



Bridging Voices
2013-2016
Projects and Partners

ABOUT THE BRITISH COUNCIL

The British Council is the UK's international organization for cultural relations and educational opportunities. We create friendly knowledge and understanding between the people of the UK and other countries. Using the UK's cultural resources we make a positive contribution to the countries we work with – changing lives by creating opportunities, building connections and engendering trust.

Images ©Mat Wright

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abbreviations and Acronyms	4
Introduction to Bridging Voices	5
Year 1 Partners and Projects	6
Partners: City University, London and George Mason University	7
Partners: University of Kent – Tufts University – University of Gröningen	10
Partners: School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) and Brandeis University	13
Partners: British Muslims for Secular Democracy (BMSD) – Muslims for Progressive Values USA (MPV) – Danish Institute for Study Abroad	15
Partners: Georgia State University – Royal Holloway – Carter Center	17
Year 2 Partners and Projects	20
Partners: World Faith – Three Faiths Forum (3FF) – Josh Cass	21
Partners: University of Exeter – Communities Engaging with Difference and Religion (CEDAR) – George Washington University – Chatham House	24
Partners: University of Leeds – Institute for Global Engagement – Georgetown University	26
Partners: Lancaster University – Religion News Service – University of Missouri – Newseum	28
Partners: University of Sussex – Notre Dame University – European University Institute – International Consortium for Law and Religion Studies (ICLARS)	31
Year 3 Partners and Projects	34
Partners: Georgia State University – Kadir Has University	35
Partners: University of Birmingham – International Religious Liberty Association – Stefanus Alliance International	37
Partners: YES Akademia – Woolf Institute – Northeastern University - L’Institut Universitaire de Technologie de Montreuil	40
Partners: New Horizons in British Islam – Hussein Rashid – British Council	42
Partners: Institute for Strategic Dialogue – University of Cambridge – Georgetown University	44
Endnotes	46

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AHRC	Arts and Humanities Research Council
BMSD	British Muslims for Secular Democracy
CEDAR	Communities Engaging with Difference and Religion
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism
DFID	Department for International Development
FBO	Faith-Based Organizations
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FoRB	Freedom of religion or belief
FRIA	Forum on Religion and International Affairs
GSU	Georgia State University
HRDP	Human Rights and Democracy Programme (FCO)
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MPV	Muslims for Progressive Values
PSA	Public Service Announcement
RNS	Religion News Service
SOAS	School of Oriental and African Studies
TPNRD	Transatlantic Policy Network on Religion and Diplomacy
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund

INTRODUCTION TO BRIDGING VOICES

In 2013, the Henry R. Luce Foundation generously awarded a grant of \$450,000 to the Friends of the British Council to support a 3-year program known as *Bridging Voices*, a series of policy and academic dialogues on religion and international affairs. Five grants were awarded per year to partnerships of universities and think-tanks in the US, the UK and Europe, to organize two dialogues – one in the US and one in the UK or Europe – on a variety of issues relating to religion and international affairs. Each grant was worth up to \$24,000 and many grant partners leveraged the grant to secure additional funding from their institution or from other partners to run their dialogues.

The objective of the *Bridging Voices* program was to provide a transatlantic space for policymakers and academics in the field of religion and international affairs to discuss best practice, research needs, policy solutions, and areas for collaboration. Since the project was launched, we supported **43 universities, think tanks and NGOs** to run **50 dialogues and public events** across the US, the UK and Europe. As part of the evaluation of the program, *Bridging Voices* grant partners produced reports at the 6-month and 12-month stages of their grants, and contributed to a final survey at the end of the third year of the project.

This e-book presents a detailed description of each individual grant: their dialogues, contributions, findings, latest developments, and the diverse range of topics examined. Outputs such as policy reports, videos, op-eds, news articles, and academic articles are also listed. All views and results depicted in this e-book belong to the various partners of each *Bridging Voices* grant. We would like to thank each partner for contributing.

This e-book highlights the British Council's role in bringing together new transatlantic partnerships to generate innovative or renewed discussions on various topics concerning religion and international affairs. The program supported transatlantic partners to produce new knowledge, build understanding between policy and academic spheres and encouraged future collaboration amongst experts in the field.

We would like to thank the Henry R. Luce Foundation, and especially Dr. Toby Volkman, Director of Policy Initiatives, for supporting the *Bridging Voices* project.

