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Author(s): Kettell, S.

Article Title: Has political science ignored religion?

Year of publication: 2012

Link to publication:

<http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayJournal?jid=PSC>

Link to published article: <forthcoming>

Publisher statement: This paper has been accepted for publication and will appear in a revised form, subsequent to peer review and/or editorial input by Cambridge University Press, in "PS: Political Science & Politics" published by Cambridge University Press. © American Political Science Association.

Has Political Science Ignored Religion?

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A common complaint from political scientists involved in the study of religion is that religious issues have been largely overlooked by the discipline. This paper considers to what extent this has been the case through a content analysis of leading political science and sociology journals from 2000 to 2010. The results show that political science publications involving religion have been significantly fewer than those engaging with subjects typically regarded as being more central to the discipline, and markedly less numerous than religious publications in leading sociology periodicals. Where political science publications have engaged with religious issues, they have also focused on a limited number of subject areas and been concentrated in specific disciplinary sub-fields. The proportion of papers engaging with religion has shown no real increase since the turn of the century. These findings underpin calls for political scientists to take religious issues more seriously.

Keywords:

political science, religion, sociology, journals, content analysis

Introduction

Since its international 'resurgence' during the 1970s, the social, cultural and political impact of religion has been difficult to miss. As the boundary between the religious and the secular has become increasingly contested in many parts of the world, so tensions over the role of religion in the public sphere have become ever-more apparent. These embrace a broad range of themes, including matters of life and death (such as abortion and euthanasia), scientific advances (research involving stem cells and cloning technologies for example), civil and human rights (notably centring around questions of equality and discrimination), and welfare and public service provision (including controversies over religious schools and faith-based initiatives). The ability of religious beliefs and organisations to promote democratic, social and political engagement has also been at the centre of contemporary debates on matters of faith, as have questions about its role in national, cultural and individual conceptions of identity, community and tolerance. Themes of conflict and violence, too, remain close at hand; fuelled, not least, by the impact of religiously-motivated terrorism, but with intra-faith disputes, sectarianism and fundamentalism all threatening to reap potentially noxious harvests. With all this taking place against a backdrop in which global levels of religious belief are expected to rise in future years (Johnson, 2004), it is no longer possible, if indeed it ever was, to regard religion as being an inevitably diminishing feature of human societies (Casanova, 1994; Norris and Inglehart, 2004).

Academic analyses of religion are substantial and extensive, and traverse a wide variety of disciplines. These include anthropology (Boyer, 2001), history (Morris, 2003; Mancini, 2007), sociology (Davie, 2006; Crockett and Voas, 2006), law (Greenawalt, 1998; Danchin, 2008); philosophy (Macdonald, 2005; Habermas, 2006), economics (Lipford and Tollinson, 2003; Fase, 2005) and political science (Kalyvas, 1996; Haynes, 2009). Yet while many of these disciplines have developed well-crafted research agendas into religious affairs, a

common refrain from scholars involved with political science is that their discipline has for too long overlooked the subject, behaving, for the most part, as if religion was irrelevant to its central themes, issues and concerns. Noting the historical lack of academic attention, Jevtic (2007: 63), for instance, maintains that the intersection between religion and politics has only recently emerged as 'a new science in the world of political sciences', and Wald and Wilcox (2006: 523) claim that: 'Apart from Economics and Geography, it is hard to find a social science that has given less attention to religion than political science'. In similar fashion, Philpott (2009: 184) remarks that the extent of political science engagement with religion remains a case of 'genuine neglect', and that 'religion's place in political science scholarship is vastly underproportioned to its place in headlines around the globe, and to scholarship in political economy, security studies, international institutions, and the like'. Continuing the theme, Gill (2001: 118) contends that most political scientists 'consider religion to be a peripheral subject matter', Bellin (2008: 315) observes that 'studies of religion in politics have typically been shunted to the margins of the profession', and Wald *et al* (2005: 122-23) note that: 'Even today, it is difficult to find a distinctively "political science" perspective on religion'.

Belying these assumptions, however, there has as yet been no attempt to analyse the state of political science research into religion in a systematic and comprehensive way. Efforts at measurement, where they have been made, have been cursory, and the results, though indicative, have been limited. A review of four leading international relations journals by Philpott (2002) found just half-a-dozen articles featuring religion as an important influence, from a total of some 1,600 published between 1980 and 1999. A similar inquiry into the contents of the *American Political Science Review*, conducted by Wald and Wilcox (2006), found just 25 articles strongly related to religion since the journal began, and that, of these, 80% were centred on the specific subfields of public law and political philosophy. The

purpose of this paper, then, is to establish a clearer picture of the academic terrain in this area by considering whether, and to what extent, political science has overlooked religion.

