Regime Types and Discrimination against Ethnoreligious Minorities: A Cross-Sectional Analysis of the Autocracy–Democracy Continuum

Jonathan Fox and Shmuel Sandler
Bar Ilan University

Although many assume that the relationship between the autocracy–democracy continuum and discrimination is linear, with autocracies discriminating the most and democracies discriminating the least, the assumption is not universal. This study uses the Minorities at Risk dataset to test this relationship with regard to government treatment of religiously differentiated ethnic minorities (ethnoreligious minorities) as well as ethnic minorities that are not religiously differentiated. The results show that the pattern of treatment of ethnoreligious minorities differs from that of other ethnic minorities. The extent to which a state is democratic has no clear influence on the level of discrimination against non-religiously differentiated ethnic minorities, but it has a clear influence on the level of discrimination against ethnoreligious minorities. Autocracies discriminate more than democracies against ethnoreligious minorities, but semi-democracies, those governments that are situated between democracies and autocracies, discriminate even less. This result is consistent on all 11 measures used here and is statistically significant for seven of them, and it remains strong when controlling for other factors, including separatism. This phenomenon increases in strength from the beginning to the end of the 1990s. Also, democracies discriminate against ethnoreligious minorities more than they do against other minorities. The nature of liberal democracy may provide an explanation for this phenomenon.

The relationship between democracy and toleration has recently been receiving renewed academic attention (Bader, 1999; Stepan, 2000). For some time, the classical view of democracy and toleration, which associates democracy with tolerance, especially in comparison with autocracies, has been the dominant view (Dahl, 1971; Rawls, 1971; Sinopoli, 1995). It places democracy and autocracy at two ends of a continuum. As a state moves closer to the democratic end of the continuum, it becomes more tolerant and discriminates less against minorities, including ethnic and religious minorities. This classical view is not universally accepted, particularly by comparative politics students of the pluralist school and more recently by some students of religion and state. In the light of this reality, a cross-sectional analysis of the link between the autocracy–democracy continuum and tolerance is warranted.

This study used quantitative methodology to examine the correlation between democracy and discrimination with regard to religiously differentiated ethnic minorities (ethnoreligious minorities). Sometimes, as is the case here, this means that the operational definitions of certain aspects of the study are limited by the nature of the available data. The most important limitation on this study was the
nature of the democracy variable, which was based on institutional factors alone. These include competitiveness of political participation, competitiveness of executive recruitment, openness of executive recruitment and constraints on the chief executive. As will be discussed in more detail in the Research Design section and in Appendix A, this is not to deny the importance of other aspects of liberal democracy, including individual rights and judicial review. For this reason, we will not limit our discussion to this more narrow definition of democracy in our review of the literature and in our conclusions, but we want to make it clear that the empirical results are based on this narrow definition, which also has certain advantages. Our definition of discrimination is also guided by the variables used here and can be generally defined as the extent to which group’s economic, political and cultural activities and rights are limited by government laws or actions.

A major argument we will make here, based on our results, is that semi-democracies, those states that are situated along the spectrum between democracies and autocracies, do not behave as we would expect and, in fact, discriminate less than democratic and autocratic states against ethnoreligious minorities. This finding, along with the results of other studies, indicates that semi-democracies may be a distinct category of regime with its own unique characteristics. However, although our results provide strong reasons to believe that this is the case, further research is needed to establish it definitively.

Democracy and Intolerance

There are several trends within the literature that question the concept of a direct link between democracy and tolerance. First, some note that tolerance is often more difficult to accomplish in heterogeneous societies. John Stuart Mill argued that democracy is almost impossible in states with multiple nationalities (Mill, 1951, p. 46). Some contemporary comparative politics students are similarly skeptical of the ability of divided societies to sustain a full democracy (Rabushka and Shepsle, 1972). Though less pessimistic, Horowitz (1985, p. 682) agrees that bifurcation along ethnic lines ‘accelerates the slide away from democracy’. Arend Lijphart and others are more optimistic and suggest ways of how divided societies can preserve democracy via shared power arrangements and coalition politics (Lijphart, 1977; Esman, 1973; Nordlinger, 1972). Nevertheless, what emerges from their writings is that, although they might have problems in ethnically divided societies, multicultural democracies still do better than autocracies with regard to tolerance.

Second, many question both the actual extent of separation of church and state in modern democracies and whether this separation is the best way to accomplish toleration. Recent studies of the relationship between state and religion cast doubt upon whether democracies, especially liberal democracies, require or fulfill the condition of a total separation between church and state. One such argument is the religious dimension of liberalism (Botwinick, 1998). Another is the need of democracy to fulfill the ‘twin tolerations’: ‘the minimal boundaries of freedom of action that must somehow be crafted for political institutions vis-a-vis religious authorities, and for religious individuals and groups vis-a-vis political institutions’
(Stepan, 2000, p. 37). These two ideas will be used below to explain our investigation into the empirical relationship between democracy and tolerance.

