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## International Recognition and Religion: A Quantitative Analysis of Kosovo's Contested Status

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### ABSTRACT

Recognition from other recognized states is the key to becoming a fully fledged member state of the international system. Although many new states are quickly and universally recognized, the recognition of other aspiring states remains highly contested. In these cases of contested sovereignty, some countries but not others extend recognition. However, research on what shapes a country's decision to recognize a claim to sovereign statehood remains relatively sparse. This article focuses on how religion shapes the incentives of states to extend or withhold recognition to aspiring states in cases of contested sovereignty. It posits two mechanisms, one at the domestic level through religious institutions and one at the international level through transnational religious affinities. The article uses new data on all state decisions regarding the international recognition of Kosovo to test these propositions. The results provide strong support for these two pathways through which religion shapes state decisions regarding international recognition.

### KEYWORDS

International recognition; religion; institutions; secession; sovereignty; unrecognized states

What explains why some states recognize the formal sovereignty claims of aspiring states, while other countries refuse to extend recognition? Although recognition is an important component of what it means to be a state and possess sovereignty (Coggins 2011; Krasner 1999; Sterio 2012), the scholarly literature provides relatively few explicit predictions about which countries (or groups of countries) will extend recognition and which states will withhold it. Internal wars have become the primary source of conflict and causalities in the post-Cold War international system (Gleditsch 2004; Lacina 2004:192; Wimmer and Min 2009:2). Many of these conflicts are between states and secessionist groups, which has made the problem of recognition even more central to world politics (Baer 2000; Fazal and Griffiths 2014; Paquin 2010; Sambanis and Milanovic 2014; Walter 2006). The modern world offers a number of examples of de facto states, aspiring states, and frozen conflicts with partial or contested recognition (for example, Abkhazia, Kosovo,

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Palestine, and Western Sahara), and even established states, notably Israel, that are not fully recognized by all other states in the United Nations (UN). Although cases of contested recognition occur less frequently than cases of full recognition (for example, Eritrea, South Sudan), their existence matters more than their numbers suggest, since they account for a substantial amount of conflict and typically require significant attention from regional actors (Florea 2014:14–16). Understanding why states “take sides” in such recognition disputes is therefore just as important as explaining secession itself and represents an important but understudied research frontier.

Much of the literature has emphasized the role of great powers in recognition (Coggins 2011; Sterio 2012). Although we agree that great power recognition is vital, and we account for it in our analysis, it is not sufficient to ensure membership in the UN or other key international organizations—small states matter, too. For example, membership in the UN requires two-thirds support in the General Assembly (XIV Rule 136).<sup>1</sup> Aspiring states spend significant time and resources petitioning all states, including small states, for recognition (Rich 2009:171–174). Krasner (1999:7) states that external recognition “facilitates treaty making, establishes diplomatic immunity, and offers a shield against legal actions taken in other states.” At the same time, states that stand to lose territory to secession often devote significant effort to lobbying other countries to withhold international recognition from the aspiring (secessionist) state.<sup>2</sup> While political reasons are primary, recognition by small states also matters for economic reasons, since small states may be a source of subsequent foreign investment and trade, and international economic links are difficult to build and regulate if one of the potential partners does not recognize the sovereignty of the other state. Indeed, the US turn toward China, which paved the way for massive investments and trade between the two countries, began in earnest only after the United States withdrew recognition of the Republic of China government in Taiwan in favor of the People’s Republic of China (Kissinger 2011).

The theory of recognition we develop in the next section emphasizes the role that religion plays in guiding recognition decisions in cases of contested recognition and leads to two main hypotheses, discussed later. We investigate the theory using a new data set on the recognition decisions of all UN members on the (non)recognition of Kosovo and discuss the results of our analysis along with their implications for understanding contested recognition around the world.

<sup>1</sup>Security Council approval is also necessary for becoming a UN member. General Assembly of the United Nations, Rules of Procedure, XIV: Admission of New Members to the United Nations. Available at <http://www.un.org/en/ga/about/ropga/adms.shtml>.

<sup>2</sup>Ker-Lindsay (2014) claims that Serbia may be giving up or compromising on Kosovo in order to join the European Union. (Also see: Economides and Ker-Lindsay [2015]. For a comparative study of countersecessionist foreign policy, see Ker-Lindsay [2012]).

## A Theory of Religion and Recognition

In contrast to more classical power-based explanations based on great powers and “facts on the ground,” this study seeks to contribute to a growing literature on the role of religion and religious institutions in politics. According to one scholar, “[t]he serious study of religion and politics is [still] relatively new because the dominant thinking in sociology and political science has long considered religion increasingly irrelevant in social life” (Gill 2001:135). However, there is an emerging literature on the role of religion and religious institutions in shaping patterns of state institutions, economic performance, policy preferences, voting and popular mobilization (Dzutsati, Siroky, and Dzutsev 2016; Grzymala-Busse 2012; Warner 2000), and in international relations (Fox and Sandler 2004; Sandal and James 2010). Scholars have studied the relationship between religion and violence as well as conflict resolution and sought to construct measures that allow us to study such questions across a large number of countries. For example, Nilsson (2012) finds that peace accords are more durable when religious groups and other civil society organizations are involved in the accords, and Vüllers, Pfeiffer, and Basedau (2015) have gathered cross-national data to examine the relationship between religion and violence (Juergensmeyer 2000).

