

Oral Defense Announcement

University of Missouri – St. Louis Graduate School

An oral examination in defense of the dissertation for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Criminology and Criminal Justice

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M.S.W. in Social Work, May, 2008, Washington University in St. Louis
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An Unholy Union? The Relationship between Protestantism and Homicide

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Time: 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Place: 324 Lucas Hall

Abstract

Cross-national studies seeking to explain the variation in rates of homicide have examined a multitude of factors including religion, but fewer studies have examined how religion may influence homicide through a society's institutional structure. Social institutions include entities such as the economy, the family, the political structure, and educational system; and these institutions serve as guides for human action and behavior. Through its emphasis on values, religion may influence the interests and legitimize the functioning within societal institutions. In the present study, I examine how the major world religions of Protestantism, Catholicism, Orthodox Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism may be associated with homicide through various cultural and institutional mechanisms. These mechanisms include religious pluralism, secularism, individualism, economic dominance, and social welfare. Higher levels of religious pluralism within a nation may contribute to higher rates of homicide by promoting secularism and an individualistic institutional environment lacking effective controls. Higher rates of homicide may also occur as the competing value structures associated with religious pluralism legitimize a differentiated institutional structure whereby economic conditions dominate and weaken the socialization capacities of non-economic institutions. An increase in social welfare through both public and private provisions may serve to offset the deleterious effects of the individualism emanating from religion. While all of the major world religions are assessed in terms of their relationship with these mechanisms, particular attention is given to Protestantism due to its pluralistic landscape and individualistic focus stemming from the Reformation. A global measure of religious pluralism is also included in this study to assess whether the coexistence of the different world religions within a nation may be linked to homicide. Results from this study suggest that neither the major world religions nor the global measure of religious pluralism is significantly associated with cross-national rates of homicide directly or through any of the proposed mechanisms. These findings suggest that future studies examining the relationship between religion and cross-national rates of homicide should focus on the measurement of religion and alternative institutional mechanisms that may elucidate this potential association.

Defense of Dissertation Committee

Richard Rosenfeld, Ph.D. (Chair)

Janet Lauritsen, Ph.D.

Michael Campbell, Ph.D.

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