Not all agree that democracy and tolerance are connected. For example, Bader (1999, pp. 599–607) challenges the consensus that a complete separation between state and religion is preferable to religious pluralism. He argues that liberalism focuses on an ideal world, but, in reality, significant constraints on minority religions exist and the concept of neutrality toward religion is really a cover for a bias in favor of the dominant religion. Kekes (1993) goes even further, arguing that the liberalism commits liberal democracies to a set of values that makes them less pluralist and, thus, less tolerant than one would expect. However, these arguments constitute a normative critique of liberal democracy rather than a theory of how the autocracy–democracy continuum influences discrimination.

There are also three trends within the empirical literature that, when combined, reveal the necessity of a study of the influence of democracy on discrimination against ethnoreligious minorities. First, there are few quantitative studies that focus on the link between democracy and discrimination against ethnic and ethnoreligious minorities. Although many studies examine some of these factors, none focuses on all of them at once. Most studies of ethnic conflict, such as those of Gurr (1993a, b, 2000) and Gurr and Moore (1997), focus on the behavior of minority groups, and any examination of the influence of the behavior and characteristics of the minority group, including the state’s regime type, is done mostly in passing. Similarly, Fox (1997, 1999a, b) and Rummel (1997) focus on the behavior of minorities. Fox (2000a, 2001a) and Midlarsky (1998) examine whether specific religions are associated with democracy, but they do not examine how this influences government treatment of minorities.

Second, Hegre et al. (2001), Ellingsen and Gledisch (1997) and Fox (1999b) provide quantitative evidence for a non-linear link between the autocracy–democracy continuum and minority conflict behavior. They show that minority groups living in semi-democracies engage in higher levels of conflict behavior. Although these studies focus on the behavior of minority groups, their findings have implications for the question of how democracy and tolerance are linked. They demonstrate that at least one aspect of conflict behavior associated with the autocracy–democracy continuum is not linear. This implies that other aspects of the conflict process, such as discrimination, may not have a linear relationship with this continuum.

The findings of Gurr (1993a, b, 2000) and Gurr and Moore (1997) showing a positive relationship between discrimination and minority conflict behavior bear on this. This is because, if minorities engage in more conflict behavior when they suffer from more discrimination, and if minorities living in semi-democracies engage in higher levels of conflict behavior, we can logically assume that semi-democracies engage in higher levels of discrimination: although autocracies may discriminate more than democracies, this literature presents some evidence that semi-democracies ought to discriminate even more. This stands in contrast to the classical argument that posits a simple linear relationship between the autocracy–democracy continuum and discrimination.
Third, many recent studies argue that democracy is becoming a more important factor in the post-Cold War era, making its influence on conflict a particular concern. For instance, Jaggers and Gurr (1995) show that democracy has been on the rise since the 1970s. This process has clearly been accelerated by the break up of the Soviet Union. Also, Huntington (1996) argues, among other things, that the West, which is partly defined by its democratic tradition, will be challenged both internationally and domestically by the Sinic and Islamic civilizations, which are considerably less democratic. However, Ikenberry (1997), Tipson (1997) and Walt (1997), among many others, disagree with this argument.3

Given all of this, an examination of the influence of the autocracy–democracy continuum on discrimination against ethnic and ethnoreligious minorities using cross-sectional methodology is warranted. We focused on the behavior of three categories of regime: democracies, semi-democracies and autocracies. We hope that this exercise will shed light on both the causes of discrimination and the nature of the democracy.

In addition to our focus on the autocracy–democracy continuum, we also examined the influence of religion on discrimination by analyzing how governments treat ethnoreligious minorities and other ethnic minorities separately. There are two reasons for making this distinction. First, previous analyses showed that ethnic conflicts involving these two types of groups are markedly different (Fox, 1997). Second, many argue that religion is becoming an increasingly important factor in modern times. For instance, Haynes (1994), Rubin (1994, pp. 22–3), Sahliyeh (1990), and Shupe (1990) argue that aspects of modernization have led to an increased importance of religion in modern times. Marty and Appleby (1991, 1993, 1994) make this argument with regard to religious fundamentalism. Juergensmeyer (1993) argues that religious ideologies are replacing secular ones, especially in the Third World.4 Also, Gurr (1993a, pp. 99–116) shows that ethnic conflict in general and ethnoreligious conflict in particular has been on the rise since 1945.

Research Design

The essential question asked here was what influence the autocracy–democracy continuum has upon discrimination: are democratic, semi-democratic or autocratic governments more or less likely to discriminate and to what extent? The variables used to answer these questions were taken from three sources: the Minorities at Risk (MAR) dataset, the POLITY dataset and Fox’s ‘Ethnoreligious Conflict Dataset for Use with the Minorities at Risk Dataset’. Full descriptions of these variables and datasets are available in Appendix A.

The majority of the data in our study were taken from the MAR data, and the unit of analysis of the MAR dataset, an ethic minority within a state, was the unit of analysis for this study. This means that, even though this study focuses on discrimination, and thus the behavior of majority groups, the unit of analysis for the dataset is the ethnic minority within a state. Thus, the same majority or minority group may appear more than once in the data; however, each pairing of majority and minority groups is unique. For example, the Hindu majority in India appears in this study six times, once for each ethnoreligious minority in India,
and the Russians appear as a minority in 12 former Soviet republics. This also means that some states are not represented in the dataset, because they do not contain any ethnic minorities that meet the MAR projects criteria for inclusion (discussed below).