Scholars have also focused on the sources of religious regulation. For example, Fox (2006) argues that government regulation of religion is widespread cross-nationally and continues to shape political life across large parts of the world. Scholars have also debated whether religious regulation is compatible with democracy (Fox 2007; Kunkler 2012). Sarkissian (2015:26) studies religious repression in authoritarian states and argues that it is driven by “the interaction of the level of political competition in a state with the structure of religious divisions in society.”<sup>3</sup> McCleary and Barro (2006) and Buckley and Mantilla (2013) examine the relationship between religious regulation and economic development.

Although we have learned more about religious institutions and domestic politics and economics, we know less about the effects of religious institutions on international policy outcomes. There is reason to expect that religious regulation has important international implications. Henne (2012) has found that interstate disputes between religious (that is, with state favoritism for a religion, among other factors) and secular states are more likely to involve the use of force. Henne (2013) argues that states with extensive government regulation of religion (especially authoritarian ones) are more likely to support UN resolutions that condemn religious defamation. We argue that religious regulation shapes international relations because it influences recognition decisions regarding aspiring secessionist states.

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<sup>3</sup>Sarkissian (2015:27) defines religious repression broadly. She argues that policies that favor a religion (for example, subsidies for clerical salaries and religious education) can constitute religious repression because this can lead to discrimination against those who do not benefit from state support.

According to some theories, the recognition of secessionist claims set a precedent that can embolden other secessionist groups (Jackson and Rosberg 1982; Herbst 1989; Vrbetic 2013). States that face a domestic threat (for example, from a separatist group) will therefore prefer to deny recognition from noncore groups, whether religious or ethnic, in other states (Mylonas 2013; Zartman 1966). Consistent with this logic, Coggins (2011) argues that vulnerability to such domestic threats reduces the likelihood that a great power will recognize a secessionist claim. This logic should also apply with even greater force to minor powers and small states facing domestic secessionist threats, since they are on average less well equipped to contain such threats. As a result, when states perceive a significant internal threat to the dominant ethnic or religious group, this theory leads us to expect that they should be systematically more likely to back the status quo (that is, to withhold recognition from aspiring states).

The “theory of vulnerability” was used to explain external support for secession (Jackson and Rosberg 1982:18; Herbst 1989; Touval 1972). This may help explain why it does not always constrain states from supporting separatist groups in other countries and why the empirical support for the theory has been mixed. Unlike covert support for secessionists, however, citizens in the recognizing state can directly discern whether their state has extended external *recognition*, which implies that recognition decisions should be more strongly guided by the logic of domestic vulnerability.

Ethnonationalism is not the only identity-based threat to the internal stability of many states around the world—as the widespread regulation of religion around the world attests, numerous states feel threatened by noncore religious groups, especially those that proselytize. Some countries are domestically vulnerable to both ethnic and religious groups, some to only one or the other, and a few states feel threatened by neither. To the extent to which a state perceives a threat from such groups, this perception is often reflected in its institutions, specifically those organizations charged with regulating religion. These institutions vary considerably cross-nationally in terms of the extent to which they tolerate or discourage religious proselytization. Restricting proselytization may be a reaction to perceived or anticipated threats from a domestic group of the same religion advocating a different interpretation or from a minority group. For example, China’s efforts to regulate Islam in Xinjiang province are connected to Beijing’s concerns about a potential secessionist threat in the province (Potter 2003). Horowitz (2000:222) claims that the effort by majority groups to enforce an official religion may occur among majority groups that feel vulnerable.

Religious regulation can reflect the perception of domestic vulnerability to secessionist threats and also a sense of vulnerability to foreign, notably Western, influences. For example, Sarkissian (2015) argues that some religious restrictions in Russia (that is, targeting religious groups not regarded as traditional in Russia) are motivated by concerns about foreign allegiances

and about groups with strong organizational structures based outside of Russia. Moreover, freedom of religion is an important American value, which has influenced the dominant values of the contemporary international system. Religious regulation can be contrary to this value, and countries that engage in it may be concerned about the extent of American international influence. They may be particularly reluctant to support a secessionist claim that is backed by the United States, as is the case in Kosovo.

Our analysis of regulation of religion builds on the work of Sarkissian (2015), who argues that religious repression should be thought of as primarily driven by politics (rather than by theological concerns). This is consistent with our claim that religious regulation reflects political concerns regarding the influence of minority religious groups and, potentially, domestic secessionist threats.<sup>4</sup> If we take the extent to which a state regulates religion as an indicator of its perceived vulnerability to noncore religious groups, countries with institutions that strictly regulate religion should be less likely to recognize an aspiring state because of its potential to set a precedent at home. This logic leads to our first hypothesis.

