RELIGION AND PUBLIC LIFE PROGRAM
Policies and Perspectives: Exploring the Implications of Religion Among Scientists in the UK and India
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Religion among Scientists in International Contexts

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Globalization of science and of religion and science debates

Scientists as global carries of secularization?

Public acceptance of science at stake

Perceived secularity preventing young religious people from entering science
The Questions

- What are the religious identities and practices of scientists?
- In what ways and in what contexts does religion have an impact on scientific work?
- How do religious identities and practices of scientists compare across different national contexts?
- How do they compare to the religious identities and practices of the general public?
The Countries

- USA
- France
- UK
- Italy
- Turkey
- India
- Hong Kong
- Taiwan
The Data

- Ask 22,000 scientists— at various career stages, from both elite and non-elite universities and research institutes, and across the disciplines of biology and physics—to participate in a survey

- In-depth interviews with 700 scientists from different self-identified religious categories
Focus for Today

- What are scientists in the UK and India like religiously?
- To what extent does religion shape or influence the work of scientists?
- Why does all of this matter? What are the practical implications of the data?
## Data Collection – UK and India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Response Rate</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>Male (%)</th>
<th>Female (%)</th>
<th>Biologists (%)</th>
<th>Physicists (%)</th>
<th>Rank 1 (%)</th>
<th>Rank 2 (%)</th>
<th>Rank 3 (%)</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>UK</strong></td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>N=1,581</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(little non-respondent bias)</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INDIA</strong></td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>N=1,763</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>(little non-respondent bias)</td>
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99 Interviews in UK and 73 Interviews in India.
Summary of Findings

- Distinct national contexts--religious majority (India) and religious minority (UK)

- Characteristics of majority religion different (Christianity vs. Hinduism), and therefore impact conceptions of the religion-science relationship in distinct ways

- There is hope for collaboration--for those who are interested. There are religious people in science in both UK and India.
Religious Identities of Scientists

Do you belong to a religion? If yes, which one?

UK Scientists

- Buddhist: 16%
- Catholic: 65%
- Hindu: 16%
- Jewish: 6%
- Muslim: 6%
- Orthodox: 6%
- Protestant: 6%
- Sikh: 6%
- Other: 6%
- No religion: 6%

Indian Scientists

- No religion: 79%
Religious Practices of Scientists

Apart from weddings and funerals, about how often do you participate in religious services or rituals (For India, this includes household pujas and public religious festivals)?

- 32% of Indian scientists attend regularly (once a month or more), compared with 12% of UK scientists
- 27% of Indian scientists attend on special holy days, compared with 9% of UK scientists
- 69% of UK scientists never participate in religious services, compared with 19% of Indian scientists
- Indian scientists are on the whole much more religious than UK scientists
- Context Matters
Religion in Scientific Work?
Research Ethics for Indian Scientists

Orienting Ethos

- The fundamental spirit that should govern science

- A “good scientist” does work that alleviates poverty and human suffering

- If you walk out of campus...you will see a bunch of kids with no clothes on their backs...So you think immediately, I just spent a million dollars...I better get something out of it which hopefully is useful for somebody in the future...

IND36, Assistant Professor, Biology, Male
The Ideal Hindu Housewife

- Religion hinders commitment to research for female scientists by enforcing boundaries between work and family
- My career has taken precedent. You won’t like it but it’s the truth – essentially, patriarchal society…I’m not saying what should be, I’m saying what is. The tradition of keeping the [religious] culture continuing, the onus is on women. IND72, Professor, Physics, Male,
Dispelling Stereotypes
#1: The Conflict Narrative is Overstated

- UK and Indian scientists experience less conflict with religion than publicly perceived.
  - For me personally, my understanding of science and religion can be described as a relationship of...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>India</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conflict—religion</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict—science</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict—not sure</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
#2: Not All Non-Religious Scientists are like the New Atheists

- UK scientists are tired of framing the religion-science relationship in terms of conflict

- 25% of UK scientists we interviewed referenced Dawkins

  - There’s no point in being Richard Dawkins and going around saying you’re all stupid. UK36, Professor, Biology, Male, Non-religious

  - I decided, well partly because I thought it would sell more books, not to adopt the Dawkinsque viewpoint. UK34, Professor, Biology, Male, Non-religious
#3: Possible Areas of Common Ground for Religious and Scientific Communities

- **Poverty Alleviation**
  - *My sense of being a responsible scientist would be to try to answer specific questions that have occurred to me, with the best utilization of the public money...when we get money for research, it’s been taken away from other things, which could have... given food and shelter to some people.*

IND36, Assistant Professor, Biology, Female, Non-religious
In response to why it is important for India to allow scientists to work on genetically modified crops, a controversial topic: *To produce more food and to overcome these adverse effects of global warming. I believe in global warming. It is affecting us and I can see everywhere the effect of this change.* IND45, Graduate Student, Biology, Male
There’s a Christian society on campus and they … invited a creationist speaker and so they… invited me to kind of have a discussion with them afterwards, a …public discussion where students would ask questions and you know he would give his view, I would give my view, UK53, Reader, Biology, Male

Spirituality makes a man soft and kind towards humanity…Spirituality helps me to understand the problem of the poor people. IND28, Associate Professor, Biology, Male