There are 267 minorities coded in the MAR dataset, which constitutes all ethnic minorities in the world that meet the project’s criteria for inclusion: 105 of these are ethno-religious minorities. The religion variables were collected only for these 105 cases, because religion is only likely to become an issue in a conflict when the two groups involved are of differing religions.

The 267 ethnic minorities contained in the MAR3 dataset constitute only a fraction of the as many as 5000 ethnic minorities existing worldwide (Gurr, 1993a, pp. 5–7). These minorities were selected for analysis by the MAR project because they are most likely to be politically active based on two criteria, one of which is sufficient for the group to be included in the dataset: (i) whether ‘the group collectively suffers, or benefits from, systematic discriminatory treatment vis-a-vis other groups in the state’ (Gurr 1993a, p. 6); and (ii) whether ‘the group was the focus of political mobilization and action in defense or promotion of its self-defined interests’ (Gurr, 1993a, p. 7). The use of these criteria has led to some criticism of the MAR dataset as being guilty of selection bias (Fearon and Latin, 1997). Gurr (2000, pp. 10–13) addresses these criticisms, arguing that the MAR dataset is intended to contain all ethnic groups that are politically significant and is not an exhaustive list of all ethnic minorities. Furthermore, the project is constantly adding groups based on the suggestions of research assistants as well as outside researchers. Whether this has resulted in an accurate list of groups is arguable, given that the project has been in existence for about two decades.

The democracy variables, although included in the MAR dataset, are originally from the POLITY dataset, which is among the most widely used dataset that covers regime characteristics. The religion variables are taken from a dataset designed for use with the MAR data. Although this dataset is the newest of the three used here, it also has the distinction of being the first and, thus far, only cross-sectional dataset on religion and conflict.

The data used here were taken from already-existing datasets. This means that the decisions made by those who collected the data with regard to what groups are included, how they are categorized, what variables were collected and how the variables were constructed could not be changed. For instance, as described in more detail in Appendix A, the democracy variable is based solely on institutional factors because of the difficulty in collecting information on individual rights in many countries. In this case, this is an advantage, because the extent of individual rights is very similar to the extent of discrimination, the dependent variable in this study. If individual rights had been a component of the democracy variable used here, this could have resulted in a situation where any connection between democracy and discrimination found was due to covariance.

In the description of the data analysis below, all the variables used in the various stages are noted. For a full description of these variables and instructions for obtaining the data, see Appendix A.
The first step of our analysis was to compare the mean levels of four types of discrimination between these three types of government. These four types of discrimination, which serve as the dependent variables in this study, are political discrimination, economic discrimination, cultural discrimination and repression. All of these variables were measured at three points in time, except the repression variable, which was coded only from 1996 onward, creating a total of 11 measures of discrimination.

The second step places the results of the first step in a larger context by examining whether these results hold up when accounting for other factors. This was accomplished through multiple regressions, as well as additional means tests and crosstabulations, using the four types of discrimination mentioned above as dependent variables. The independent variables include democracy in 1994, democracy-squared (a variable used to control for the influence of semi-democracies), democratization, whether the state has an official religion, the relevance of religion to the conflict, minority demands for more religious rights, cultural differences between the majority and minority group, minority grievances over autonomy issues, per-capita GNP, contagion of protest, contagion of rebellion and international political and military support for the minority group.

Data Analysis

Table 1 shows the mean levels of discrimination against the 105 ethnoreligious minorities, the 162 non-religious ethnic minorities and the two populations combined. There are several important results in this table. First, the mean level of all of the dependent variables, except economic discrimination, is significantly higher for the ethnoreligious minorities than the non-religious minorities. Second, the mean level of political and cultural discrimination against ethnoreligious minorities drops over 20 percent from the beginning of the 1990s to the mid-1990s. Third, and perhaps most importantly, the pattern of discrimination is highly counter-intuitive. As predicted by classical democratic theory, autocracies engage in more political discrimination, cultural discrimination and repression than democracies. Although the results show that democracies engage in more economic discrimination than autocracies, these results are not statistically significant after 1990–91. However, semi-democracies discriminate and repress the least against ethnoreligious minorities, on all of the measures used here, with these results being statistically significant from 1994–95 onward for all of the dependent variables except economic discrimination. This is a direct contradiction to both theories dealing with the subject. The first theory, remember, posits that repression and discrimination steadily drop as states become more democratic, and the second posits that, because of their instability, semi-democratic governments are likely to discriminate and repress the most.

This result is even more striking considering that it is not mirrored in the pattern of discrimination against non-religious minorities, which is that there is no clear pattern. There is little difference between the level of cultural discrimination against non-religious minorities by the three forms of government. Economic discrimination against non-religious minorities actually rises as governments become
### Table 1: Mean Levels of Discrimination and Repression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Discrimination</td>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Economic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Political</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Repression</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious minorities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Autocratic</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>2.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Semi-democratic</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>0.45***</td>
<td>0.52***</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>1.16*</td>
<td>0.37***</td>
<td>0.40***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>1.14*†</td>
<td>2.08†</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>1.17*†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>1.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-religious minorities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Autocratic</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Semi-democratic</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.69***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.062</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All minorities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Autocratic</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>1.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Semi-democratic</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.62*</td>
<td>0.67*</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>0.86***</td>
<td>0.82***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.78*</td>
<td>0.74*</td>
<td>1.96†</td>
<td>1.92†</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>1.14*</td>
<td>0.97**</td>
<td>0.86***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Significance (t-test) between marked variable and value for ‘autocratic’ within same category: *P < 0.05; **P < 0.01; ***P < 0.001. Significance (t-test) between marked variable and value for ‘semi-democratic’ within same category †P < 0.05; ††P < 0.01; †††P < 0.001.
more democratic. Political discrimination in 1998, the only variable that shows significant differences for non-religious minorities, shows that autocracies engage in the highest level of this form of discrimination. Finally, repression against non-religious minorities is highest among autocracies in 1996 and 1998, lowest among democracies in 1998 and lowest among semi-democracies in 1996.