Design

A useful means of examining the topography of political science research is through a content analysis of publications in leading political science journals. Although such an exercise is not without its problems, the output of leading periodicals provides a broadly accurate guide to the character of the academic mainstream, and hence to the scope of its engagement with religious issues. The first, and most obvious, difficulty involved in undertaking such a review, given the absence of any objective measurement of publication quality and a corresponding lack of consensus on what the 'leading' journals might actually be, is to determine the most appropriate sample. One way to do this is by using data provided by the ISI Web of Knowledge, which ranks periodicals according to various measurement indices, one of the most useful of which is a five-year impact factor based on citation reports.¹ Although ranking periodicals in this way is not unproblematic (Hargens, 2000),² this method nonetheless yields a good medium term representation of the leading journals within the discipline, and avoids the potentially greater difficulties (such as lack of replicability and comparability with other disciplines) associated with constructing a sample using more subjective criteria (Hix, 2004; McLean *et al.*, 2009).

The review for this study involved a content analysis of the twenty highest ranked political science periodicals, based on the ISI's 2009 measurement of five-year impact factor, covering a period of eleven full years from the beginning of 2000 to the end of 2010 (for comparative purposes the same process was also undertaken for the twenty highest ranked sociology periodicals).³ In order to limit the analysis to substantive publications, papers shorter than six pages in length, typically consisting of book reviews, short replies, rejoinders, research notes

and editorials, were, as a rule, excluded from the sample.⁴ All main and original articles, along with other publications such as review articles, commentaries and replies of at least six pages in length, were included. Publications were then coded, following an analysis of the title, abstract and keywords, according to the centrality of religious issues to their content.⁵ Papers featuring religious issues as one of the principal or direct themes of analysis were coded as 'primary' items. Papers dealing with religious issues either indirectly or as a minor part of the analysis, or for which religious variables featured as but one amongst a range of explanatory factors or discussion points, were coded as being 'secondary' items.

For the most part this coding schema was relatively unproblematic, but at times a certain degree of subjective interpretation was required. Though infrequent, this occurred most often in cases, such as discussions of the Arab-Israeli conflict, where it was uncertain if the main theme of a paper should be classed as dealing principally with 'ethnic' or 'religious' matters. Where such issues were treated primarily in non-religious terms, being used, for example, as a demonstration of social reconciliation processes, or of 'ethno-nationalist' conflict, then the publication was not coded as belonging to either of the primary or secondary classifications (examples include Horowitz, 2002; and Ben-Yehuda and Sandler, 2003). Where the title, abstract or keywords mentioned factors explicitly related to religion (such as 'sectarianism' or 'creationism'), however, or where they referred to direct religious markers (such as divisions between 'Christians' and 'Muslims'), or contained ambiguous markers (such as 'anti-semitism') with no clear indication as to whether these were intended to denote 'ethnic' or 'religious' terms, then the publication was coded as being religious according to the 'primary' or 'secondary' schema.

Analysis

The sample drawn from the twenty highest ranked political science journals produced a total

of 7,245 publications. Of these, a total of 97 were coded as 'primary' papers, being directly engaged with religious issues as a principal or leading theme of analysis. This resulted in a mean average of 1.34%, or one primary coded paper for every 75 publications. A further 87 papers were coded as dealing with religion as a 'secondary' issue. Thus, out of the entire sample, just 184 papers were classed as engaging with religion in any way whatsoever, producing an average of 2.54%, or one paper for every 39 publications.

