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Radicalizing Religion? Religious Identity and Settlers' Behavior

Sivan Hirsch-Hoefler^a, Daphna Canetti^b, and Ehud Eiran^b

^aLauder School of Government, Diplomacy & Strategy, Interdisciplinary Center, Herzliya, Israel; ^bSchool of Political Science, University of Haifa, Haifa, Israel

ABSTRACT

Does religious identity prompt radical action? This article presents a model of individual-level radical action. Drawing mostly on collective action theory the article posits that organizational membership drives the effect of religious identity on individual-level radical action. Using survey data the article assesses the behavior of Jewish settlers in the West Bank in the face of the 2005 Gaza withdrawal. The article finds that contra the prevailing view, which holds that religious identity alone is sufficient to trigger violence, evidence suggests that organizational membership is a mechanism bridging religious identity and radical action. Longstanding arguments tying radical actions solely to religion may require substantial revision.

ARTICLE HISTORY

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From the Christian crusades to the recent violence employed by the Islamic State, many conflicts have occurred along religious fault lines.¹ And indeed, both popular intuition and much scholarship suggest that religious identity (RI) leads inexorably to radical action (RA), which can include violence.²

The purported association between RI and RA relies chiefly on the argument that the inherent intractability and exclusivity of religion leave little room for the negotiation of conflicts, and hence lead by their very nature to RA.³ Yet, while individuals and institutions sometimes exploit religious claims to justify or inflame violence,⁴ others adduce their religious identity in promoting peace, moderation, and prosocial behavior.⁵

Drawing on micro-level data analysis, some scholars offer frameworks, including elite-analysis and constructivist perspectives, that account for this discrepancy, arguing that RI cannot be considered the sole direct cause of support for RA, violence, and the negation of democratic values.⁶

We contribute to this debate by arguing for a mediating role of networks of mobilization in the link between RI and RA. We argue that a religious identity leads to radical action only if mediated by membership in an organization that has political goals.

To test our argument we conducted a representative survey ($N = 517$) among Jewish settlers in the West Bank in February 2006—about six months after Israel's disengagement from the Gaza Strip and the northern West Bank, in which it removed all settlers and

CONTACT Ehud Eiran  eeiran@poli.haifa.ac.il  School of Political Science, University of Haifa, 199 Abba Hushi Blvd., Haifa 3498838, Israel.

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settlements from those territories. Specifically, we tested whether a religious identity made Israeli settlers more likely to adopt radical action against the Israeli government following the announcement of the disengagement plan, and if so, whether the influence of religious identity on radical behavior could be traced mainly to individual beliefs or sentiments or, rather, to networks of mobilization. The Israeli settler population during this period makes a good case study for examining the relationship between religion and political behavior writ large, and the influence of religion on radical action in particular, because this population offers great variation in their engagement in radical responses to the disengagement policy.

Below, we first outline the theoretical justification for our hypothesis that organizational membership plays a mediating role in the relationship between RI and RA. We then describe the setting and background in terms of the Israeli settler population and the particular event which anchors the research (the disengagement). Following that, we report on our study and its findings. We conclude with the implications of our research for the study of religion and political behavior.

Religious Identity and Radical Action

The connection between religious identity and radical action has traditionally been examined through the notion of “radicalization.”⁷ Radicalization does not necessarily entail action; it can simply mean support for extensive and vast changes to a system or society, without using violent means to this end. However, some scholars argue that radicalization must include active, purposeful, and violent behavior to that end.⁸ Situating the definition of radical action within this debate, radical action is defined as an action that is intended to affect public policy through behaviors that are regarded as illegal or otherwise unacceptable under the norms and rules of the wider social group.⁹ Radical action can be distinguished from activism by type of action. Radical action entails the willingness and the readiness to use violent and illegal means, while activism does not.¹⁰ Radical behavior is juxtaposed against moderate (i.e., non-radical) or “normative” political action,¹¹ where “normative” relates to the norms of the dominant social system (as expressed in, e.g., laws and regulations) rather than the norms of the group undertaking the action.¹²

Religious identity refers to both individual and collective facets. The individual dimension of religious identity pertains to whether the person organizes his or her life along a set of religious values, beliefs, and practices.¹³ These principles and practices are based on an inherent belief and faith in a supernatural, spiritual being.¹⁴ It provides a moral code and organizing principles for its adherents and thus lends itself to communal expression.¹⁵ Religious observance entails having religious faith, practices, and affiliation stand at the center of one’s identity,¹⁶ yet provides an outlet for people to unite around a particular social organization based on action, practice, ritual, and morality.¹⁷

Defining oneself as part of a collective, be it a football club, a political party, or a religion, necessitates a feeling that one belongs to a group that is distinct from others, the well-known “us versus them.”¹⁸ The “us versus them” distinction is based upon a joint recognition of shared values and objectives¹⁹ that also meet individuals’ psychological needs.²⁰ Collective identity is manifested through shared goals, and through shared action (e.g., selecting a place of residence).²¹ These shared objectives and goals are the basis on that action is undertaken.²² Collective identity is therefore an active entity, it is a cause of and motivation for certain behaviors.