This trend of semi-democracies discriminating the least against ethnoreligious minorities increases in strength during the 1990s. For all three variables for which it is statistically significant, the significance of this relationship increases from the beginning to the end of the 1990s. This appears to be mostly due to a drop in the level of discrimination and repression by semi-democracies against religious minorities. After 1990–91, political and cultural discrimination against ethnoreligious minorities in semi-democracies drops to less than 40 percent of their previous levels. In contrast, the levels of discrimination against ethnoreligious minorities by autocracies stays about the same. Democracies discriminate less against ethnoreligious minorities after 1990–91, but these drops are much smaller, to about 79 and 76 percent of their previous levels for cultural and political discrimination, respectively.

In addition, although governments on average discriminate more against ethnoreligious minorities, semi-democracies discriminate less against ethnoreligious minorities than any type of government against any type of minority on many of the variables. This is true of cultural discrimination in 1994–95, all of the economic discrimination variables, political discrimination in 1994–95 and 1998 and repression in 1998. Thus, on seven out of 11 measures, ethnoreligious minorities living in semi-democracies experience less discrimination than other ethnic minorities. This is an especially powerful finding considering the fact that, on average, ethnoreligious minorities experience more discrimination than other minorities.

In all, these results produce the very counter-intuitive result that semi-democracies discriminate and repress less than autocracies and democracies, but only against ethnoreligious minorities. Furthermore, the level of this discrimination and repression by semi-democracies against ethnoreligious minorities drops disproportionately during the 1990s. That this result holds only for discrimination and repression against ethnoreligious minorities implies that religion may provide an explanation for this counter-intuitive phenomenon: perhaps, for some reason, religious issues are less often involved in ethnic conflicts within semi-democracies.

In order to test this possibility, two religion variables were tested in multiple regressions along with democracy-squared, a variable designed to isolate the influence of semi-democracies on ethnic conflict, using the discrimination and repression variables as dependent variables. The 1998 versions of these variables were used because they were the most recent available at the time and they were the most recent variables in which the phenomenon of semi-democracies discriminating the least is strongest. The other control variables are listed above in the previous section. These regressions used only the 105 ethnoreligious minorities, because they were the minorities for which the phenomenon being tested applies and because the religion variables were only collected for these 105 cases.
The results of these multiple regressions (Table 2) show that at least one of the religion variables are strongly significant in the regressions for all of the dependent variables. More importantly, the democracy-squared variable is significantly strong in all of the regressions except the one for economic discrimination. The democracy-squared variable, remember, places semi-democracies at close to 0 and both democracies and autocracies as high as 25. Thus, this finding confirms the one from the means tests that autocracies and democracies discriminate more than semi-democracies against ethnoreligious minorities, even when controlling for other factors. That both the variables for religion and whether a government is semi-democratic are significant in the same regressions also shows that each has an independent influence. Thus, the religious factors used as controls in these regressions, although important influences on discrimination, cannot explain why semi-democracies discriminate less.

An additional benefit from these regressions is a better understanding of the process leading to discrimination. Other than the religion and the democracy-squared variables, only one variable has an influence on several types of discrimination and repression – international political support for the minority group. Autonomy grievances and contagion influence repression and per-capita GNP influences the level of political discrimination. Also, with the exception of the regression for economic discrimination (adjusted $R^2 = 0.200$), the amount of variance explained for these regressions ranges from moderate to strong, with the adjusted $R^2$ values ranging from 0.318 to 0.503 (Table 2).

Table 2: Regressions Predicting Discrimination against Religiously Differentiated Minorities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Discrimination in 1998</th>
<th>Repression in 1998</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Political</td>
<td>Economic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State has official religion, 1990s</td>
<td>0.245*</td>
<td>0.216*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance of religion, 1990s</td>
<td>0.277***</td>
<td>0.394***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural differences 1990s</td>
<td>0.104</td>
<td>0.139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy grievances, 1994–95</td>
<td>0.107</td>
<td>0.164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy in 1994</td>
<td>−0.177</td>
<td>0.181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy-squared 1994</td>
<td>0.251*</td>
<td>0.160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratization</td>
<td>(−0.017)</td>
<td>(0.036)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per-capita GNP 1993</td>
<td>0.296*</td>
<td>(0.067)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contagion of protest 1990s</td>
<td>−0.191</td>
<td>−0.143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contagion of rebellion 1990s</td>
<td>(−0.056)</td>
<td>(0.069)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International political support 1994–95</td>
<td>0.309***</td>
<td>0.167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International military support 1994–95</td>
<td>(0.058)</td>
<td>−0.113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Degrees of freedom 100 95 102 102