The political science journal with the highest proportion of primary coded publications was *Public Opinion Quarterly*, with 12 papers from a total of 332 producing an average of 3.61%. The periodical with the highest total number of primary coded papers was the *Journal of Politics*, with 16, although this also published a greater overall number of papers than any other journal included in the sample, with a total of 708. Five journals – a quarter of the entire sample – did not contain any primary coded publications at all, and an additional six (making a total of eleven journals altogether) had an average of less than 1%. Taking all primary and secondary coded publications together, the journal with the highest sum total, and also the highest overall proportion, was the *Journal of Peace Research*, with 25 papers from a total of 437 producing an average of 5.72%. A total of five periodicals had an average of less than 1% for all primary and secondary coded items combined. These findings are set out in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Political science journals ranked by average number of primary coded papers

ISI Rank	Title	N	All	Primary	% All	% Primary
4	Public Opinion Quarterly	332	15	12	4.52	3.61
9	Journal of Peace Research	437	25	13	5.72	2.97
16	Comparative Political Studies	513	19	14	3.70	2.73
12	Journal of Politics	708	21	16	2.97	2.26
5	Annual Review of Political Science	229	5	5	2.18	2.18
1	American Political Science Review	460	12	10	2.61	2.17
10	International Studies Quarterly	386	13	6	3.37	1.55
20	Quarterly Journal of Political Science	76	1	1	1.32	1.32
11	Political Psychology	389	19	4	4.88	1.03
3	American Journal of Political Science	613	11	5	1.79	0.82
18	British Journal of Political Science	371	8	3	2.16	0.81
15	Political Communication	260	7	2	2.69	0.77
7	Political Geography	420	16	3	3.81	0.71
6	Journal of Conflict Resolution	418	6	2	1.44	0.48
13	European Union Politics	231	3	1	1.3	0.43
19	Studies in Comparative International Development	208	1	0	0.48	0
14	Governance	259	1	0	0.39	0
8	European Journal of Political Research	338	1	0	0.3	0
2	Political Analysis	229	0	0	0	0
17	Review of International Political Economy	368	0	0	0	0
		7245	184	97	2.54	1.34

How, then, are these results to be interpreted in light of claims that political science has overlooked religion? Certainly the overall averages of just 1.34% for primary coded publications and 2.54% for all publications relating to religion, do not appear to be overly impressive. But can they be regarded as being unusually low? A key problem in answering this question, of course, is that this deals with a relative measure, and thus raises the obvious, subsequent question of: low in relation to what?

One way to answer this is by comparing the number of political science publications concerning religion with those dealing with other subjects. Although attempting to classify publications in terms of their principal themes relies on a greater degree of subjective judgement and interpretation than a simple primary/secondary coding schema, the results nevertheless provide an illustrative guide to the topological distribution of key issues within the discipline. To get a sense of this (and since a detailed examination of every paper included in the sample was beyond the scope of the study), the analysis focused on the publication record of three randomly selected periodicals (two drawn from the upper, and one from the lower sections of Table 1).

The first of these was the *American Political Science Review*, ranked first according to the ISI's five year impact factor, and sixth in terms of the average number of primary coded papers. This published 10 primary and 2 secondary coded papers during the eleven year period, the combined total of 12 giving an average of 2.61%, but produced three times as many publications, a total of 37 (8.04%) on issues relating to political parties, 42 publications (9.13%) on issues relating to war, conflict and terrorism, and 43 publications (9.35%) on political institutions. A total of 56 papers (12.17%) involved the theme of 'democracy', and 59 publications (12.83%) dealt with issues related to voting, almost five times the number published on religion. Notably, too, the journal published more papers (13) on the workings of the U.S Supreme Court than it did both primary and secondary coded items put together.

The composition of the second journal to be examined, the *International Studies Quarterly*, ranked tenth by the ISI and seventh by the average number of primary coded papers, followed a similar theme. Containing 6 primary coded items (1.55%) and 13 papers on religion in total (3.37%), this published 31 pieces (8%) on issues relating to 'human rights', 39 papers (10.1%) relating to issues of 'democracy', and 51 papers (13.2%) on international institutions. By far the largest categories, however, were those relating to economic issues (including trade, foreign investment and global finance), which accounted for no fewer than 80 papers (an average of 20.7%), and the theme of war, conflict and terrorism, which amounted to a total of 103 publications, an average of 26.7% being almost eight times greater than the average for primary and secondary papers put together.

The final periodical to be analysed was *Governance*. Ranked fourteenth in the ISI listings, *Governance* contained no primary coded papers for the sample timeframe at all (from a total of 259 publications), and produced just one secondary coded item. In contrast, the journal published 11 papers (4.2%) on environmental issues, 17 papers (6.6%) on the theme of policy transfer or learning, 24 pieces (9.3%) involving the European Union, and 28 papers (10.8%) on the subject of institutional change or reform. More prominently, the journal also published a total of 47 papers (18.1%) on institutions generally (excluding issues of institutional change), and 50 papers each (19.3%) dealing with the themes of policy change and bureaucracy or administration.