*H1: Countries that extensively regulate religion are less likely to recognize aspiring states than countries that regulate religion less.*

Since international recognition decisions are an international policy issue, we should expect that religion would also exhibit its effect in international interactions. The literature has already highlighted that countries are more likely to intervene in civil wars on behalf of their coreligionists who are fighting a group or a state of a different religion (Carment, James, and Taydas 2009; Fox, James, and Li 2009).<sup>5</sup> This appears particularly widespread for Muslim majority states, which usually do not intervene in secessionist conflicts on the side of non-Muslim groups (Fox et al. 2009). Scholars have also found that, in general, countries that share a dominant religious identity tend to support one another politically (Ellis 2010; Sandal and Fox 2004). There is reason to expect that this dynamic may apply in the case of Kosovo since, as Fox and Sandler (2004:71) point out, ethnic Albanians in Kosovo received significant support from Islamic organizations and majority-Muslim states.

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<sup>4</sup>Sarkissian (2015) points out that majority religions can be repressed as well. However, countries that repress the majority religion usually repress minority religions as well. For example, in countries included in Sarkissian's (2015) analytical category of repressing "all but one" religion, the religion that is not repressed is the majority religion.

<sup>5</sup>The literature has also analyzed the role of specific transnational *ethnic* ties in other domains, such as international involvement in civil wars (Forsberg 2014; Saideman 1997, 2002, 2007; Cederman, Girardin, and Gleditsch 2009). Shifting the focus from ethnic ties to transnational religious ties makes practical sense, since the number of other countries where coreligionists live is larger and could serve to form a larger coalition that aspiring states need to achieve recognition.

What is the causal logic behind the idea that transnational religious affinities matter in international relations? Fox and Sandler (2004) argue that religion can matter in international relations as a potential source of domestic legitimacy. In other words, policymakers who assist coreligionists abroad may benefit from increased domestic political support. Fox and Sandler (2004) also claim that religion can act as an important source of identity that directly shapes individual worldviews. Our second hypothesis therefore focuses on how transnational religious affinities may shape recognition decisions.<sup>6</sup>

H2: *Countries that have transnational religious ties to the aspiring state are more likely to extend recognition to it.*

### **Existing Explanations**

In a systematic study of international recognition, Coggins (2011) showed that great powers influence recognition decisions of other great powers. Great powers may be able to influence the recognition decisions of other countries as well. Since many countries may not have a strong interest in a particular recognition dispute, they may be willing to adopt the position of their more influential partners.

For example, if we assume that the United States is a key power in the contemporary world, then we should expect American foreign policy preferences to shape the recognition decisions of many other countries. Countries allied with the United States should be more likely to adopt the same position on any given case of contested recognition. One way in which states may cluster is through formal alliances, especially multilateral security alliances. The key contemporary example of an institutionalized United States-led military alliance is the North Atlantic Treaty Alliance (NATO 2012). Moreover, given that NATO intervened in the Kosovo conflict (as we discuss further later), NATO membership should play a role in explaining recognition decisions involving Kosovo. In addition to formal alliances, one might also expect clustering of non-NATO countries with the United States to the extent that their economies are dependent on foreign direct investment from the United States.

The expectation that the United States will be able to influence other countries' foreign policy positions is also consistent with Lake's (2009)

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<sup>6</sup>Some recognition conflicts take the form of a dispute between actors who share a dominant religious tradition (for example, the conflict between Morocco and the Sahrawis over Western Sahara). If a country has transnational religious ties to the aspiring state and to the state that also claims the territory in question, the effect of transnational religious ties may be more ambiguous. However, religious regulation should still shape the likelihood of recognizing the aspiring state.

concept of international hierarchy. Lake challenges the realist assumption that the interstate system is anarchic and argues that we should think of some interstate relationships in terms of hierarchy and of authority as involving dominant (notably the United States) and subordinate states. In particular, Lake argues that subordinate states are more likely to join a United States-led coalition.

However, great power influence is a two-edged sword, and US policy decisions may also increase the likelihood that some countries will adopt the *opposite* position. A number of countries have a geopolitical orientation that is defined in opposition to America's global influence and, more generally, in opposition to hegemony and to great power politics. Since World War II, socialist countries have sometimes assumed this role and may have a distinct antipathy to religion, which may be doing the causal work behind religious regulation and thus is included as a control in the model. This can lead to two camps: one with a pro-status quo orientation that is likely to back the recognition position of the United States and one with an anti-status quo orientation that opposes the US position. Some elements of the two camps are formalized, such as NATO membership, whereas other elements rely on more informal mechanisms, such as the mutual affinity among socialist countries (for example, Smith 1979:248). While states will not automatically follow the lead of the United States, or automatically take the contrary position, many countries in the international system may be influenced (positively or negatively) by the position of the United States.