History offers a wealth of cases in which religious claims have been used to justify or rationalize violence; at the same time, deeply held religious beliefs also inform many ordinary lives marked by caring and concern for others. However, this leaves open the question of when, and under what conditions, a religious identity is likely to lead individuals to engage in radical political action.

The theories thus far provide only partial and indirect support for the idea that religion has an impact on *radical* behavior. For instance, consider the argument that those who commit violent acts in the name of religion would likely engage in such behavior anyway, and simply use religion as an excuse.²³ This presumption, while compelling on the surface, fails to explain why many people who are by all accounts not sociopaths can end up engaging in radical and even extreme violence. Similarly, the contention that local elites exploit religious sentiment among the public in order to secure their own power²⁴ falls short of explaining why members of the public are willing to act (or are so easily duped into acting) in a way that benefits those elites. Neither of these explanations, the constructivist²⁵ or the instrumental,²⁶ fully explains the mechanism underlying the association between RI and RA. Furthermore, there is a wealth of scholarship that reveals that religious identity or religiosity is not inherently violent.²⁷ Rather, it is when this religious identity is politicized that it becomes associated with militant attitudes.²⁸

Organizational Membership: Mediation Hypothesis

We draw on two bodies of literature, that dealing with terrorism and that dealing with collective action, to argue that the effect of RI on RA is mediated by organizational membership. By organizational membership, we refer to any external expression of commitment to a political organization. These expressions of commitment can include, but are not limited to, formal membership (including payment of dues), financial support, and participation in non-radical actions of the organization such as meetings.

In the context of terrorism, Moghadam suggested that the relationship between the individual believer and the organization is bi-directional: “An organization without individuals that are willing to die will be unable to translate its goals into practice, whereas an individual who is willing to become a *shaheed* [martyr] would normally lack the resources, information, and logistical capacity to turn his intentions into deeds.”²⁹ Yet when it comes to terrorism, religious organizations provide a great deal more than practical and logistical support. For example, Berman and Laitin³⁰ show that religiously motivated terrorist organizations that provide social services such as healthcare, education, and so on are more deadly and more likely to successfully attack high-value targets than those which do not. For these groups, the role of religion is not in generating greater commitment to the cause; rather, religion serves as a method of embedding potential agents in a dense network of reciprocal relationships. We argue that radical activity on the part of religious activists is best understood, therefore, as being motivated by a desire to strengthen their sense of belonging within this network of relationships. The operational secret of radical religious groups is an organizational form that deters defection, allowing them to perpetuate high-risk activism.³¹

Indeed, the literature on collective action suggests that people do not radicalize on their own, but as part of a group in which a collective identity is developed.³² Research on small group interaction shows that social interactions cause people to behave differently than they otherwise would have. For instance, Thomas, McGarty, and Louis³³ found that under

conditions where groups are primed to consider more extreme actions to be legitimate, social interactions may catalyze shifts toward more extreme behavior. Individual-level variables also influence how different group members behave. Hogg and Adelman³⁴ found that group-membership factors encourage specific individuals within a group to greater extremes than others on behalf of the group. In a similar vein, others have found that more-active members of a political organization are more likely to engage in confrontational action than their less-active peers.³⁵

Moskalenko and McCauley argue that strong group identification is associated with higher levels of both activism and radical action. They develop a pyramid of radicalization, which shows the process by which one is likely to undertake radical action. The base of the pyramid is sympathizing with a specific cause, the next level is justifying the actions of radicals for that cause; it builds to higher levels of action in support of the cause; and then finally to illegal and violent actors. However, while this pyramid may display the stages leading to radical action, it has no explanatory power for why one moves through these stages to radical action.³⁶ Other models of radicalization, such as Moghaddam's "Staircase to Terrorism" or the "NYPD Model of Jihadization"³⁷ similarly suffer from the same explanatory problem. Precht's model of a typical pattern of radicalization, however, does emphasize the importance of bonding with a particular group.³⁸ It is clear, however, that the causal chain of the radicalization hypothesis demonstrates only the progression to RA but does not explain why some individuals with a religious identity engage in radical action while others do not.

Some scholars take an either-or approach to understanding the decision to go the radical route (i.e., one is motivated either by religion, or by a desire to strengthen their sense of belonging in some embracing collective). The aforementioned bodies of work suggest that this approach is insufficient. While the above literature suggests different mechanisms which lead to RA, we propose that RI is a motivating factor for RA, but that it is the sense of belonging which serves as the trigger for radical action.³⁹ Accordingly, we hypothesize that membership in a political organization will mediate the relationship between RI and RA (see Figure 1).

The Context: Jewish Settlers in the West Bank and the Disengagement Plan

Israel launched its settlement project in the West Bank shortly after Israeli forces occupied the region during the 1967 Six Day War. The project was initially top-down, with Labor governments (1967–1977) settling mostly in Jerusalem and in small portions of the West Bank. These early government-sponsored West Bank settlers had no specific religious profile.