Adjusted $R^2$ 0.318 0.200 0.503 0.440

Notes: *$P < 0.05$; **$P < 0.01$; ***$P < 0.001$. All of the coefficients in the chart are beta values. The numbers in parentheses indicate that the variable was not included in the regression. These numbers are the value the beta would have been had that variable been included in the regression.
Another clear result is that the process that leads to economic discrimination against ethnoreligious minorities is different from the process that leads to other types of discrimination and repression. Democracy-squared does not have a significant influence on this process. This is not surprising considering that this type of discrimination is the only one for which the pattern of semi-democracies discriminating the least was not significant in means tests. In addition, none of the variables in the multiple regressions, other than the religion variables, has a significant impact on the level of economic discrimination. This finding requires further research.

Returning to the finding that semi-democracies discriminate the least, there are three additional explanations for this phenomenon that can be tested statistically with the available data. The first potential explanation is that the specific religion involved may somehow influence the process. This argument was tested (Table 3). Islamic groups score highest for cultural and political discrimination and lowest for economic discrimination. ‘Other’ groups score highest on economic discrimination and repression. Finally, Christian groups score lowest on all of the dependent variables except economic discrimination. Thus, although no religion is consistently associated with the highest levels of discrimination and repression, Christianity is associated with the lowest. However, Table 4 shows that semi-democracies are not particularly associated with Christian governments. Although 60 percent of the majority groups in ethnic conflicts involving semi-democracies are Christian, 66 percent of majority groups in conflicts involving democracies are Christian. Given this, if Christianity were the explanation, we would expect discrimination to be slightly lower in democracies, which is not the case. Also, the mean levels of discrimination and repression by Christian majorities, although lower than those for other types of majority groups (Table 3), are not as low as the mean levels of discrimination and repression within semi-democracies. Thus, the type of religion involved is not an explanation for the phenomenon of semi-democracies discriminating and repressing the least. Table 4 also shows that, in more than half of conflicts involving autocracies, the majority groups are Islamic. This confirms results by Fox (2000a, 2001b) and Midlarsky (1998) that Islamic governments tend to be more autocratic.

The second potential explanation is that more than half of the conflicts involving semi-democracies occur in the former Soviet bloc, implying that there may be a factor specific to this region that explains why semi-democracies discriminate the least. Table 3 shows that the levels of discrimination and repression in the former Soviet bloc are consistently lower than the mean. However, they are not as low as the means for conflicts involving semi-democracies, except for economic discrimination. Also, the mean levels of discrimination and repression, except for economic discrimination, are also lower among Western democracies, which are all coded as democracies. Based on this information alone, we would expect the mean levels of discrimination and repression by democratic governments to be the lowest, which is not the case (Table 1). Thus, although regional factors may provide a partial explanation for the phenomenon of semi-democracies discriminating the least against religious minorities, they cannot provide a full explanation, and whether they can provide any explanation at all is questionable.
### Table 3: Mean Levels of Discrimination against Ethnoreligious Minorities, Controlling for Religion and Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control variable</th>
<th>Value of control variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Number of semi-democracies</th>
<th>Discrimination in 1998</th>
<th>Repression in 1998</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>Economic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion of majority group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td></td>
<td>48</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.72***</td>
<td>1.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td></td>
<td>35</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.94**</td>
<td>1.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>2.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western democracies</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Soviet bloc</td>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>1.12*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>2.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Africa and Mideast</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>1.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America and Caribbean</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>2.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All semi-democracies</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All groups</td>
<td></td>
<td>105</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>1.66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: The highest mean within a category is in boldface and the lowest in italics. Significance (t-test) compared to mean of rest of sample: *P < 0.05; **P < 0.01; ***P < 0.001.
The third potential explanation is ethnic nationalism, which, among minorities, expressed through the desire for some form of self-determination, is considered by most states to be a serious threat to national ideologies and national security (Gurr, 1993a, p. 294; 1996, p. 54; Horowitz, 1985, pp. 229–84; Kumar, 1997; Williams, Robin, 1994). This is, perhaps, especially true of religious minorities, because of the connection between religion and the origins of nationalism (Smith, 1999). Therefore, minorities, especially ethnoreligious ones, expressing such sentiments could be the more likely to be the targets of discrimination. Thus, if ethnoreligious minorities living in semi-democracies expressed a desire for self-determination less often, this would provide an explanation for the lower levels of discrimination by semi-democracies against religious minorities. However, this is not the case: 73 percent of ethnoreligious minorities in semi-democracies express a desire for some form of self-determination (as measured by the autonomy grievances variable), as opposed to 62 and 58 percent of such minorities in autocracies and democracies, respectively. This confirms the findings of Hegre et al. (2001), Ellingsen and Gledisch (1997) and Fox (1999b) showing that minorities living in semi-democracies engage in the highest levels of conflict behavior. Given this, we would expect semi-democracies to discriminate more than democracies and autocracies against ethnoreligious minorities, which is not the case. Furthermore, there is no clear connection between autonomy grievances and discrimination (Table 5), since governments engage in higher levels of cultural and political discrimination against minorities that do not express autonomy grievances, but higher levels of economic discrimination and repression against religious minorities that do express such grievances.