Coggins (2011) argues that great powers often converge on the status of an aspiring state. However, great powers (and other countries) do not always converge—indeed, they often clash—in their recognition decisions. Great powers may have an incentive to cooperate regarding recognition, but at other times their interests pull them in opposite directions. In the case of Kosovo, the great powers have still not converged eight years after the initial declaration of independence and the first recognitions. The United States, France and the United Kingdom have recognized Kosovo, while China and Russia have not. As of 2015, about half of UN members do not recognize Kosovo.<sup>7</sup>

Graham and Horne (2012) argue that support by a foreign patron is crucial to the survival of “unrecognized states.” They model the international community as a unitary actor that opposes secession from states that are “members in good standing of the international community,” while being “much less protective of the territorial integrity of pariah states, such as those guilty of mass atrocity crimes” (Graham and Horne 2012:18). Related to this logic are arguments that emphasize the role of regime types in conditioning

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<sup>7</sup>The division among great powers is not unique to Kosovo. For example, China has recognized Palestine, but the United States has not. To this day, only about two dozen states recognize Taiwan, and about three dozen have not recognized Israel. All UNSC members recognize Israel, but China only established formal diplomatic relations with Israel in 1992, even though Israel was the first country in the Middle East to recognize the PRC.

recognition decisions. One prediction is that democracies are less likely to support aspiring states that seek to secede from other democracies. Consistent with this expectation, Bélanger, Duchesne, and Paquin (2005) show that rebels within democracies are less likely to benefit from an external intervention on their behalf by other democracies. The reason is that democracies are viewed as more sympathetic to individual rights than authoritarian states, which tend to restrict such rights at home (Davenport 1999). Although democracies do not systematically uphold the right to self-determination, being a democracy may increase the likelihood that a state will follow the recognition preference of the United States, which sometimes stands for territorial integrity (for example, Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014) and at other times supports the secessionists (Kosovo in 2008).

There are also prominent arguments in the literature on recognition that focus on how the “facts on the ground” drive international recognition decisions: Coggins (2011) provides a summary of the “decisive relative strength” arguments. On this count, if secessionists defeat the government’s military, and establish control over the territory that they claim, the group’s claim will be recognized by all other states; if they are defeated or fail to gain control, they will remain unrecognized. However, the continuing existence of a number of entities that are recognized by some countries but not by others—the gray area of contested recognitions—is problematic for “facts on the ground” arguments. Several political entities have remained only partially recognized for a significant period of time (for example, many decades in the cases of Western Sahara, Israel, and Palestine). Cases of partial recognition should not persist, if the “facts on the ground” argument is correct. If one side has clear control, as it does in many of these cases, recognition should not remain contested. In the case of Kosovo (as we discuss in more detail subsequently), Serbia has not controlled the situation on the ground since 1999, and yet close to half of the world’s countries have not recognized Kosovo as an independent state. Next, we provide some brief background on Kosovo as it relates to the question of its status.

## Kosovo

The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRJ) consisted of six republics—Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia. The largest of the republics, Serbia, included two autonomous provinces: Kosovo and Vojvodina. The population of Kosovo (at the time of secession, as well as today) was majority ethnic Albanian and largely Muslim, with a Serbian and largely Orthodox minority. Constitutional reforms adopted by Yugoslav authorities in 1974 increased Kosovo’s autonomy (Kubo 2011), but Slobodan Milošević sharply reduced the autonomy of both Kosovo and Vojvodina after coming to power (Little and Silber 1997; Woodward 1995; Zimmerman 1999).

The SFRJ collapsed in the early 1990s, and eventually all six republics became independent states. In Kosovo, the conflict between the Serbian state and groups representing ethnic Albanians (KLA/UÇK) escalated in the late 1990s. In 1999, NATO intervened militarily with an aerial bombardment campaign targeting Serbia. The Milošević regime escalated an ethnic cleansing campaign, forcing many Albanians to leave Kosovo. The NATO campaign ended after Milošević agreed to order the Serbian forces to leave Kosovo. UN Resolution 1244 reaffirmed the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, while making provisions for the entry of international security forces into Kosovo. According to Human Rights Watch, a "campaign of arson, abduction, intimidation and killing directed at Serbs and Roma in the summer of 1999" forced many Serbs to flee Kosovo.<sup>8</sup> Soon after the military withdrawal, pro-democracy opposition groups in Serbia overthrew the Milošević regime. Violence escalated again in Kosovo in 2004, with rioting by crowds of Kosovo's Albanians in which Serbs were targeted and medieval Serbian monasteries in Kosovo were damaged (Buerstedde 2004). In February 2008, the Kosovo Assembly declared independence from Serbia (Visoka and Bolton 2011).<sup>9</sup>

Serbia has not accepted Kosovo's independence, and a diplomatic battle has ensued in which Kosovo has sought to maximize the number of countries that recognize it, while Serbia has tried to dissuade countries from recognizing Kosovo. The proponents of independence argue that Kosovo should be independent because the atrocities suffered by Kosovo's Albanians have made it impossible for Kosovo to remain a part of Serbia. Whereas, mainly in the West, Kosovo is considered a *sui generis* case that does not set a precedent for other secessionists, other countries that have not recognized Kosovo—including China, India, and Russia—argue that Kosovo's unilateral secession has set a dangerous precedent (Bakker 2008; Ker-Lindsay 2013).

