Sacred Politics:
Religious Leaders and Conflict in Israel
I am currently an assistant professor (lecturer) in political science at the University of Haifa. I received a doctoral dissertation grant in Round 2. I have a PhD in political science, from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (2019).

I study religion and conflict in Israel and the Muslim world. My work combines big data approaches with experiments and in-depth interviews.

You can contact me at mrfreed@poli.haifa.ac.il.

My website is http://mfreedman.mit.edu/.
Religion and Conflict
Open Questions

Religion and Conflict

Religion and Political Polarization
1. How do religious leaders relate to nationalism, conflict, and the state?
1. How do religious leaders relate to nationalism, conflict, and the state?

2. What influence do religious leaders have on conflict dynamics and the political behavior of their followers?
Dissertation

Three papers exploring why religious leaders adopt nationalist positions and how these positions contribute to the duration of an ongoing conflict
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1. Fighting from the Pulpit: Religious Leaders and Violent Conflict in Israel (Published at JCR)
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Dissertation

Three papers exploring why religious leaders adopt nationalist positions and how these positions contribute to the duration of an ongoing conflict

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Fighting from the Pulpit: Religious Leaders and Violent Conflict in Israel
Question: Why do religious leaders adopt certain nationalist positions during different military and political conflicts?
Question: Why do religious leaders adopt certain nationalist positions during different military and political conflicts?

Theory:

- Incentive-based theory
- Different types of conflict: Strategic versus Symbolic
Sacred Spaces
Sacred Spaces

WAR ON SACRED GROUNDS
RON E. HASSNER
Sacred Spaces

Indivisible Territory and the Politics of Legitimacy
Jerusalem and Northern Ireland
Stacie E. Goddard
Religious leaders respond to symbolic conflict
Religious leaders respond to symbolic conflict
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Different types of conflicts
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Data: Sabbath Pamphlets
Findings

Operation Cast Lead

Impact of Conflict on Nationalist Rhetoric

Date

Operation Pillar of Defense

Impact of Conflict on Nationalist Rhetoric

Date

Operation Protective Edge

Kidnapping

Impact of Conflict on Nationalist Rhetoric

Date
1. Religious leaders infuse conflict with a religious tone
1. Religious leaders infuse conflict with a religious tone

2. Symbolic conflict versus strategic conflict
1. Religious leaders infuse conflict with a religious tone

2. Symbolic conflict versus strategic conflict

3. Why religious conflicts are hard to solve
Discussion

1. Religious leaders infuse conflict with a religious tone

2. Symbolic conflict versus strategic conflict

3. Why religious conflicts are hard to solve

4. Introduce new data and methods to the study of conflict
Vote with Your Rabbi: The Electoral Effects of Religious Institutions in Israel
Question: Can religious institutions generate grassroots support for religious political parties?
Question: Can religious institutions generate grassroots support for religious political parties?

Theory:

- Patronage-based theory
- Religious institutions ally with religious political parties
Motivation
Religious Party Success

Egypt
Religious Party Success

Egypt

Lebanon
Religious Party Success

Egypt

Lebanon

Christian-Democratic Parties
Why do they succeed?
Why do they succeed?

No easy class-based explanation
Why do they succeed?

No easy class-based explanation

Opinion 1: Good reputation
Why do they succeed?

No easy class-based explanation

Opinion 1: Good reputation

Opinion 2: Organizational capacity
Why do they succeed?

No easy class-based explanation

Opinion 1: Good reputation

Opinion 2: Organizational capacity

Little consensus among scholars
Specific Research Questions

1. Can religious institutions generate grassroots support for religious political parties?
1. Can religious institutions generate grassroots support for religious political parties?

2. What impact do different electoral strategies have on local communities?
Theory
Religious institutions form alliances with religious parties
Religious institutions form alliances with religious parties
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Religious institutions form alliances with religious parties

Resources → Vote → Services

Religious Institutions
Different Types of Patronage
Different Types of Patronage
Different Types of Patronage

Brokers, Voters, and Clientelism
*The Puzzle of Distributive Politics*

*Compassionate Communalism: Welfare and Sectarianism in Lebanon*

Susan C. Stokes
Thad Dunning
Mercolo Nazareno
Valeria Brusco

Melani Cammett
Case Study
Religious parties in Israel

United Torah Judaism
Religious parties in Israel

United Torah Judaism

Shas
Religious parties in Israel

United Torah Judaism

Shas

Jewish Home
Data

- More than 5,000 religious institutions
  - Date founded and address
  - Organization objectives
  - Financial data, including government funding

- Estimate impact of new religious institutions on neighborhood voting patterns

- Distinguish between institutions that receive (or not) government funding
Religious institutions do not randomly choose their geographic location
Empirical Strategy

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Empirical Strategy

Religious institutions do not randomly choose their geographic location.
Empirical Strategy

Religious institutions do not randomly choose their geographic location.

![Image of people standing in front of a building]

![Image of a building and surrounding area]

![Image of a street with parked cars]
Empirical Strategy

Religious institutions do not randomly choose their geographic location

But their timing is somewhat random
Comparable Neighborhoods
Comparable Neighborhoods

Treated
Control
Main Results

Percentage Change in Vote

Political Parties

UTJ  Shas  Mafdal  Likud  Center  Labor  Meretz
Mechanisms

- Why is the entry of religious institutions associated with effects on local vote choice?
Mechanisms

- Why is the entry of religious institutions associated with effects on local vote choice?
  1. Resources
Mechanisms

Why is the entry of religious institutions associated with effects on local vote choice?