**Discussion**

The data analysis shows a backward-J-shaped relationship between the autocracy–democracy continuum and discrimination against religious minorities (Figure 1). Although, as predicted by classic democratic theory, autocracies discriminate more than democracies against ethnoreligious minorities, semi-democracies discriminate even less. This counter-intuitive result is a powerful one that is consistent across all 11 measures of the four categories of discrimination measured in this study and is statistically significant for seven of them. This result is confirmed by a multivariate analysis. Furthermore, even though discrimination against ethnoreligious minorities is higher on average than discrimination against other minorities, on seven of the 11 measures used here ethnoreligious minorities

### Table 4: The Government Type by the Religion of the Majority Group for Groups Involved in Conflict with Minorities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion of majority group</th>
<th>Type of government (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Autocracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
living in semi-democracies experience less discrimination than non-religiously differentiated ethnic minorities living under any type of regime.

This leaves us with the following questions. Why do semi-democracies discriminate less than full democracies against religious minorities? Why does this phenomenon apply only to government behavior toward ethnoreligious minorities and not also other ethnic minorities? And why does this relationship between semi-democracies and low levels of discrimination become stronger during the mid- and late 1990s? When asking these questions, we also implicitly ask what it is in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>Economic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None expressed</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>1.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressed</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>1.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *Significance (t-test): P < 0.01. Four cases were excluded from this analysis because of missing data.

Figure 1: Graphic Representation of the Backward-J-Shaped Relationship between the Autocracy–Democracy Continuum and Discrimination against Religious Minorities
democracies that explains their variation from semi-democracies when it comes to dealing with ethnoreligious minorities. These questions are, in fact, two sides of the same coin, and it is not possible to ask one without asking the other: the question of where, when and why discrimination occurs is inextricably linked to where, when and why it does not.

Although the data analysis clearly shows that these trends exist, it does little to show why, except to rule out some likely explanations. The regression analysis (Table 2) rules out the possibility that this phenomenon is due to religion being an important element in the conflict, as well as other factors including autonomy grievances, cultural differences, democratization, economic development, contagion and international support for minority groups. The analyses shown in Tables 3 and 4 rule out the possibility that the semi-democracy variable is really a surrogate variable for a specific religion or geopolitical region. Finally, the analysis shown in Table 5 rules out the possibility that this phenomenon is due to demands for self-determination by religious minorities. This exclusion of testable factors leaves us with only potential explanations that, at this time, cannot be tested empirically.

These results are even more perplexing given that none of the existing theories on the subject of democracy and discrimination forecasted such a result. Thus, if nothing else, these results require us to consider the possibility that semi-democracies should be considered, at least by default, a separate category with its own unique attributes that are distinct from those of democracies and autocracies, rather than being considered merely the midpoint of a continuum between democracy and autocracy. If they were just the midpoint, we would expect them to exhibit some combination of the traits of democracies and the traits of autocracies. But this study and others show that semi-democracies have some traits that are different from both autocracies and democracies.

A preliminary path for explaining this phenomenon is to focus on one aspect of the set of questions above. Specifically, we asked why democracies discriminate more than semi-democracies against ethnoreligious minorities, or even at all. This question is especially pertinent to liberal democracies, which we would expect to be particularly tolerant of all minorities. Although the normative philosophies of liberal democracies clearly preach tolerance, we must differentiate between their treatment of ethnic and ethnoreligious minorities. Specifically, democracies, because of their commitment to pluralism, will grant equal treatment to ethnic minorities; but because of incongruities between their liberal ideologies and some religious ideologies, they are more likely to treat ethnoreligious minorities differently. Also, the secular make-up of these regimes, including the constitutional separation of religion and the state in some, allows them to discriminate against religious practices but not ethnic attributes.

We can better understand this differentiation between attitudes toward ethnic and ethnoreligious minorities when we distinguish between tolerance and pluralism (Sagi, 1995, pp. 176–85). Pluralist ideologies allow for the validity of many approaches and values as representing different sides of reality. In fact, they preach tolerance, denoted as a situation where one should be ready to accept the right of another to express an ideology or set of values even though one considers them
to be erroneous. Democracies are more inclined, according to the evidence of this study, toward ethnic pluralism than to tolerate religious imperatives that are different from their values and often challenge the value of tolerance.

In effect, there is a closer and more natural link between liberalism and pluralism than between liberalism and tolerance (Berger, 1990): liberal democracy is committed to a set of values that are believed to supersede competing values. Accordingly, liberal democracies, to be faithful to their basic principles, must be willing to be tolerant of many diverse groups, including ethnic groups, as long as they are willing to accept the liberal-democratic value system, or at least do not openly reject it. At the same time, liberal democracies are less obliged to tolerate those groups that espouse values, including religious ones, that are deemed to contradict the liberal-democratic value system. Some, like Kekes (1993, pp. 199–217), argue that, because of this, liberal democracy constitutes a civic religion that is not truly pluralist.12

To be sure, to fully validate this argument, we should differentiate among ethnoreligious minorities according to their level of tolerance and intolerance. This study examined differences between Christian, Muslim and other majority groups. A more comprehensive analysis would account for the religion of the minority group, the extent to which a government follows a liberal ideology and the extent to which the religious ideologies of ethnoreligious minorities are compatible with liberal ideologies. This includes accounting for whether ethnoreligious minorities follow fundamentalist or non-fundamentalist ideologies as well as many other factors. Such inquiries would require more developed data that, to the best of our knowledge, do not exist today.