## Data and Methods

The unit of analysis is the country-level recognition decision, where one is for formal recognition and a zero otherwise.<sup>10</sup> Membership in the UN defines the universe of cases, which generates 192 observations. This setup allows us to focus on the ties of the secessionist movement with the recognizing state (for example, transnational religious ties) and other dyadic characteristics.

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<sup>8</sup><https://www.hrw.org/news/2004/03/18/kosovo/serbia-protect-minorities-ethnic-violence>. (Accessed July 1, 2015)

<sup>9</sup>While much of the conflict over Kosovo occurred under an authoritarian regime (for example, the Milošević regime), Kosovo declared independence in 2008, about eight years after Serbia had begun to democratize. Despite Serbia having democratized, many democracies recognized Kosovo's independence from Serbia.

<sup>10</sup>The source for recognition data is <http://www.kosovothankyou.com/> (last accessed March 25, 2016). For robustness testing, we also examined recognition data from Kosovo's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (<http://www.mfa-ks.net>).

To test the key hypothesized relationships between religion and recognition, we collected data on the recognition decision of each state and each country's religious regulation and transnational religious and ethnic affinity to Kosovo. To examine our domestic-level conjecture about religious regulation (H1), we use a standard measure of the extent to which religion is regulated, both formally and socially, from the Association of Religious Data Archives (ARDA). The variable is composed of two parts. The formal regulation of religion (GRI) varies on a scale from 0 to 10 and measures the extent to which the government allows freedom of religion, allows proselytizing and conversion, and allows for foreign and other missionaries to operate within the country. The second part of the measure is the social regulation of religion (SRI), which also ranges from 0 to 10, and assesses social attitudes toward "nontraditional" faiths and toward proselytization within the country by members of those faiths. We use the additive index of religious regulation for each country as the main indicator of Hypothesis 1. The two indices are highly correlated and thus jointly form a single explanatory "factor," which is more efficient to estimate than two correlated variables. To measure transnational religious affinity (H2), we created a variable for the percentage of a country's population that is Muslim.<sup>11</sup>

To investigate domestic vulnerability to ethnic separatism, we used data from the Griffiths database on secessionist movements, which includes all secessionist groups and not only those involving "at risk" minorities (Griffiths 2015, 2016). We coded countries as "vulnerable" if they had an active secessionist movement the year prior to Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence.<sup>12</sup> To capture transnational ethnic ties, we constructed measures of ethnic ties to the aspiring state: the percent of the population that is Albanian.<sup>13</sup> As another indicator of the role of ethnicity, we include a measure of each country's ethnic fractionalization index (Alesina, Devleeschauwer, Easterly, Kurlat, and Wacziarg 2003).

To test the influence of alliances, we added an indicator of whether a country is a NATO member. To account for differences and clusters of democracies, we also include an indicator of democracy for the year prior to the declaration of independence. We use a regime-type indicator from Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland (2010), which codes a country as a democracy if its executive and legislature are chosen in elections contested by more than one party and alternation between parties in power occurs (that is, when

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<sup>11</sup>The source of percent Muslim variable is the ARDA data.

<sup>12</sup>We also tried two other coding schemes (secessionist movement anytime since 1940 and 1980) and found similarly significant results. Finally, we tried the SEPINX indicator from the Minorities at Risk project, which is less comprehensive, and found similarly significant results.

<sup>13</sup>The sources for this variable were taken from each country's census data, whenever such data were available, and from a Wikipedia page dedicated to the Albanian ethnicity around the world as a secondary source, which often cited the census ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albanian\\_diaspora](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albanian_diaspora) [Accessed March 26, 2014]). There is undoubtedly some measurement error. However, as a rough indicator of countries with smaller and larger co-ethnic populations, it is probably adequate for the purposes of this analysis.

the ruling party loses an election, a peaceful transfer of power occurs). We also considered the raw Polity 4 score and a cutoff of 6 and above or 7 and above (Marshall, Gurr, and Jagers 2014). For economic development, we used the logged gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (Gleditsch 2002; v. 6 updated 2014). We also include an indicator for socialist countries, which may have a distinct antipathy to religion and to US hegemony and should thus be accounted for in the analysis. This is coded on the basis of constitutional references to socialism present the year prior to the first recognitions.<sup>14</sup> We include foreign direct investment (FDI) from the United States as percentage of the GDP of each country in our sample as an indicator of economic leverage.<sup>15</sup> For each of the time-varying variables, we took the year prior to the declaration of independence or the closest year available (that is, 2007 for Kosovo's 2008 declaration of independence). Finally, we also included a control for distance from Belgrade because neighboring countries may be systematically more interested in the dispute and behave differently in terms of recognition (Weidmann, Kuse, and Gleditsch 2010).