These results would seem to provide a clear demonstration of the extent to which religious issues have been sidelined relative to those considered to be more central to the discipline of political science. However, to obtain a more fine-grained picture, all 97 primary coded items were themselves also categorised in two further ways: firstly, according to the principal topics that they addressed, and second, by the disciplinary sub-fields with which they were engaged. In the first of these, grouping primary coded publications according to their subject matter

revealed a high level of concentration. Of the ten most popular themes, 21 papers (21.7%) were related to issues of violence, conflict and terrorism, 20 papers (20.6%) were directly related to issues about Islam, and 17 papers (17.5%) were related to U.S politics and society. In contrast, the topic of women and gender featured ninth, with just 4 papers (an average of 4.1%), while life and death issues (such as abortion and euthanasia) came tenth, with just 3 papers (averaging 3.1%).

The process of classifying publications according to their relevant sub-field was based on the sub-division of political science set out by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) (2007). This identified a series of eight sub-fields: institutions, political theory, comparative politics, political behaviour, political economy, public policy, international relations and methodology. Although papers could be classified as belonging to more than one category, the distribution of primary items here was also highly focused on a few areas. By far and away the largest of these was 'political behaviour' (a broad category including a range of topics, such as voting, public opinion, identity issues and terrorism), which accounted for almost two thirds (63.9%) of all primary coded papers. In second place, though far behind this, was the sub-field of 'political institutions', with which almost two-fifths (17.5%) of all primary coded items were engaged. Comparative politics and political theory (the only other sub-fields to involve more than 10% of papers) occupied the third and fourth places with 13.4% and 10.3% of primary publications respectively. The least populated category was 'political economy', with just one publication. Details of these analyses are set out in Tables 2 and 3 below.⁶

Table 2: Primary coded publications by main themes

	Theme	N	%
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1	Violence, conflict and terrorism	21	21.7
2	Islam/Muslims	20	20.6
3	U.S politics and society	17	17.5
4	Social capital/civic engagement	10	10.3
5	Elections and voting	10	10.3
6	Democracy	7	7.2
7	Political science	6	6.2
8	Nationalism	5	5.2
9	Women/gender	4	4.1
10	Life and death issues	3	3.1

Table 3: Primary coded publications by sub-field

		N	%
1	Political behaviour	62	63.9
2	Political institutions	17	17.5
3	Comparative politics	13	13.4
4	Political theory	10	10.3
5	International relations	8	8.2
6	Political methodology	8	8.2
7	Public policy	3	3.1
8	Political economy	1	1.0

In comparison to the broad spread of issues that are addressed by high-ranking periodicals, the extent of political science engagement with religion would, on the basis of the above, indeed appear to be low. Compounding this, papers engaging with religious issues also tend

to be concentrated both in particular subject areas and disciplinary sub-fields. But how does political science stand in relation to other social scientific disciplines? A useful benchmark for comparison here is with sociology, the social science discipline most actively involved in the study of religion. For comparative purposes, the methodology outlined earlier was repeated for the twenty highest ranked sociology journals, again involving a content analysis of titles, keywords and abstracts covering the period from the beginning of 2000 to the end of 2010. This produced a total sample of 6,896 publications, of which 242 were coded as primary items, an average of 3.51%. The combined total for all primary and secondary coded papers was 339, an average of 4.92%. The average proportion of primary coded papers published by sociology periodicals, then, was more than two and a half times that produced by political science journals. The average proportion of both primary and secondary coded items combined was almost two times higher. This gap is all the more notable when it is considered that sociology outlets specifically designed to advance the study of religion within the discipline, such as *Review of Religious Research*, *Sociology of Religion* and *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, are not included in the sample. Further still, no sociology journal included in the sample was without a single primary coded publication (compared to a total of five political science journals), and just four sociology periodicals had an average publication rate for primary coded items of less than 1% (compared to eleven in the political science sample). The results of the content analysis for sociology journals, and a direct comparison to political science periodicals, are set out in Tables 4 and 5 below.