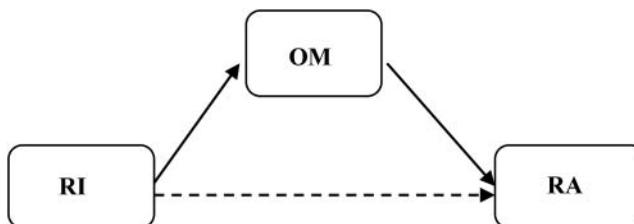


Figure 1. Hypothesized model explaining changes in radical action as a result of religious identity.

During this period there were also a few bottom-up efforts, usually led by national-religious groups, to settle in other areas of the West Bank—areas that Israel generally intended to hand back to Jordan in a future peace agreement. The government removed some of these settlements, but allowed others to remain.⁴⁰

Following the rise to power of the conservative Likud party in 1977, national-religious settlers became more dominant, and their organization, Gush Emunim, cooperated with the government in creating dozens of settlements.⁴¹ At the same time, Likud governments expanded West Bank settler cities which included a large non-religious population attracted by the affordable cost of living in the settlements. By the late 1980s the government also initiated the creation of a small number of settlements to house an ultra-orthodox (but non-nationalist) Haredi population. Currently, some 353,500 settlers reside in the West Bank (excluding Jerusalem⁴²) in over 220 communities.⁴³ Between 1967 and 2005, Israel also established 21 settlements in the Gaza Strip, which was likewise captured by Israel during the Six Day War.

In February 2005, Israel's Parliament (the Knesset) approved legislation that authorized the removal of all Israeli settlements and settlers—some 9,000 people in all—from the Gaza Strip and the northern West Bank.⁴⁴ The disengagement itself took place in August of that year. The disengagement was a traumatic process, in which whole families, most of them with children, were uprooted from their homes, communities, schools, and, in some cases, places of work. The settlers felt deeply betrayed by the government, which—as described above—for decades had encouraged and supported the settlements.⁴⁵ In addition, religious settlers believed that uprooting settlements was a serious violation of religious norms, with renunciation of any part of the Land of Israel—the Promised Land—considered on a par with the sins of murder, apostasy, and incest.⁴⁶ A number of rabbis aligned with the settlement movement issued rulings that made it illegitimate to remove settlements, and called for disobedience.⁴⁷

Faced with the upcoming disengagement, the settlers offered a unique opportunity to study the process of mobilization and radicalization in response to a major policy decision with regional and international implications. First, this population offered great variance in terms of their willingness to engage, and de facto participation, in radicalized political behavior.⁴⁸ In the period prior to the disengagement, some settlers protested using symbolic methods: distributing stickers, hanging posters, pinning orange ribbons to their clothing (orange was used to represent opposition to the disengagement and blue, support for it). Others joined demonstrations, lobbied ministers and Knesset members, or went from house to house, trying to explain the justice of their cause to non-settlers. There were also those who undertook more radical actions: blocking roads, setting up homes in communities slated for evacuation, attacking persons, or damaging property. A total of 3,864 arrests were made in connection with anti-disengagement activities, and charges were filed against 634 settlers, most of them youths, for illegal actions related to the disengagement.⁴⁹

Second, settlers also vary in terms of their religious identity, from wholly secular to ultra-orthodox, with varying degrees of religiosity in between. While these groups to some extent evade easy classification, they are recognized to generally reside in settlements that reflect their level of religious identity. Some settlements are populated by highly committed Jewish nationalists who moved there in order to advance their political agenda of Israeli territorial expansion, while others comprise secular or ultra-orthodox communities whose residents bought homes in the settlements for economic reasons.⁵⁰ These “quality-of-life” settlers are

mostly young couples, many of them immigrants from the former Soviet Union, who were drawn to the settlements by highly subsidized mortgages for single-family homes within driving distance of the center of the country, where many had their work, relatives, and friends.⁵¹ It should be mentioned that traditionally, most of the settler population, whether religious or not, has voted for right-wing parties.⁵² At the time of the survey, national-religious groups comprised some 40 percent of the settler population in the West Bank, and ultra-orthodox settlers comprised 30 percent. The remaining 30 percent resided in less religious quality-of-life settlements.⁵³

Research Design, Data, and Measurement

The disengagement was approved by the Knesset on 16 February 2005, and took place from 15 August through 23 August 2005; all evacuation actions occurred within this window. We were able to capture the effect of the disengagement policy in its entirety by utilizing a dataset obtained shortly after this time.

The survey was implemented in February 2006. Interviews were conducted by telephone using structured questionnaires by an experienced and computerized survey institute based at Haifa University. Telephone numbers of West Bank settlers were randomly drawn from the telephone directory.⁵⁴ The interviews were held in Hebrew or Russian, depending on the respondent's native language, by fluent interviewers. Oral informed consent was obtained at the interview onset, and respondents were told that their participation was entirely voluntary.