In addition to the straightforward generalized linear model (that is, the logit model with a binomial link function), which makes the usual i.i.d. assumption, we estimate two statistical models that relax the i.i.d. assumption: (1) a multilevel model with a random effect for the region, and (2) a mixed-effect model. Both take the geographic region (of which there are 10 distinct regions coded in the data set) as the clustering factor and model it as a random effect in the MLM and a mixed effect in the MEM.<sup>16</sup>

## Discussion

The empirical results support the two hypotheses on the effect of religious regulation (H1) and the effect of transnational religious ties (H2) on international recognition. We find varying degrees of support for other explanations. Table 1 presents the numerical results with three different estimators, and Figure 1 then depicts the marginal effects of the two key hypothesized relationships to illustrate the substantive impact of these factors on the predicted probability of international recognition.

States that heavily regulate religion, according to our results, were considerably less likely to recognize Kosovo, consistent with H1. For instance, a

<sup>14</sup>Constitutional references to socialism are found in each country's constitution and summarized online at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_socialist\\_states](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_socialist_states). All constitutions that currently mention socialism or did so in 2007, the year prior to recognitions, were coded as 1, and all others were coded 0.

<sup>15</sup>Bureau of Economic Analysis, Balance of Payments and Direct Investment Position Data. Available at <http://www.bea.gov/iTable/index.cfm>. (Accessed on January 3, 2014)

<sup>16</sup>Two models are estimated in the statistical language R (R-CRAN 2014) and one in Stata v. 12. The baseline model is estimated using the *glm* function with a binomial family "logit" link (GLM) in R. The second model (MLM) uses the *lmer* function to estimate a multilevel model (Bates, Maechler, Bolker, and Walker 2015; Bliese 2013; Pinheiro, Bates, DebRoy, Sarkar, and R Core Team 2014). The third model (MEM) is estimated using stata's *xtmelogit* functionality.

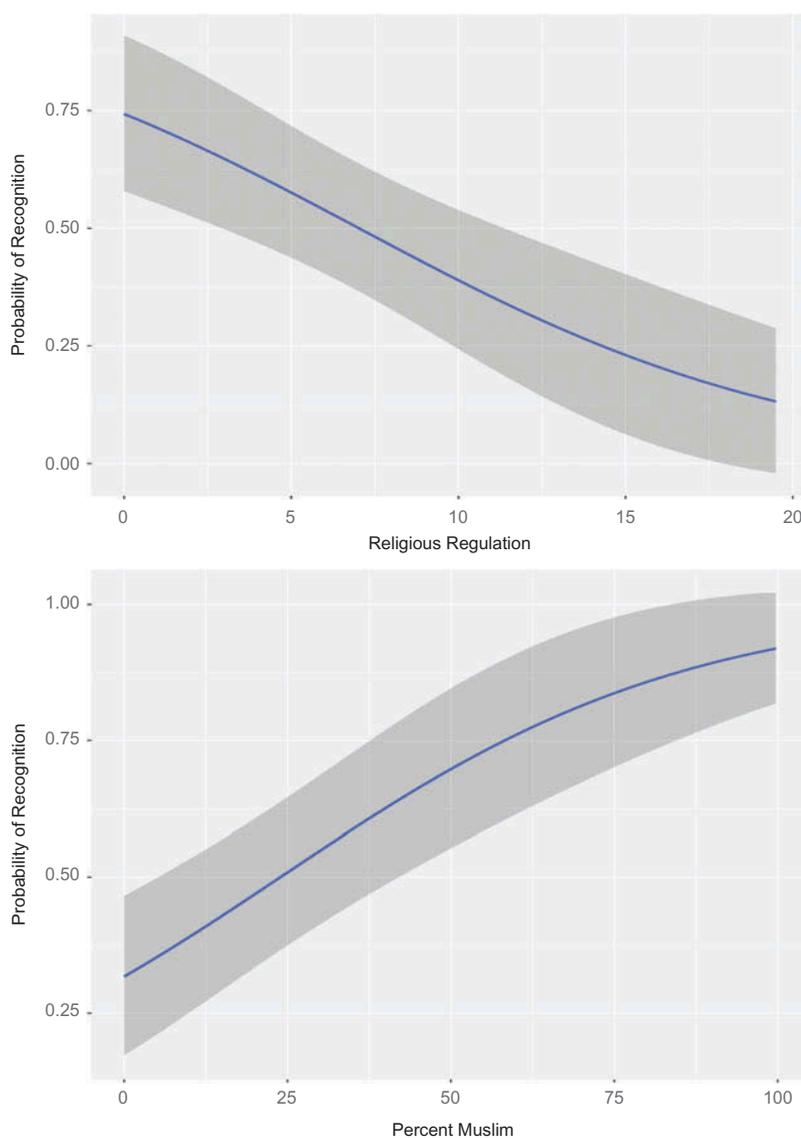
state that scores in the 10th percentile on the regulation of religion index has a 75% chance of recognizing Kosovo, whereas a state that scores at the 90th percentile on the regulation of religion index has only a 20% chance of recognizing Kosovo, all else equal (Figure 1, top). Transnational religious ties (H2) were also important: Countries with a very high percentage of Muslims were about three times more likely to recognize Kosovo than countries with a very low percentage of Muslims, holding all other variables constant (Figure 1, bottom). A country where 100% of the population is Muslim has a predicted probability of 0.90 of recognizing Kosovo, all else equal, while a country with no Muslims at has a predicted probability of only 0.30 of recognizing Kosovo.