Table 4: Sociology journals ranked by average number of primary coded publications

ISI Rank	Title	N	All	Primary	% All	% Primary
12	Social Forces	696	75	59	10.78	8.48
2	American Sociological Review	461	39	31	8.46	6.72
13	British Journal of Sociology	351	26	22	7.41	6.27
20	Sociological Theory	231	19	13	8.23	5.63
14	Gender and Society	380	25	21	6.58	5.53
10	Social Problems	305	20	14	6.56	4.59
3	American Journal of Sociology	409	21	14	5.1	3.4
11	Economy and Society	303	13	10	4.29	3.3
1	Annual Review of Sociology	250	11	8	4.4	3.2
15	Population and Development Review	332	19	9	5.72	2.71
7	Journal of Marriage and Family	933	30	18	3.22	1.93
8	Sociology of Education	188	6	3	3.19	1.60
16	Annals of Tourism Research	521	11	7	2.11	1.34
19	Youth and Society	234	6	3	2.56	1.28
9	Sociology of Health and Illness	528	13	6	2.46	1.14
17	Sociological Methodology	115	1	1	0.87	0.87
18	Work and Occupations	199	1	1	0.5	0.5
5	Sociological Methods and Research	204	1	1	0.49	0.49
6	Social Networks	256	2	1	0.78	0.39
4	Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*	-	-	-	-	-

* The inclusion in the ISI rankings of the *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly* was considered to be anomalous, since this deals principally with issues of leisure and business management rather than sociological matters *per se*. The journal was thus excluded from the sample.

		6896	339	242	4.92	3.51
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Table 5: Political science and sociology journals compared

	N	Primary	% Primary	Secondary	% Secondary	All	% All
Political Science	7245	97	1.34%	87	1.20%	184	2.54%
Sociology	6896	242	3.51%	97	1.41%	339	4.92%

A comparison to sociology is also revealing in other ways. If both political science and sociology samples are combined, then just one political science journal (*Public Opinion Quarterly*) acquires a place in the top ten ranked by the average number of primary coded items. If the rankings are ordered in terms of the average number of all primary and secondary coded items put together, then just two political science journals appear in the top ten (*Journal of Peace Research* and *Political Psychology*). In neither case does any political science periodical penetrate the top six (see Table 6).

Table 6: Political science and sociology journals combined

	% Primary		% All	
1	Social Forces	8.5	Social Forces	10.8
2	American Sociological Review	6.7	American Sociological Review	8.5
3	British Journal of Sociology	6.3	Sociological Theory	8.2
4	Sociological Theory	5.6	British Journal of Sociology	7.4
5	Gender and Society	5.5	Gender and Society	6.6
6	Social Problems	4.6	Social Problems	6.6
7	Public Opinion Quarterly	3.6	Journal of Peace Research	5.7
8	American Journal of Sociology	3.4	Population and Development Review	5.7
9	Economy and Society	3.3	American Journal of Sociology	5.1
10	Annual Review of Sociology	3.2	Political Psychology	4.9

Problems

The above analysis reveals and underscores the degree to which leading political science journals have overlooked religious issues. However, before drawing any firm conclusions from this, several potential methodological difficulties need to be addressed. The first of these is that the research design, in examining titles, keywords and abstracts, may have been insufficiently robust to accurately capture the content of all of the publications included in the sample. The objection may thus be made that a number of publications dealing with religious issues could have gone undetected, thereby giving a lower estimation of political science engagement with religion than is actually the case. However, while the possibility cannot be ruled out, concerns about the overlooking of relevant publications are far more likely to apply to papers dealing with religion as a secondary issue, given that papers engaging with religion as a primary theme of analysis, for the most part, have their religious content clearly highlighted. Moreover, given the large number of publications contained in the sample overall, it is unlikely that any publications overlooked would have been of sufficient number to distort the results. This potential problem is also unlikely to have affected the comparison between political science and sociology periodicals given the equal likelihood of publications being overlooked in each sample.

