost?”
societies where one faith tradition prevails; in the absence of such differences, people can use variation in orthodoxy and devotion to construct boundaries between the pious and the irreligious. In multifaith societies, however, belonging varies alongside beliefs and commitment. When people emphasize the former, religion takes on an exclusive, sectarian dynamic. When abstracted from doctrinal details, however, religion’s ethical ideals and behavioral first principles crosscut nominal belonging and help people build inclusive, ecumenical coalitions.

Religion manifests itself in myriad ways in the plural public sphere. Discourse about it is agenda setting, framing social problems as well as their solutions. Such discourse can define social diversity as a central problem in the public sphere. Moreover, it emphasizes religious tradition as the particular dimension on which people are diverse while de-emphasizing the many other less salient political dimensions on which people differ. Further, religion provides the idiom with which to propose solutions to diversity, whether exclusive and sectarian or inclusive and ecumenical. That these solutions are countervailing emphasizes that religion is multidimensional and multivocal in the plural public sphere and that it is a force operating both for and against pluralism, depending on interpretation.

Empirically, this article studies mass discourse about religion and sectarianism in Lebanon, a multifaith society in the developing world. In particular, it examines a nationally representative sample of Lebanese and meshes their public statements as expressed through religious and political iconography with nonpublic information contained in their survey responses. These icons provide a vehicle through which to articulate different visions of the polity. Theoretically, sectarianism emphasizes competition between exclusive, secularized communities nominally bound by religious tradition. These data suggest that ethnocentrism induces people to articulate sectarianism in the public sphere and to devalue pluralist institutions to regulate public affairs. This finding at the mass level substantiates the denunciations expressed at the elite level for sectarianism’s “tribal struggle” and “war of children.”

Alternatively, people can use iconography to make public statements about religiosity. Consistent with previous theoretical and empirical work, however, religiosity may sometimes be apolitical, in which case it does not appear to influence people’s preferences toward any particular set of governing institutions. Religion, in its capacity as personal practice that regulates interactions between private individuals and the divine, has little to say about how to regulate the public sphere. In its capacity as behavioral first principles that regulate interactions between
believers, however, religion provides a set of ethical prescriptions to guide public life. When left in the abstract, these moral and ethical principles largely overlap between defining doctrinal traditions and providing targets for good governance and social justice. These data suggest that this more inclusive vision of religion, with ecumenical ideals guiding public life, tempers the ethnocentric excesses of sectarianism and valorizes pluralist institutions.

For public discourse, it is not the mere act of displaying (or not displaying) iconography by itself that is interesting, but rather it is the content of the message so expressed that merits attention. Iconography provides a means to communicate with others, and its capacity to convey ideas is not diminished by the fact that the statements are pictographic rather than written or spoken. Although the discursive medium may affect how people phrase their messages—how eloquently, how politely, how playfully, how concisely, and so on—it seems plausible that the underlying content of the ideas should not vary much with the medium. If so, then iconography can serve as a window on to public discourse more generally. Hence, what people are saying with images can tell us something about what they are saying in cafés, clubs, and conferences—the sorts of venues in which we commonly imagine public deliberation to occur.

Using iconography to study discourse is not without limitations, however. First, I inferred the broad content of the iconographic statements indirectly from people’s personal characteristics rather than from direct questions asking people about their intended messages and audiences. As such, the empirics rely not on direct validation but rather on construct validity in which iconographic choices vary in theoretically predictable ways. There are, of course, defensible reasons for using the indirect route. Direct questions about iconographic displays would almost certainly be novel and unexpected and, consequently, intrusive. The inherent novelty of such questions risks unwanted measurement effects, in which the act of measuring changes what is being measured. Further, we might anticipate that some people would be suspicious that the information garnered was being recorded for nefarious purposes by security services or unfriendly parties. Finally, we might imagine that direct measures would suffer from social desirability bias, in which respondents feel social pressure to portray their choices as enlightened or well reasoned. Put together, measurement effects, sensitivity, and social desirability all militate against direct validation, but acknowledging these problems does not imply that the indirectly validated measures I do use are, in fact, valid.
Second, I draw broad distinctions between religious and political iconography but do not parse the varied content of the icons in great depth. As such, another limitation of this work is that it does not do justice to the diversity of nuance embedded in the iconographic messages. Do political posters urge people to transcend their differences, or do they denigrate opponents? When people inscribe Quranic or biblical verses over their front doors, which particular verses do they choose? Does a Quranic verse convey scriptural orthodoxy and the Hand of Fatima folk religion? More provocatively, would a crucifix mean the same thing as a Christmas tree? Cutting down on nuance reflects the practical necessity of reducing a babel to a few key themes. One may reasonably ask, however, if this data reduction glosses over too much interesting information in pursuit of tractability.