States that were domestically vulnerable to ethnic secession were roughly half as likely to recognize Kosovo. Countries such as Spain (Basques), China (Tibetans), and India (Kashmir) have yet to recognize Kosovo—and all have secessionist movements at home. Leaders of those countries have expressed an aversion to recognizing secessionist movements in their public statements. Although countries with more Albanians were somewhat more likely to extend recognition (for example, Albania, Italy, United States), transnational

**Table 1.** Kosovo Recognition Models.

	Logit	MLM	MEM
<u>Religious Regulation</u>	-0.15** (0.05)	-0.02* (0.01)	-0.13* (0.06)
<u>Percent Muslim x 10</u>	0.32*** (0.08)	0.05*** (0.01)	0.34*** (0.09)
NATO Member	2.40 ** (0.77)	0.37** (0.12)	2.43** (0.81)
Socialist	-0.71 (0.72)	-0.07 (0.11)	-0.69 (0.77)
GDP pc x 10,000	0.42** (0.14)	0.05* (0.02)	0.43** (0.16)
US FDI	1.74 (1.34)	0.31 (0.20)	1.74 (1.32)
Democracy	0.43 (0.44)	0.13 (0.08)	0.60 (0.47)
Domestic Vulnerability	-1.24* (0.54)	-0.23** (0.08)	-1.46* (0.60)
Ethnic Diversity	0.13 (0.74)	0.04 (0.14)	0.11 (0.83)
Belgrade Distance x 10,000	0.27 (0.58)	-0.07 (0.13)	0.08 (0.73)
Ethnic Ties (Albanian) x 10	3.31 (3.56)	0.05 (0.05)	3.61 (3.76)
AIC	217.46	330.46	217.29
BIC	256.55	376.06	259.64
Log Likelihood	-96.73	-151.23	-95.65
Deviance	193.46		
Num. obs.	192	192	192
Num. groups: regnum		11	11
ICC		0.11	0.11

Note. \*\*\* $p < .0001$ ; \*\* $p < .001$ ; \* $p < .01$ .



**Figure 1.** Marginal plots of hypothesized relationships.

ethnic ties were not statistically significant predictors of recognition. NATO members were more than twice as likely to recognize Kosovo than non-NATO members. Wealthier states were also more likely to recognize Kosovo than less-developed states. Both effects were significant across all three models. Being a socialist country does not have a statistically significant effect on recognition decisions regarding Kosovo. Finally, several other factors that have been theorized in the literature—including democracy, distance, ethnic diversity and US FDI into the host country—did not have significant effects, according to our analysis, on the probability of recognizing Kosovo.

The main results were consistent across all three estimators, and the other findings were also stable. In the multilevel and mixed-effect models, the second-level variable, region, accounts for about 11% of the total variance. In terms of minimizing the log-likelihood and the AIC, the multilevel model provides a better fit than the mixed-effect model. The model fit statistic based on minimizing the AIC indicates that the mixed-effects model is best, followed by the basic logistic regression GLM (column 1) and then the MLM estimation (column 2).

Overall, the analysis points to the crucial role played by religion in shaping recognition decisions at both the domestic and transnational levels and also to the importance of several other claims in the existing scholarly literature. The NATO membership effect highlights the importance of great power politics and alliances in influencing the propensity of countries to recognize new states. In addition, the analysis indicates that countries facing a domestic secessionist movement were much less likely, and richer countries were much more likely, to recognize Kosovo. This reinforces previous results in this field with new evidence and shows that religion can help to further refine existing models and studies.

The main hypotheses of the article are consistent with the data. Regulation of religion is a powerful predictor of recognition. The data also lend support to the second hypothesis, which predicted majority-Muslim countries would be more likely to recognize Kosovo. While the model generally performs strongly in explaining recognition decisions, there are also cases where the model predicts that the country that recognized Kosovo should have been unlikely to do so, or that a country that has not recognized Kosovo should have been likely to do so, presenting us with an opportunity for nested analysis (Lieberman 2005). We proceed to describe one of each of those cases to establish potentially useful venues for future research.