Another possibility, however, is that the results of the study may simply be an artefact of the selected sample, and that periodicals outside the sample may contain a significantly greater volume of publications involving religion. Without an even more comprehensive examination it remains possible that this too could be the case, although again there are reasons to believe that such a situation is unlikely. The first of these is the extremely small number of specialist political science periodicals in this area outside the sample, with the only notable outlet, *Politics and Religion*, publishing its first issue in 2008 (another, less prominent, journal, also called *Politics and Religion*, based in the Centre for the Study of Religion and Religious

Tolerance, began in 2007). Secondly, the spread of results in the political science sample shows no relationship between a journal's position in the ISI rankings and the number of papers published on religion. Indeed, half of the top ten periodicals ranked according to the average number of primary coded items were from outside the top ten when ranked according to the ISI's five year impact factor (see Table 1). Comparing the top and bottom halves of the sample ranked in this way also revealed no significant difference in the number of publications involving religion. Indeed, if anything, journals appearing in the top ten of the ISI rankings were more likely, albeit only slightly, to have published papers involving religion than those in positions 11-20 (see Table 7). Since journals lower down the ISI rankings were no more likely to contain papers on religion than those rated more highly, there is no reason, on this basis, to suppose that journals outside the sample, and hence further down the ISI rankings, will be any more likely to contain a higher proportion of publications on religion.

Table 7: Political science journals compared by ISI rankings

ISI ranking	N	Primary	% Primary	All	% All
Top half (1-10)	3862	56	1.45	104	2.69
Bottom half (11-20)	3383	41	1.21	80	2.37

Another potential problem is that scholarly research on religion may be shaped by the geographical distribution of the periodicals contained in the sample, and by the respective geographical differences within political science itself. One of the most notable divisions here concerns that between North American and European approaches to the discipline; with the former having tended to be dominated by positivist approaches, and with the latter having tended to take a more historicist, theoretical and normative approach (Marsh and Savigny,

2004). As such (notwithstanding editorial relocations), this raises the possibility that journals based in the U.S may have been more or less likely to publish research on religion than those from Europe, and that this may have consequently shaped or distorted the findings.⁷

Again, however, the figures show there to be no appreciable differences in the proportion of publications involving religion based on this criteria. The U.S and European journals contained in the sample were split almost equally, at 11 and 9 in number, and published a total of 3,569 and 3,465 papers respectively. Of these, U.S journals published a total of 47 primary coded papers, producing an average of 1.24%. European journals published 50 primary coded papers, with an average of 1.44%. The figures for all primary and secondary coded publications were 88 for U.S periodicals and 96 for those based in Europe, giving averages of 2.33% and 2.77% respectively. Thus, while European journals had a slightly higher publication average for papers relating to religion (both primary coded and overall), the differences between the two are not significant, just 0.2% higher for primary coded papers, and 0.44% greater for all publications involving religion (see Table 8).

Table 8: Political science journals compared by geographical location

	N	Primary	All	% Primary	% All
U.S	3,780	47	88	1.24	2.33
Europe	3,465	50	96	1.44	2.77

The U.S journals were: *American Journal of Political Science*, *American Political Science Review*, *Annual Review of Political Science*, *Comparative Political Studies*, *Governance*, *International Studies Quarterly*, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *Political Analysis*, *Political Psychology*, *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*.and *Studies in Comparative International Development*. The European journals (all from England unless stated) were: *British Journal of Political Science*, *European Journal of Political Research* (Netherlands), *European Union Politics*, *Journal of Peace Research* (Norway), *Journal of Politics*, *Political Communication*, *Political Geography*, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, and *Review of International Political Economy*.

One final difficulty to be considered is that the findings presented here may not accurately reflect the chronological distribution of papers on religion. A possible problem with claiming

that political science has generally ignored the issue, then, is that simply taking the overall average number of publications over the eleven year period may conceal significant variation over time. This is likely to be especially problematic if the number of publications engaging with religious issues has substantially increased in recent years. To capture the chronological distribution, the contents of the sample were thus examined across four periods: 2000-2001, 2002-2004, 2005-2007, and 2008-2010. The dividing line of the initial period was set at 2001 in order to register any potential '9/11 effect' upon the pattern of publications.

The analysis of the chronological distribution of primary and secondary coded items shows there to have been no significant increase in the average number of papers engaged with religion, but does indicate an uplift in the initial period after 2001. Although the total number of publications involving religion consistently increased during the eleven year period (from 27 in 2000-01 to 57 in 2008-10), and although the average proportion of primary coded items also rose, from 0.95% during 2000-01 to 1.5% during 2008-10, the overall proportion of papers engaging with the subject did not substantially change. The average number of combined primary and secondary items pursued a fluctuating trajectory during the course of the decade before ending in a position not substantially greater than that from which it had started, recording an average of 2.58% for the period 2008-10 compared to 2.34% for the period 2000-01. Interestingly, the largest rise in the proportion of papers dealing with religion occurred in the immediate post-2001 period, with an increase in the average proportion of primary papers from 0.95% to 1.26%, and a rise in the average proportion of primary and secondary papers together from 2.34% to a peak of 2.69%. While this is suggestive of a possible '9/11 effect', however, any impetus given to the study of religion does not appear to have been sustained. While the proportion of primary papers continued to rise during the subsequent period, from 2005-2007, the proportion of primary and secondary papers

combined fell back to 2.47%. A more detailed and longer-term study would be needed to explore this point more clearly.