Cluster sampling was employed to obtain as representative a sample of the Jewish settler population as possible. Our sample essentially mirrored the population according to the Israeli census (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics 2005).⁵⁵

Identification Strategy

To account for potential unobserved differences between religious-ideological and non-ideological settlers, we used place of residence—that is, whether the respondent lived in a religious-ideological or quality-of-life settlement—as a proxy for RI. Such a spatial/geographical measure serves as a reliable implicit measure of RI in the settler population on the grounds that settlers choose the type of settlement they live in, and therefore can be assumed to generally share the motives, values, and ideology of the people they live among.⁵⁶ That is, while the settler population as a whole is heterogeneous, individual settlements tend to support homogenous communities based around either a national-religious vision of “land redemption” or a desire for a better quality of life with no particular religious ideology attached. Following Sheleg⁵⁷ (2003), we defined settlements as ideological or quality-of-life based on a majority of the settlement's population. Approximately 35 percent of our sample resided in quality-of-life settlements and the rest (65 percent) in religious-ideological settlements. As seen in [Figure 2](#), the final sample included 517 Jewish settlers (18 years old or older) residing in 34 quality-of-life settlements and 73 religious-ideological settlements across the West Bank.⁵⁸

As expected, settlers who resided in religious settlements scored significantly higher on right-wing political leanings and religiosity than those who lived in quality-of-life settlements (see [Table 1](#)). This finding justifies the use of a group-level measure of religious

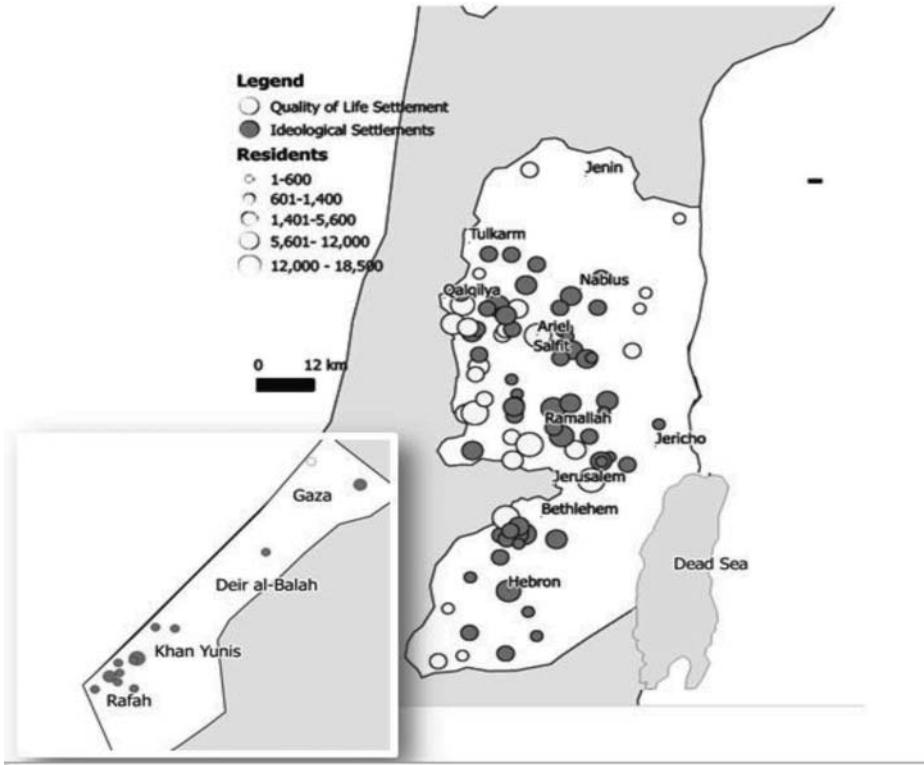


Figure 2. Sampled settlements. Arc GIS map of sampled Israeli settlements.

identity (i.e., settlement type), rather than a self-report measure. The two types of settlements/settlers did not differ along any axes that might contaminate the study (e.g., age, gender, or income).

Sample

Forty-five percent of the respondents were men and 55 percent were women, with an age range of 18 to 87 years and a mean age of 38 years (*SD* = 12.95). Four-fifths (80 percent) of the respondents were married with children; 32 percent of the full sample had five children or more. Overall, the sample’s education level was very high (70 percent had post-high school or academic education) and their income relatively low (39 percent reported a

Table 1. Balance checks for opinion measures and demographics: RI versus QLI.

| Variable | Index | Mean (RI) | Mean (QLI) | t-test | p-value test |
|-----------------------------------|--------|-----------|------------|--------|--------------|
| Religiosity | 1 to 4 | 2.83 | 2.39 | −5.00 | .000 |
| Political orientation (left-wing) | 1 to 5 | 1.94 | 2.14 | 2.88 | .004 |
| Income | 1 to 5 | 2.89 | 2.95 | .46 | .65 |
| Education | 1 to 4 | 3.45 | 3.16 | −3.26 | .001 |
| Age | 1 to 4 | 1.82 | 1.92 | 1.44 | .15 |
| Gender (female) | 1 to 2 | 1.57 | 1.51 | −1.19 | .23 |

RI = Religious identity/settlements; QLI = quality-of-life identity/settlements.

monthly income below Israel's average). Most respondents defined themselves as "right-wing" or "extremely right-wing" (84 percent) and religious or very religious (71 percent); while 16 percent identified themselves as conservative and the rest (13 percent) as non-religious.