As we said at the beginning of this paper, there is a growing recognition of the religious dimension of liberal democracy. Traditional religion, in many states, often competes with liberal democracy, providing a challenge to its value system. This challenge is particularly severe when the competitor is a minority religion that contests both the liberal-democratic values and the culture of the ruling majority: the identification of the state with the ‘civic religion’ of liberal democracy puts the state in confrontation with some strains of religion.13

There is some support for this argument in the literature on fundamentalism. Marty and Appleby (1991, 1993, 1994) argue that, among other things, fundamentalism is a rejection of modern ideas, often including the modern ideologies that are the basis for democratic government. In fact, fundamentalists often seek to replace democratic ideologies and governments with their own. This may be particularly true of pluralist societies (Williams, Rhys, 1994, p. 801):

only in societies where there are competing options is it necessary to declare so vigorously that there is only one correct choice. Pluralism, with its threat of an easy tolerance that weakens religious commitment itself, is the yeast of many fundamentalist movements.

This reasoning also has the advantage of providing an explanation for why democracies discriminate against ethnoreligious minorities more than they do against other ethnic minorities.
Having provided a potential answer for democracies’ discrimination of religion, we now examine the other side of this question: why do semi-democracies have less difficulty tolerating ethnoreligious minorities? Semi-democracies, as it seems from this study, possibly constitute a distinct group, to a large extent due to the infusion of liberalism into Western democracy. By definition, none of the semi-democracies could be defined as a liberal democracy and, hence, is less inclined to see some types of religious dogmas and practices as threatening their central values system: semi-democracies are not as committed to liberalism as are democracies and, accordingly, are less likely to feel challenged by religious ideologies. In fact, the opposite may be true. Even a minority religion can serve as a legitimizing force for these regimes (Kokosalakis, 1985, p. 371; Little, 1991; Turner, 1991, pp. 178–98). As such, minority religions can be useful tools for legitimating a regime that does not possess the means of coercion of an autocracy but also lacks the political culture of a liberal democracy. Moreover, given the inherent instability of such regimes, religion as a mobilizing force of an ethnic minority could pose a threat to the regime. Hence, it is very important to co-opt the religious leaders of the minority in support of the regime. To a certain extent it would be easier to co-opt or satisfy the religious needs of such minorities than to do so for their ethnonational needs. This may be especially necessary considering that semi-democracies suffer from, perhaps, the highest levels of challenges by ethnic and religious minorities (Hegre et al., 2001; Ellingsen and Gledisch, 1997; Fox, 1999b).

Thus, by focusing on why democracies discriminate, the liberal ideologies of these democracies, in comparison with the more practical concerns of semi-democracies, can provide an explanation for the fact that semi-democracies discriminate the least against, in particular, religious minorities. This argument can also provide an explanation for the increase in strength of this phenomenon after the early 1990s. This is because the decrease in discrimination by semi-democracies coincides with the end of the Cold War. The democracy variable used here, remember, was measured in 1994. Many states in the former Soviet bloc were well into the process of democratization by this time (Table 3), having achieved the status of semi-democracy. This was less true in 1990 and 1991, to the extent that many of these states that in 1994 are categorized as semi-democracies had not yet achieved this status in 1990–91 or, at least, were still more influenced by their autocratic past. Thus, the decrease in discrimination by semi-democracies against ethnoreligious minorities between the early and mid-1990s coincides with the solidification of the post-communist governing institutions.

However, this explanation has two drawbacks. First, it cannot be tested quantitatively at this time. In order to do so, we would need state-level data on, among other things, aspects of civic culture, including the influence of religion on state behavior and state commitment to liberal-democratic ideals, as well as more specific information on the religious ideologies of each ethnoreligious minority in the study.

Second, as shown in Appendix B, many of the states that are considered democratic according to this typology are not among those that all would consider liberal democracies. This is, in part, due to the fact that the democracy variable used here focuses on questions of institutional democracy and popular participation, rather
than human rights (Jaggers and Gurr, 1995). However, these democracies have clearly been influenced by the ideas of Western liberal democracies. Also, these states are clearly closer than the states classified as semi-democracies to the definition of liberal democracy. Hence, whether these states are sufficiently influenced by liberal-democratic doctrine to exhibit some of the behavior of liberal democracies is arguable. In addition, the exclusion of human rights issues from the democracy variable is, perhaps, an advantage, because the democracy variable would be covariant with discrimination if human rights records were included.

Conclusions

This study provides considerable evidence for a backward-J-shaped relationship between democracy and discrimination against religious minorities: although autocracies generally discriminate more than democracies, semi-democratic governments discriminated the least throughout the 1990s and especially in the mid-to late 1990s, even when controlling for several other factors.