On these issues a further comparison with sociology is also revealing. As with political science, the number of sociology publications engaged with religion increased during each period, from 29 primary coded papers in 2000-01 to 80 during 2008-10, but, in contrast to political science, the overall proportion of sociology papers with religious content also grew consistently. The average number of primary coded items rose from 3.07% in 2000-01 to 4.03% in 2008-10, while the number of primary and secondary coded items combined rose from 4.31% in 2000-01 to 5.44% in 2008-10. This shows that the gap between political science and sociology also widened over the eleven year period (notwithstanding a brief narrowing during the early part of the decade), rising from a differential of 2.12% in 2000-01 to 2.53% in 2008-10 in terms of the average number of primary coded items, and from 1.97% to 2.86% for primary and secondary coded items combined. These statistics are set out in Tables 9 and 10, and Figure 1 below.

Table 9: Political science publications involving religion over time

Period	N	Primary	% Primary	All	% All
2000-01	1156	11	0.95	27	2.34
2002-04	1821	23	1.26	49	2.69
2005-07	2062	30	1.45	51	2.47
2008-10	2206	33	1.50	57	2.58
2000-10	7245	97	1.34	184	2.54

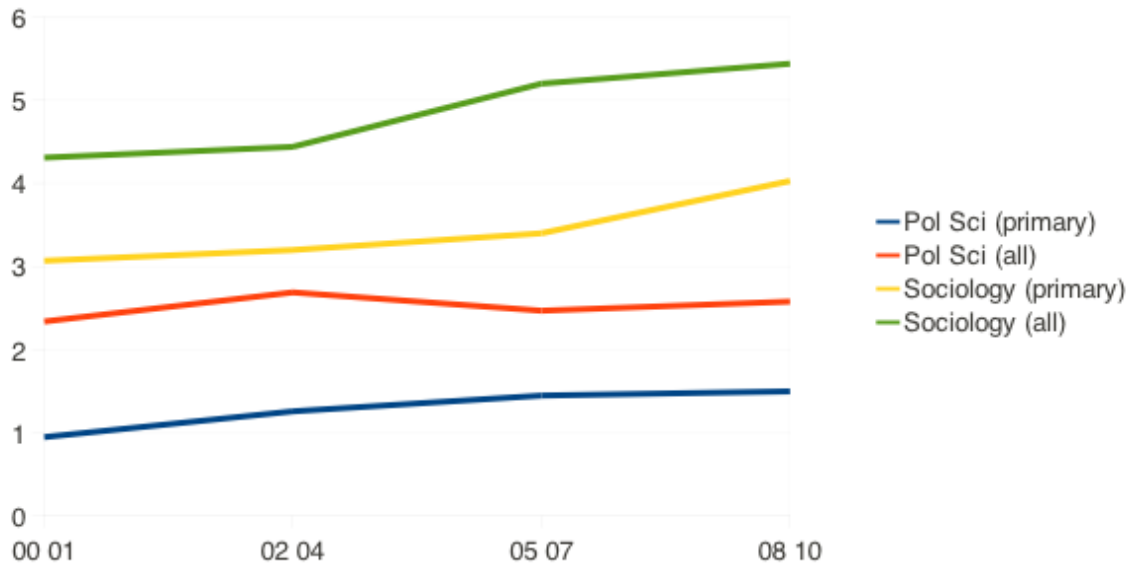
Table 10: Sociology publications involving religion over time

Period	N	Primary	% Primary	Gap	All	% All	Gap
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2000-01	1206	37	3.07	+2.12	52	4.31	+1.97
2002-04	1781	57	3.20	+1.94	79	4.44	+1.75
2005-07	1923	68	3.54	+2.09	100	5.20	+2.73
2008-10	1986	80	4.03	+2.53	108	5.44	+2.86
2000-10	6896	242	3.51	+2.16	339	4.92	+2.34

* The columns headed 'gap' denote the percentage differential between sociology and political science publications.