Measures

Organizational Membership

This is the mediator, which was measured based on Verba, Schlozman, and Brady's⁵⁹ pioneering study of voluntary activity in the American public. Respondents were asked two dichotomous questions about organizational affiliation and membership: (1) "During the disengagement period, did you take part in any activities or meetings of a counter-disengagement organization of any kind?" (Yes/No); (2) "If you did, do you consider yourself to have been an active member of this organization (that is, did you spend time on special projects or help organize meetings)?" (Yes/No). To enable a distinction not only between membership and non-membership but also active versus inactive membership, the final scores were translated into a single item with three possible responses: (1) non-member; (2) inactive member; and (3) active member.

Radical Action

This is the dependent variable, which relates to behaviors, not intentions or attitudes.⁶⁰ Respondents were asked whether they had participated in a list of actions before or during the disengagement from the Gaza Strip and northern West Bank. Drawing from existing studies, answers were coded into two categories on the basis of their legality (adapted from Tausch et al.⁶¹): (0) non-radical actions and (1) radical actions. The non-radical actions included 11 behaviors, namely (a) lobbying or contacting an elected official; (b) making a donation to an anti-disengagement organization; (c) taking symbolic action such as wearing a pin or displaying a flyer/poster/sticker; (d) signing a petition; (e) organizing or gathering signatures for a petition; (f) canvassing door to door; (g) writing a letter to or article for a newspaper; (h) speaking publically (e.g., on television); (i) trying to persuade family and friends to actively oppose the disengagement; (j) participating in demonstrations; and (k) taking part in a product boycott ($\alpha = .80$). The radical actions were as follows: (a) occupying public buildings and/or homes of elected representatives; (b) blockading roads; (c) illegally entering or attempting to enter a settlement slated for evacuation; (d) damaging property; and (e) violence toward persons (e.g., security or elected representatives), including by throwing stones or bottles ($\alpha = .65$). Inter-item correlation and explanatory factor analysis using promax with a Kaiser normalization rotation were performed to examine the scales' content validity and differentiation. A clear two-factor solution was obtained, supporting the existence of two different group-based repertoires of political actions, radical and non-radical, which are closely related but independent constructs.⁶²

Covariates

Gender, age, political orientation (right wing or left wing), and religiosity were included to address possible confounding effects.

Estimation Strategy

Our pooled estimation strategy allows us to estimate the impact of settlers' RI on RA in the face of the disengagement. We pursued a mediation analysis using Preacher and Hayes's PROCESS procedure. In addition to estimating the maximum likelihood logistic regression (for dichotomous dependent variables), PROCESS enables estimation of direct and indirect effects, for the total effects of X on Y. The direct effect of X on Y is estimated in the equation $M = I_M + a_1X + e_M$, which quantifies how much two cases differing by one unit on X are estimated to differ on Y independent of the effect of M on Y. The indirect effect of X on Y through M is estimated in the equation $Y = i_Y + c_1X + b_1M + e_Y$, which quantifies the product of the effect of X on M and the effect of M on Y while controlling for X.

Findings

The means and standard deviations for all of the variables can be found in Appendix 1.

As expected, our analyses show that membership (both active and inactive) in counter-disengagement organizations was significantly higher among residents of religious settlements than among residents of quality-of-life settlements ($M = 1.75$, $SD .74$; $M = 1.28$, $SD .57$, $p < .001$, respectively). Specifically, 57 percent of respondents living in religious settlements were members (active or inactive) of counter-disengagement organizations and 43 percent were non-members, whereas among respondents in quality-of-life settlements, only 21.5 percent were members and 78.5 percent were non-members.

With regard to RA, as described above, we coded non-radical actions as 0 and radical actions as 1; thus, while some respondents who engaged in radical acts may have also taken part in more moderate activities, we were able to distinguish between those who undertook *only* moderate activities and those whose repertoire of behaviors included more radical acts. As can be seen in Table 2, most of the respondents—374 out of 517, or about 72 percent—

Table 2. Settlers' participation in moderate and radical activities in response to the disengagement.

| Mode of political activity | All settlers (<i>N</i> = 517) (%) | RI (<i>n</i> = 336) | QLI (<i>n</i> = 181) | |
|-----------------------------------|---|-------------------------|--------------------------|----|
| Moderate action (<i>n</i> = 374) | 1. Contacting an elected official | 18 | 20 | 14 |
| | 2. Donating to an anti-disengagement organization | 58.5 | 70 | 38 |
| | 3. Wearing a pin or displaying a flyer/poster/sticker | 47 | 55 | 32 |
| | 4. Signing a petition | 71.5 | 77 | 61 |
| | 5. Organizing or gathering signatures for a petition | 23 | 24 | 22 |
| | 6. Canvassing door-to-door | 49 | 59 | 30 |
| | 7. Writing a letter to or an article for a newspaper | 16 | 18 | 12 |
| | 8. Speaking publically (e.g., on television) | 9 | 10 | 8 |
| | 9. Trying to convince family and friends | 74 | 75 | 72 |
| | 10. Taking part in a demonstration | 66 | 81 | 38 |
| | 11. Taking part in a product boycott | 32 | 39 | 19 |
| Radical Action (<i>n</i> = 143) | 1. Occupying public buildings/homes of elected representatives | 3 | 3 | 2 |
| | 2. Blockading roads | 13 | 16 | 7 |
| | 3. Illegally entering or attempting to enter a settlement slated for evacuation | 22 | 27 | 7 |
| | 4. Causing damage to property | 3 | 4 | 2 |
| | 5. Violence toward persons (e.g., elected representatives or security forces) | 3 | 4 | 3 |

RI = Religious identity/settlements; QLI = quality of life identity/settlements.