These results are counter-intuitive, in that they stand in contradiction to the existing theories on the topic. In fact, these results are especially perplexing given that this study confirms the findings of previous studies that minority groups living in semi-democracies engage in higher levels of conflict behavior. Thus, although semi-democratic governments tend to be more tolerant of ethnoreligious minorities, ethnoreligious minorities tend to be more likely to oppose semi-democratic governments. This stands in direct opposition to the classic relative deprivation argument made by Gurr (1970, 1993a, b), among others, that higher levels of discrimination should lead to higher levels of opposition activity.

Although the above argument, that this is due to the lesser menace from religious opposition that semi-democracies feel in comparison with liberal democracies, provides some explanation for this phenomenon, it is also somewhat problematic for several reasons. First, it is an explanation that, at this time, cannot be proven or disproven through quantitative analysis. However, the quantitative portion of this study was able to eliminate a number of factors, including separatism, international factors, region, religious culture, regime and economic issues, as explanations for this phenomenon. Second, at least part of the explanation may lie within some other characteristics of democracies and/or semi-democracies that we have not examined.

Third, as described above and in Appendix A, our variables, especially the democracy variable, have certain limitations. Specifically, our categorization of states by regime type is limited to the institutional aspects of democracy, and some would question whether, even on this basis, all states are categorized correctly by this coding scheme. Accordingly, more work needs to be done in creating workable means to categorize states. Nevertheless, these data are taken from a widely used and accepted database and this problem is well within the bounds of what is considered acceptable in this type of analysis. Also, any categorization of regime types is unlikely to be found acceptable by all.

Be that as it may, this study clearly shows that semi-democracies are possibly a distinct type of government, rather than the midpoint between democracies and
autocracy, with their own unique attributes and patterns of behavior about which we do not have nearly enough information. This analysis makes clear that more study is required of both how semi-democratic governments behave and why they behave as they do.

This future research would need to deal with the following questions. What, if any, additional aspects of semi-democracies are different from what we would expect if they were just the midpoint between autocracies and democracies? If such differences exist, are they sufficient to justify categorizing semi-democracies as a qualitatively different type of regime or are these differences merely anomalies? If they do constitute a separate category of regime, are semi-democracies a stable category, with states remaining in it for long periods of time, or is it made up of states in transition between autocracy and democracy or vice versa? Another possibility would be that there exist several types of semi-democracy: stable ones, those in transition to democracy and those in transition to autocracy. If this is the case, are these three types of semi-democracy significantly different from each other and, if so, how? Finally, what minority characteristics, especially those related to religious ideologies and practices, most influence the extent of discrimination against ethnoreligious minorities?

(Accepted: 12 February 2003)

About the Authors

Jonathan Fox, Department of Political Studies, Bar Ilan University, Ramat Gan 52900, Israel; email: foxjon@mail.biu.ac.il

Shmuel Sandler, Begin-Sadat (BESA) Center for Strategic Studies, Bar Ilan University, Ramat Gan 52900, Israel; email: sandls@mail.biu.ac.il

Notes

1 The Appendices for this paper can be found on the Political Studies website (http://www.politicalstudies.org/mainjournal/supplementarydata/).

2 One notable exception to this trend is Fox (2000b). Although that paper focuses on religion as a cause of ethnic discrimination, a control variable for semi-democracies is used and shows that semi-democracies discriminate the least against ethnoreligious minorities, but it does not provide a suitable explanation for this trend and concludes that ‘more research into this phenomenon is necessary’.

3 For a further critique of Huntington’s theory, see Fox (2001b, 2002a).

4 For a more detailed discussion of modernization and religion, see Fox (2002b, pp. 31–63).

5 The MAR project has since added 18 cases to the data, making the total 285. These cases are not included in this analysis because the additional religion data used in this study were not coded for these cases.

6 For a sampling of studies based on this database, see, among others, Cleary (2000), Gurr (1993a, b, 1994, 2000), Gurr and Moore (1997), Latin (2000) and Fox (1999b, 2000b). For a discussion of data reliability, see Appendix A.

7 For a sampling of studies based on these data, see, among others, Hegre et al. (2001), Jaggers and Gurr (1995), Fox (1999b), Midlarsky (1998) and Ward and Gleditsch (1998). For reliability tests on these data based on comparisons with the results of other researchers, see Jaggers and Gurr (1995, p. 473).

8 For a sampling of studies based on these data, see, among others, Fox (1997, 1999a, b, 2000a, b). For reliability tests on these data based on back-up codings, see Fox (1999b).
9 These variables were selected because they were shown by Fox (2000b) to be important in predicting levels of discrimination against ethnoreligious minorities using data similar to those used here. Further discussion of why these variables are important is included in Appendix A.

10 These differences are statistically significant for the political restrictions in 1990–91 (t-test, \( P < 0.05 \)), for all of the cultural restrictions variables (t-test, \( P < 0.001 \)) and for both repression variables (t-test, \( P < 0.001 \)).

11 The religions tested here were aggregated into three categories – Christian, Islamic and other – because to divide them more specifically by religion and denomination would result in there being too few cases in many of the categories for meaningful statistical results.

12 On the inherent bonds between liberalism and pluralism, see Sandel (1982). Also, some, like Bader (1999, p. 600), argue that even secular democracies still favor the religion of the majority.

13 Haynes (1994) and Juergensmeyer (1993), among others, argue that this is precisely what is happening in much of the Third World.

References