Figure 1: Political science and sociology publications involving religion compared over time (by average percentages)



Conclusions

Scholars working in the field of politics and religion often claim that, despite their obvious political influence, religious issues have been largely ignored by political science. This paper has examined the validity of this assertion through a content analysis of the twenty highest ranking periodicals from both political science and sociology (as determined by the ISI's 5-year impact factor), covering a period of eleven years from the beginning of 2000 to the end of 2010. The results uphold the claim that political science has generally overlooked religion, but also reveal a series of nuanced features on the scholarly landscape.

The principal finding of the study is that the volume of political science publications involving religion is relatively small. The proportions of primary and secondary coded items (those engaging directly and more tangentially with religious themes), at just 1.34% and 2.54%, are far lower than the proportion of papers dealing with more mainstream political

science concerns, such as issues relating to democracy, political institutions or conflict. Political science publications involving religion are also focused on a narrow range of issues, principally concerning the themes of violence, U.S politics and Islam, and are highly concentrated in a small number of disciplinary sub-fields, most notably that of political behaviour. Compared to sociology, the most active social science discipline in terms of the study of religion, political science also fares poorly. The average number of primary coded papers published by leading sociology periodicals (3.5%) is more than two-and-a-half times that produced by the highest ranked political science journals, while the average number of primary and secondary coded items combined is almost twice as high. Although the total number of political science papers engaging with religion has consistently increased since the turn of the century, rising from 27 primary and secondary coded publications during 2000-01 to 57 during the period from 2008-10, the overall proportion of papers dealing with religious themes has increased by just a quarter of one percent (from 2.34% to 2.58%) over the same period, while the gap between political science and sociology has widened.

These findings naturally raise the question of why religion should have been overlooked by political science in this way. While a full analysis of this issue falls beyond the scope of this paper, the typical explanation that is usually given centres on the historical construction of the discipline itself. Here it is maintained that the primary themes and concerns of political science (such as 'power', 'democracy', 'the state') and so forth, emerged from historical processes bound-up with the creation of an increasingly secular system of territorially sovereign states in the Westphalian settlement of the seventeenth century. As such, the intellectual framework for political science was from the outset grounded in underlying assumptions about the declining influence of religion in public life. With such assumptions continuing to dominate for most of the post-war period, and in the ongoing absence (contra sociology) of a recognisable disciplinary sub-field of religious studies with which scholars

could engage, the development of political science thus remained on a trajectory that was far from conducive for the analysis of religious issues (see Stark, 1999; Philpott. 2002, 2009; Mitchell, 2007; Wald et al, 2005).

In setting out a comprehensive and detailed account of the output of high ranking periodicals, the empirical findings produced in this study both support and underscore narratives about the secular development of political science as a discipline. Yet with debates over the political influence of religion only likely to intensify as the twenty-first century develops, the necessity for political scientists to turn the tools of their trade to its analysis is likely to become ever-more pressing. By highlighting the extent of this disciplinary disengagement, the analysis presented here outlines the nature of the task ahead, but also the scale of what is required. If political science is to meet the challenge effectively, then scholars will need to take religion more seriously than they have thus far been prepared to do.

1. The Web of Knowledge database can be accessed via <http://www.webofknowledge.com/>
2. One potential problem with using citations as the basis for impact factor, for instance, is that this can lead to the over-representation of periodicals appealing to a small, specialist audience.
3. The review was conducted by year, rather than by volume and issue numbers. Where the publication of a particular volume fell across different years, only those issues published in the year in question were counted for that year.
4. Though somewhat arbitrary, the six page limit was considered to be a reasonable threshold for preventing the sample from being diluted or distorted by a high volume of short pieces. One exception to this was *Political Communication*, which publishes a high proportion of short articles, often fewer than six pages in length, the exclusion of which would create a misleading picture of its main content.
5. In cases where an abstract was not available, coding was based on an examination of the introductory text.
6. Please note: In Tables 2 and 3, N does not amount to 97 (the total number of primary coded items) and percentages do not add up to 100% since papers could belong to more than one category or sub-field.
7. The differences between European and American approaches to the discipline include the categorisation of political science itself. In contrast to the ESRC classification, the sub-fields of political science set out by the American Political Science Association do not contain 'institutions' as a category, and also include the categories of 'political philosophy' and 'political ideology'

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