Table 3. Differences between radical activists versus non-radical activists.

| Variable | Index | Mean (non-RA) | Mean (RA) | T | <i>p</i> -value test |
|-----------------------------------|--------|---------------|-----------|-------|----------------------|
| Organizational membership | 1 to 3 | 1.45 | 1.94 | -6.75 | .000 |
| Religious-ideological settlements | 1 to 2 | 1.59 | 1.80 | -4.82 | .000 |
| Religiosity | 1 to 4 | 2.62 | 2.81 | -2.56 | .01 |
| Political orientation (left-wing) | 1 to 5 | 2.08 | 1.83 | 3.92 | .000 |
| Age | 1 to 4 | 1.93 | 1.66 | 3.9 | .000 |
| Gender (female) | 1 to 2 | 1.57 | 1.48 | 1.88 | .06 |

RA = Radical action; non-RA = non-radical action.

engaged only in non-radical action, while 143 respondents, or about 28 percent, fell into the radical activist group.

In line with the findings of other studies,⁶³ the most prevalent moderate actions were signing a petition or participation in demonstrations. In terms of radical actions, 3 percent of the respondents reported engaging in violence toward persons, and a similar figure reported causing damage to property. The most prevalent radical action, reported by 22 percent of the respondents, was trying to illegally enter a settlement slated for evacuation.⁶⁴

Table 3 displays the settlers' participation in moderate and radical political activities by measures and demographics. As the table shows, settlers who lived in religious-ideological settlements scored significantly higher on radical action than those who lived in quality-of-life settlements ($M = 1.80$, $SD = .40$; $M = 1.59$, $SD = .49$, $T = -4.82$, $p < .001$, respectively). Moreover, radical action was significantly higher among members (whether active or inactive) in counter-disengagement organizations compared with non-members ($M = 1.94$, $SD = .77$; $M = 1.45$, $SD = .65$, $T = -6.75$, $p < .001$, respectively). Specifically, among settlers who engaged in radical action, 67 percent were members (active or inactive) in anti-disengagement organizations, and 33 percent were non-members. Among those settlers who engaged only in non-radical action, the majority percent (64 percent) were non-members, and only 36 percent were members in anti-disengagement organizations.

A correlation matrix shows that radical action correlated significantly with organizational membership ($r = .31$, $p < .0001$), RI (i.e., residing in a religious-ideological settlement; $r = .19$), holding right-wing political leanings ($r = -.17$, $p < .0001$), young age ($r = -.16$, $p < .0001$), and greater religiosity ($r = .10$, $p = .022$). The strongest correlation was with organizational membership. No significant association was found between radical action and gender, education, and income. Finally, correlations among the independent variables did not reach the critical value of .70. These findings indicate little likelihood of multicollinearity among the independent variables.⁶⁵

The Mediating Effect of Organizational Membership

Returning to the central motivating question of this article, we seek not merely to show *whether* collective forms of RI motivate radical action, but *how and when* they might do so. Thus far we have provided a window into how RI affected settlers' political action in the face of the disengagement from Gaza. We argue that RI made the subject population more likely to become radical activists, and we suggest membership in anti-disengagement organizations as the mechanism bridging religious identity with radical action. To examine the extent to which organizational membership mediates the effect of RI on RA in our sample, we

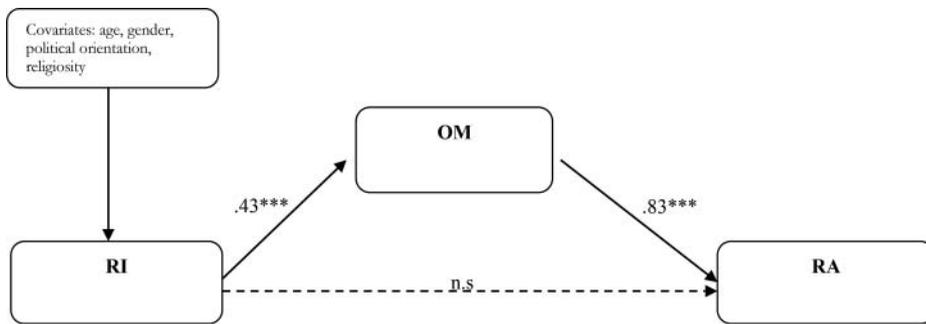


Figure 3. Religious identity leading to organizational membership leading to radical action among Jewish settlers.