1. Resources
2. Immigration
Mechanisms

- Why is the entry of religious institutions associated with effects on local vote choice?
  1. Resources
  2. Immigration
  3. Religious Ideology
Resources

Percentage Change in Vote

Political Parties

Funding

No Funding
Discussion
Implications

- Conceptual similarities between religious patronage strategies and clientelism
Implications

- Conceptual similarities between religious patronage strategies and clientelism
- When religious institutions form political alliances
  - Likely to weaken community links
  - Polarizes religion
  - May weaken party accountability to the median voter
Implications

- Conceptual similarities between religious patronage strategies and clientelism

- When religious institutions form political alliances
  - Likely to weaken community links
  - Polarizes religion
  - May weaken party accountability to the median voter

- Findings are most relevant when there is overlap between religious and other sectarian identities.
  - Middle East countries like Lebanon
  - Western countries like the USA
Religious Credibility and Political Compromise: Experimental Evidence from Religious Leaders in Israel (with Pazit Ben-Nun Bloom)
Overview

1. Theory of religious credibility
Overview

1. Theory of religious credibility
2. Describe our survey experiments
Overview

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2. Describe our survey experiments
3. Outline how we examine the impact of religious leader credibility on public support for political compromise
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4. Results suggest that religious leaders with political and religious credibility do contribute to a greater willingness to make political compromises
Overview

1. Theory of religious credibility
2. Describe our survey experiments
3. Outline how we examine the impact of religious leader credibility on public support for political compromise
4. Results suggest that religious leaders with political and religious credibility do contribute to a greater willingness to make political compromises
5. Why religious conflicts are hard to resolve
Can religious leaders help resolve conflict?
Can religious leaders help resolve conflict?

Opinion 1: Drive conflict by enforcing indivisibility
Can religious leaders help resolve conflict?

Opinion 1: Drive conflict by enforcing indivisibility

Opinion 2: Resolve conflict by appealing to sacred values
Can religious leaders help resolve conflict?

Opinion 1: Drive conflict by enforcing indivisibility

Opinion 2: Resolve conflict by appealing to sacred values

Little consensus among scholars, especially regarding type of religious leader
Specific Research Question

**Question:** Why are some religious leaders able to help resolve conflict while others have little impact?
Research Design

- Survey experiment in Israel
Research Design

- Survey experiment in Israel
- Different types of conflict and religious leaders
Research Design

- Survey experiment in Israel
- Different types of conflict and religious leaders
- Randomize religious and political credibility of leader
Research Design

- Survey experiment in Israel
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- Conciliatory message about peace
Research Design

- Survey experiment in Israel
- Different types of conflict and religious leaders
- Randomize religious and political credibility of leader
- Conciliatory message about peace
- IRB approval from MIT and Hebrew University
Dependent Variables

1. Support for Peace

- Support for negotiations
- Land for peace
- Divide Jerusalem

2. Feelings towards Palestinians

3. Support for Religious Tolerance
Dependent Variables

1. Support for Peace
   - Support for negotiations
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<td>Former hardliner who opposed peace in the past</td>
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<td>Religious (study 1)</td>
<td>Takes position on other religious matters</td>
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<td>Strict and lenient version</td>
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Study Samples

Study 1 - 280 respondents, collected in 2 waves (September 2018 and January 2019)
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Study 2 - 290 respondents (May 2019)

Data collected using IPanel (online internet panel)
Over-sampled from Israel’s religious groups
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Over-sampled from Israel’s religious groups
Manipulation Check

Religious Credibility by Treatment Group

(a) Study 1
Manipulation Check

Religious Credibility by Treatment Group

(a) Study 1

(b) Study 2
Study 1 Impact of Treatment on Political Compromise

(a) Support for Peace
Study 1 Impact of Treatment on Political Compromise

(a) Support for Peace

(b) Feelings towards Palestinians
Mediated by religious credibility
Heterogeneity by Exposure to Conflict

Support Peace

Control − Low  Treatment − Low  Control − High  Treatment−High

n=60  n=102  n=44  n=42

Exposure to Conflict

2.5  3.0  3.5

3.29  3.58

3.29  2.60

2.5  3.0  3.5

3.58  2.60

2.55
Study 2

Impact of Treatment on Political Compromise

(a) Support for Peace
Study 2

Impact of Treatment on Political Compromise

(a) Support for Peace

(b) Feelings towards Palestinians
• Religious leaders with political and religious credibility are effective
Discussion

- Religious leaders with political and religious credibility are effective
  - Infrequent combination - possible explanation why religious peacemaking is rare
Discussion

- Religious leaders with political and religious credibility are effective
  - Infrequent combination - possible explanation why religious peacemaking is rare
- How to explain the divergence between studies
  - Study 2 was conducted during a period of violence
Discussion

- Religious leaders with political and religious credibility are effective
  - Infrequent combination - possible explanation why religious peacemaking is rare
- How to explain the divergence between studies
  - Study 2 was conducted during a period of violence
- Further follow-up analyses studies to bridge between the 2 studies
Main Contributions

- Dissertation shows why religious clerics adopt moderate and extreme ideologies.
Main Contributions

- Dissertation shows why religious clerics adopt moderate and extreme ideologies.
- Outside of scholarly literatures, my dissertation offers important findings for policy-makers seeking to understand and include religious leaders in development and peace-building processes.
Future Planned Research

Examine how religious leaders relate to the state
Examine how religious leaders relate to the state
Examine how religious leaders relate to the state

Resources Based Theory