Third, this article studies people’s public statements as expressed through iconography. It does not, however, examine what people perceive when they see someone else’s icons. As such, reality is almost certainly more complicated than the relatively simple story of central tendencies that I present here, because iconographic statements, like their written and spoken counterparts, can admit multiple interpretations and misinterpretations. One would hope that future work based on different research designs could address each of these limitations through a complementary mix of exploratory ethnography and evaluative field experiments.

One additional limitation of this research is, of course, that it draws its empirics from a single venue. Insofar as the units of analysis are individual Lebanese survey respondents, the empirics do not suffer from the “many variables, small-N” problem in the technical sense. Because these individual-level data come from a single society, however, they cannot help us evaluate country-level conditioning factors or directly compare different systems. Contextual details that differ from society to society virtually guarantee that the specifics from the Lebanon venue are not perfectly reproducible elsewhere. Even as the details differ, however, Lebanon shares the experience of political competition between religiously defined groups with many other countries around the world. In addition to familiar mainstays such as India, Nigeria, the former Yugoslavia, and Northern Ireland, more recent conflicts, often narrated with a religious idiom, have brought places such as Iraq, Sudan, and Côte d’Ivoire to the attention of both mainstream and scholarly audiences. We might expect religion to manifest itself in the public sphere in such societies in both its sectarian and its ecumenical capacities to define exclusive and inclusive political coalitions; future research should explore this conjecture.
Societies vary in the degree to which religion defines salient political cleavages, and many are diverse along more than just the denominational dimension. Given this variation, we might expect system-level factors to condition when we hear sectarian versus ecumenical religious discourse. In particular, we would wish to know whether denominational memberships reinforce or crosscut other salient cleavages based on race, region, language, or the like. When faith tradition compounds other cleavages, political entrepreneurs have incentives to stress sectarian elements of religion to reinforce group boundaries and mobilize their supporters against competing communal groups. People face qualitatively different incentives when denominational membership does not correlate with other cleavages, however. First, we might expect supporters of communal groups defined along the other dimensions to avoid religious discourse entirely in order to avoid splitting their groups. Second, we might also expect competing political entrepreneurs to stress religion's ecumenical ideals to transcend cleavages defined along other dimensions. Although plausible, these conjectures await empirical research that explicitly examines variation in cleavage structures in different societies.

More broadly, ecumenical religion is the foil to sectarian religion in multifaith societies; religion is therefore not necessarily inimical to pluralism or democracy. Plural constituencies based on shared religious ideals can crosscut more ethnocentric and often more vocal communal constituencies. The latter will always attract attention from scholars and policymakers, but the former engage in the less riveting discursive spadework of building a civil society. As one scholar observes: “[T]hese groups possess no militias, funds, or political power. What they do possess and propagate are ideas, those that promote cultural tolerance, political pluralism, and democratic governance.” The loudest voices are not the only voices; future research can help uncover how all of the various voices speak to, or past, each other.

References


Although this article focuses primarily on mass views, a potentially fascinating extension would examine the interaction between elite political entrepreneurs and their cue-taking mass constituents. One could use cueing and framing experiments to assess mass receptiveness to inclusive and exclusive appeals in these two different environments, which in turn would suggest how effective such rhetorical strategies are from the entrepreneur’s point of view.

Davis 2008, 558.


Bashir, Iskandar. 2006. *Al-Ta’ifyya fi Lubnan ila Mata* [Sectarianism in Lebanon until When?]. Beirut: University Institute for Studies.


Luskin, Robert C., James S. Fishkin, and Roger Jowell. 2002. “Considered Opin-