employed Hayes's PROCESS bootstrapping command⁶⁶ with 5,000 iterations to assess a simple mediation model (model 4).⁶⁷ This model specified RI as the independent variable, radical action as the outcome variable, and levels of organizational membership as the potential mediator. The model also controlled for sociodemographic variables (age, gender, political orientation, and religiosity; see Figure 3). The analysis revealed that RI increased participants' organizational membership ($b = .43$, $t = 6.21$, $SE = .07$, $p < .0001$), which in turn was associated with greater support for radical action ($b = .83$, $t = 5.31$, $SE = .16$, $p < .0001$). A bias-corrected bootstrap analysis indicated that the mediation path from RI via organizational membership to engagement in RA was significant (i.e., the confidence interval did not include the value zero; 95 percent CI between .20 and .56), and that the total indirect effect (the sum of the indirect effects; see Hayes⁶⁸) was significant as well ($b = .88$, $SE = .26$, 95 percent CI between .37 and 1.39) with 95 percent confidence, as zero was not included in the confidence interval.

This model corroborated our prediction that the effect of RI on RA is explained by organizational membership. Organizational membership fully mediated the link between RI and RA. Moreover, the direct effect of RI on radical action was insignificant, $b = .54$, $p = .05$, CI between $-.00$ and 1.08 . These findings suggest that radical action in our sample is produced via two parallel paths (Figure 3): (1) via the direct influence of organizational membership on radical action, and (2) via the indirect influence of religious identity, as expressed through residence in a religious-ideological settlement, on organizational membership.

Our findings thus confirm that the association between religious identity and radical action is mediated by organizational membership. Most crucially, the findings rule out the direct effect assumption indicating that radical political behavior seems to pivot on organizational infrastructure and membership.

Robustness Checks

First, to ensure that our measure of RI at the collective level (i.e., residence in a religious settlement) captures actual religious identity, we tested an alternative measure of religion: a continuous variable indicating self-definition of religiosity (See Figure 4). We ran a separate mediation analysis with self-defined religiosity as an independent variable ($\beta = .48$, $SE = 0.57$, CI: between -0.64 and 1.60), and compared this model to the quadratic mediation

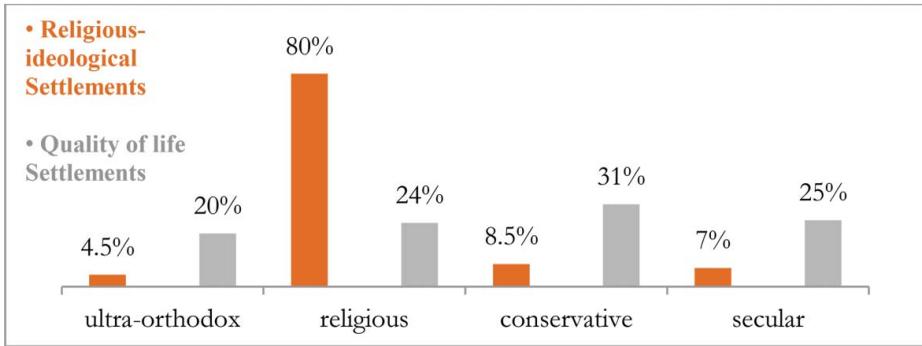


Figure 4. Religiosity by settlement type.

model of religious settlements—organizational membership—radical action. The test yielded insignificant results, and thus, the results showed significantly better measures for the RI model as compared to the religiosity model. Overall, this evidence strengthens our design. Still, it is not feasible to definitively rule out the direct-influence-of-RI hypothesis with the data at hand, and it should be further tested in future experimental and longitudinal studies.

Finally, we tested the robustness of our results to a change in the specification of the dependent variable. We re-estimated the mediation model for two of the most prevalent radical actions, blockading roads and illegally entering a settlement slated for evacuation. The key estimates did not change substantially due to this altered specification, supporting the robustness of our findings. The mediation path from RI via organizational membership to engagement in blocking roads was significant (i.e., the confidence interval did not include the value zero; 95 percent CI between .07 and .47), and that the total indirect effect was significant as well ($b = .73$, $SE = .35$, 95 percent CI between .05 and 1.42) with 95 percent confidence. The direct effect of RI on blocking roads was insignificant, $b = .47$, $p = .20$, CI between $-.25$ and 1.18. The mediation path from RI via organizational membership to illegally entering a settlement slated for evacuation was also significant (i.e., the confidence interval did not include the value zero; 95 percent CI between .17 and .49), and that the total indirect effect was significant as well ($b = .32$, $SE = .08$, 95 percent CI between .17 and .49) with 95 percent confidence.

Discussion and Conclusion

By looking at behavior, not attitudes or intentions, and by accounting for a relevant mechanism—networks of mobilization—we offer a framework that opens a window to understanding the complex interplay between religion and political behavior. Indeed, this study is one of the very few systematic empirical examinations of antecedents of the full range of political action.⁶⁹

We show that RI is indeed associated with RA. However, in contrast to the prevailing view that a fundamentalist identity is inherently a destructive force that plays a central role in extreme forms of political action, or the related view that radical action occurs mainly in ideological or religious communities,⁷⁰ we found no evidence that a religious identity by itself fosters political radicalism. If anything, like Simon, Reichert, and Grabow,⁷¹ we found

that a politicized identity even counteracted such radicalism. Rather, in line with Stekelenburg, Oegema, and Klandermans⁷² our data demonstrate that religion leads to radical action only when it is mediated by group membership. We thus expand the scope of the literature on terrorism, which has long recognized organizational membership as a mediating variable in cases of suicide bombings and other forms of extreme political violence. Our findings extend the mediating role of organizational membership to activities that are illegal, but which nonetheless fall far short of such extreme acts of violence.