The model identifies Colombia as a country whose recognition of Kosovo is surprising. According to the Council on Hemispheric Affairs (COHA 2010), Kosovo was “recognized by a number of Latin American states more likely due to national economic interest rather than abstract concepts of goodwill and friendship.” COHA points out that Colombia is a major ally of Washington. The example of Colombia may indicate that great power influence may be particularly influential in countries that are geographically distant from the dispute in question and/or lack a strong interest in how it will be resolved.

The model identifies Greece as a country that has surprisingly *not* recognized Kosovo. Alternative arguments would predict recognition: Most notably, Greece is a member of NATO and the EU. Dempsey (2015) includes Greece’s nonrecognition of Kosovo among the sources of foreign policy tension between Brussels and Athens. A factor that may not be fully captured

by the model is the historical ties between Greece and Serbia, which share cultural affinities<sup>17</sup> and a history of cooperating during major conflicts in the region (for example, the First Balkan War).

### Other Cases of Contested Recognition

Kosovo is not a *sui generis* case, and we expect that our key hypotheses are relevant for other cases of contested recognition. While a detailed examination of other cases is beyond the scope of this article, we offer some suggestions on potential similarities and differences that future research could explore.

One such case is Western Sahara's pursuit of statehood, which is interesting from the perspective of this theory because the conflict between the Sahrawis and Morocco lacks a clear religious cleavage, as both parties are majority Muslim. Studying this case presents an opportunity to examine whether transnational religious ties matter in such a context. Similarly, it would be worth examining further cases in which religion is a highly salient factor and dividing line, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, studying international recognition in this context may require an examination of these decisions as interdependent rather than independent of one another.<sup>18</sup>

While such comparisons offer fruitful directions for future research and points of comparison, Kosovo may have certain attributes due to its history and geographical setting that distinguish it from these other cases. For example, NATO intervened militarily in Kosovo, which makes NATO membership a particularly strong predictor of recognition decisions in this context. This may not be true in other settings. Moreover, Kosovo's location in Europe may increase the perceived relevance of the conflict to Western countries compared to countries farther away. The same would obviously be true for African states in the case of Western Sahara. Furthermore, unlike the case of Kosovo, which is an instance of (attempted) secession, the dispute over Western Sahara is viewed by the Sahrawis and many others (but not Morocco) as a case of decolonization (Zunes and Mundy 2010). This could influence how other countries, perhaps especially the ones that used to be colonized and/or are located in the region, view this dispute. Future research, focused on other cases of contested recognition, can help advance our knowledge of which factors matter consistently and in general and which ones have a notably different impact across different cases of contested recognition.

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<sup>17</sup>Future research could also explore potential effects of transnational Orthodox ties. We included this variable in the analysis and found that the results were not statistically significant.

<sup>18</sup>On Israel and Palestine, see Mirilovic and Siroky (2015).

## Conclusions

Theoretical and empirical work on the international recognition of aspiring states is still relatively sparse, even though international recognition plays an important role in explaining whether or not new states emerge and in explaining the outcome of secessionist conflicts. This article proposes a theory that emphasizes the role of religion in shaping the incentives of states to extend or withhold recognition in cases of contested recognition. It provides new evidence for two mechanisms (one domestic and one transnational) through which religion shapes international recognition decision making. The results support the literature's emphasis on other factors as well, including classic great power politics and alliances. However, other factors thought to explain state behavior, such as democracy, appear to have little if any effect on the model's fit or explanatory power.

Although this is not the last word on international recognition, this study makes two key contributions. First, it develops a theoretical argument about the role of religion in recognition decisions and derives two principal propositions and related mechanisms. Second, it offers one of the first large-*N*, cross-national empirical tests of the influence of religion (together with other factors) on recognition decisions in an important contemporary case—Kosovo. While there is much to be gained by studying cross-national variation, future research should also employ time series methods to examine variation across time and explain the timing and the dynamics of recognition decisions. Furthermore, we acknowledge that the causal mechanism linking religious regulation to recognition decisions through the logic of vulnerability is hard to test directly in a cross-national analysis and requires further unpacking and testing in future studies. It is possible that religious regulation could shape recognition decisions through other mechanisms, but the interpretation proposed in this article—which emphasizes the logic of vulnerability—affords a coherent account that builds on previous research regarding how a state's exposure to ethnonationalism influences its external support for secession abroad, expands it in a new direction, and ties it to a growing literature on the role of religion in politics. Future research could take advantage of more targeted indicators to examine which specific types of religious regulation have a particularly strong influence on recognition decisions.

Mutual recognition is the cornerstone of sovereignty in the international system. Without extensive international recognition, aspiring states cannot enjoy the status and privileges reserved for states. Although the study of secession has spawned a large literature, a related issue—international recognition—has been mainly overlooked. Given the numerous active secessionist movements around the world, and a growing number of aspiring states, the results may apply more broadly than might appear at first glance, but exactly how broadly is a question that will have to be determined by future research.

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Replication data and annotated code are available online at: <http://dvn.iq.harvard.edu/dvn/dv/internationalinteractions>.

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