Emmanuel Kattan
Project Lead, *Bridging Voices*

Melissa Wear
Project Manager, *Bridging Voices*



Year 1

Projects and Partners

PARTNERS: CITY UNIVERSITY, LONDON AND GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

Project title: *The Role of Religion in Foreign Policy and Societal Transformation: Bridging Scholarship and Policymaking*

Principle Investigator(s): Dr. Peter Mandaville (US), Dr. Sara Silvestri (UK)

Associate Co-investigator(s): N/A

This project brought together academics and policymakers at the Brookings Institution in Washington, DC and at Wilton Park in the UK. The partners sought to capitalize on increasing interest from US and UK governments in engaging on issues of religion and religious actors in foreign policy.

The first dialogue at Wilton Park addressed specific challenges of societal transformation and democratization in diplomacy and development. The second dialogue followed on to the first dialogue at Wilton Park to bridge the knowledge gap between academics and policymakers, and tackle some of the practical challenges of integrating awareness of religious issues and religious actors into the foreign policymaking process. A public panel featuring US, UK and EU experts followed at the Brookings Institution on transatlantic religious engagement.

Workshops and Public-Facing Events

1. Closed-door conference, Wilton Park: 'Religion, foreign policy and development: making better policy to make a bigger difference', London, UK, February 2014
2. Public talk, Chatham House: 'European and US Approaches to Religion in Foreign Policy: Responses to the Arab Uprisings', London, UK, February 2014
3. Closed-door workshop, Brookings Institution with academics and policymakers, Washington, DC, May 2014
4. Public talk, Brookings Institution, Washington, DC, May 2014
5. Closed door informal networking lunch for policymakers the day after the Washington, DC dialogue, May 2014

There were 59 participants at the conference at Wilton Park and around 120 people who registered for the public events at Chatham House and Brookings Institution. 37 participants attended the closed-door workshop at Brookings Institution and 24 people attended the informal networking lunch.

Additional events as a result of *Bridging Voices*:

6. City University London public lecture on Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood by Professor Peter Mandaville, February 2014
7. Briefings at the Foreign Office - meeting on the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and prospects for democracy in the country, February 2014
8. Closed door workshop 'Religion and Development post 2015' jointly convened with UNFPA, New York City, May 2014

Findings

The following is a compilation of cross-sector findings from both of the project's closed-door workshops and public events:

- The idea for this policy dialogue grew out of increasing interest in studying the relationship between religion and foreign policy in Europe. This gave the project partners an opportunity to

bring together a new set of players to discuss questions around the role of government in defining the field and better understanding the interface of transatlantic comparative perspectives.

- The grant activities uncovered the different circumstances faced by actors working within this space in Europe; some participants were confident to discuss religion and foreign policy, while others were still exploring this field. This raised the issue of how different governments engage with religion and foreign policy and how religious literacy training could be provided to diplomats.
- When discussing the potential expansion of the network to other regions, there was a shared consensus to preserve the transatlantic nature of the network, which had achieved a well-developed cooperation mechanism and comfortable working relationships through the grant's activities.
- Two main deliverables were accomplished through *Bridging Voices*:
 - (1) A comprehensive report, which recorded the entirety of the conversation (co-authored by Peter Mandaville and Sara Silvestri)
 - (2) A launch effort to establish an institutionalized transatlantic network on religion and diplomacy.
- This *Bridging Voices* grant achieved outcomes beyond what was planned; its success was linked to the ability to work with Wilton Park in the UK, which gave the project partners a much larger platform.

Initiatives and Partnerships

- As mentioned above, these activities produced fruitful interactions and led to the Transatlantic Policy Network on Religion and Diplomacy (TPNRD). TPNRD is a policy network for foreign policy professionals working in various US and European governments. TPNRD has become a unique and valuable space for fostering transatlantic communication, coordination, and collaboration between diplomats whose portfolios focus on the role of religion and religious engagement in foreign policy. Its participants, many of whom are of ambassadorial rank, have been effusive in their expressions of appreciation for the candor and collegiality of the network and the new ideas and initiatives it generates.
- TPNRD meets regularly on current pressing issues and in 2014 they received funding from the Henry R. Luce Foundation to run network initiatives.

Articles/Videos

- ['Integrating Religious Engagement into Diplomacy: Challenges & Opportunities, Issues in Governance Studies: no.67'](#), Peter Mandaville and Sara Silvestri, *Brookings* (2015).
- ['Diplomacy and Religious Engagement: Promise and Pitfalls'](#), Peter Mandaville and Sara Silvestri, *Council on Foreign Relations* (2014).
- ['Religion, foreign policy and development conference report'](#), Pat Finlow and Gerald Fitzgerald, *Wilton Park* (2013).