It should be emphasized that the findings show that RI is a necessary, although insufficient, antecedent of RA. These findings cast doubt on the primordial perspective, which explains the role of religion in radical action through its essential intractability and exclusivity.⁷³ At the same time, they are consistent with the constructivist and instrumental approaches,⁷⁴ which posit that religion contributes to radical action only in conjunction with other factors.

The present study makes a number of additional contributions. First, we open a window to studies on religious communities, alongside existing work on immigrants, ethnic groups, and protest movements. Indeed, we demonstrate how even collective living within religious communities, seemingly a banal form of religious identity, has a considerable impact on the behaviors of subject populations. Within our sample in the West Bank, we find that settler populations in non-religious settlements were significantly less likely to engage in radical action than those in religious communities.

Second, this article offers specific contributions to the study of Israeli settlers, in that it is one of the very few empirical examinations of political action by Israeli settlers.⁷⁵ The use of a representative sample of persons facing real and immediate threat to—in some cases—deeply held religious beliefs enabled us to obtain compelling evidence of the roles of organizational membership and RI in RA. Moreover, much of the existing literature on Jewish settlers' activism tends to reduce such mobilization to its ideological components, neglecting other dimensions of political action (e.g., organizational resources).⁷⁶ Our study shows that religious settlers hold beliefs which potentially justify and encourage radical, unlawful behavior. Nonetheless, they do not engage in such behavior on their own. This study shifts the focus from ideology to the convergence of identity and instrumentality, thus joining emerging trends in studies dealing with the mobilization of religious groups in the Middle East.⁷⁷

Finally, it should be mentioned that although sociodemographic variables were not at the core of our project, our findings in this area corroborate those in previous studies. Age contributed significantly to radical action, with younger activists more inclined to engage in radical action than older ones. This finding may be explained by age-related deterrents to radicalism, such as marriage and having children, which would make the risks involved too high.⁷⁸ In contrast, consistent with recent findings on suicide terrorism⁷⁹ and on political protest in general,⁸⁰ our findings show that radical action is undertaken by persons of all economic and educational levels, and is not solely the province of poor, uneducated individuals. These findings call into question the resource-based approach, which maintains that education and income are vital resources in political action, but support Norris's⁸¹ call to re-examine the widely touted notion that radical action is fueled by resentment among low-income and poorly educated individuals.

The local and contextual nature of our data may be seen as an inevitable limitation of the present study. While our approach is theoretically applicable to radical activism in other settings around the globe, our framework must be tested in different political cultures, with

different opportunities and threats. Such studies are of special relevance today, when many states worldwide are challenged by religious and ethno-nationalistic movements that employ radical actions to achieve their goals.

On a practical level, the findings suggest that to better anticipate and deal with radical action, attention should be paid not only to the religious-ideological identities of potential activists, but primarily their group belonging. Instead of efforts such as the New York Police Department's "demographic unit" (which was indeed shut in April 2014),⁸² law enforcement agencies should be concerned with the networks of mobilization, particularly those that are involved in radical activities which are illegal but which nonetheless fall short of violence. At least in the Israeli case, while the government does monitor some organizations, it is far from clear that it takes the latter all that seriously. Since 2008 there have been hundreds of incidents (commonly known as "Price Tag") in which fringe settler groups attacked Palestinians and their property. There were, however, very few prosecutions or efforts to single out the networks and organizations that are engaged in these attacks. This is obviously the result of priorities, but also of focus. This principle extends beyond the context examined in this paper. The organizational infrastructure of some groups allows for and encourages RA, in areas as far-reaching as sports clubs whose fans engage in violence and hooliganism or eco-terrorists. This combined approach is already used with respect to terrorism. It should also be applied to radical political action.

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Appendix 1. Summary statistics

| Variable | Mean | SD | Min | Max | n (non-missing) |
|-----------------------------------|------|------|-----|-----|-----------------|
| Radical action | .28 | .45 | 0 | 1 | 517 |
| Religious Identity | 1.65 | .48 | 1 | 2 | 517 |
| Organizational membership | 1.58 | .72 | 1 | 3 | 517 |
| Religiosity | 2.67 | .83 | 1 | 4 | 510 |
| Political orientation (left-wing) | 2.01 | .64 | 1 | 5 | 475 |
| Income | 2.91 | 1.37 | 1 | 5 | 480 |
| Education | 3.35 | .93 | 1 | 4 | 517 |
| Age | 1.86 | .74 | 1 | 4 | 510 |
| Gender (female) | 1.55 | .50 | 1 | 2 | 517 |