Latest Developments

- Dr. Mandaville became Senior Advisor to the Special Representative for Religion and Global Affairs at the US Department of State until late 2016.
- The TPNRD now includes participants from the US, Canada, EU, and over a dozen European countries. The current participants are keen to ensure their successors join the network and are also eager to expand the network to include more European countries. Recently the network welcomed Belgian and Greek diplomats.

- As a result of the TPNRD secretariat's base being at Cambridge University and the active participation from the Foreign Office, the UK is positioned at the very center of this cutting-edge transatlantic partnership.
- The grant was key in formulating the UNFPA New York conference on Religion and Development (May 2014), and subsequent [publication](#).
- This grant also gave stimulus for the UNFPA New York conference on Religion and Development (July 2015) and the World Bank religious engagement [conference](#) (July 2015). Dr. Silvestri has since been invited to join the UK Joint Learning Initiative main conference organizers.
- Dr. Silvestri has been invited to co-author DFID/British Academy [report](#) Religion in Conflict and Peacebuilding, British Academy, September 2015.
- Dr. Silvestri has been invited to author a [reading pack](#) for Religion and Conflict.
- Dr. Mandaville participated in conferences conducted by other British Council/Henry R. Luce Foundation grants.
- Media [interviews](#) have taken place, e.g. 'Diplomacy and Religious Engagement: Promise and Pitfalls', Council on Foreign Relations.

PARTNERS: UNIVERSITY OF KENT – TUFTS UNIVERSITY – UNIVERSITY OF GRÖNINGEN

Project title: *Addressing the Asylum Crisis: Post-secular Contributions to Rethinking Protection in Global Politics*

Principle Investigator(s): Dr. Elzbieta Gozdzia (US), Dr. Luca Mavelli (UK)

Associate Co-investigator(s): Dr. Erin Wilson (Netherlands)

In response to the overwhelming pressure placed on established procedures and mechanisms for asylum seekers, refugees and people in need of protection, this project aimed to explore the role of religious actors in providing services to those vulnerable groups. The dialogues organized as part of this project brought together an interdisciplinary group of policymakers, scholars, and practitioners to explore potential opportunities for partnerships between governments, NGOs, international organizations, and religious organizations. These conversations sought to create new frameworks for working on behalf of asylum seekers and refugees. As part of the dialogues, public workshops were held on these issues and included a policy paper launch for the European Parliament.

Workshops and Public-Facing Events

1. Closed-door workshop, meetings and public paper presentations and discussions, Washington, DC, May 2014
2. Closed-door workshop, meetings and public paper presentations and discussions, Brussels, Belgium, June 2014
3. Policy paper launch, European Parliament, Brussels, Belgium, November 2014

Across the two closed-door dialogues, there were approximately 60 scholars, policymakers and practitioners from both the US and Europe engaged in the project. An additional 60 members of the general public, and from the policy and NGO communities, were engaged through open events attached to the workshops, and the launch of the policy paper at the European Parliament in November 2014.

Findings

The following is a compilation of cross-sector findings from both of the project's closed-door workshops:

- The academics and policymakers who attended the dialogues converged on the idea that greater awareness of religious and spiritual matters is needed in the study and practical responses to displacement, forced migration, and asylum.
- US-based practitioners, policymakers and representatives from the European Commission's European Political Strategy Centre (formerly the Bureau of European Policy Advisers) attended the workshops and provided feedback on the recognition for a greater need of religious literacy amongst policymakers.
- EU policy advisers also positively responded and confirmed the project partners' recommendation to establish a semi-permanent network on religion and asylum.
- The workshops have provided an opportunity for new collaboration between UK, European and US institutions working on issues of asylum and displacement, as well as stronger connections with the policy world. It has also helped to raise awareness of organizations such as Islamic Relief Worldwide and the University of Kent who conduct research and work in practice on issues of religion and asylum.

Initiatives and Partnerships

Three projects are in development or are complete due to the project:

- The establishment of a European network on religion and asylum.
- A policy paper for EASO (European Asylum Support Office), which will further strengthen the policy impact of the project's research results. The paper's launch was held at the European Parliament, November 2014 with a panel discussion and audience response.
- An innovative edited volume containing contributions from practitioners and scholars, in dialogue. ['The Refugee Crisis and Religion: Secularism, Security and Hospitality in Question \(Critical Perspectives on Religion in International Politics\)](#) was published by Rowman & Littlefield (2016). Themes include: questioning the secular/religious divide, constructing and deconstructing the Muslim refugee, religious traditions of hospitality in theory and practice and the intersection of faith, gender, sexuality and asylum.

Articles/Videos

- ['Faith and the Asylum Crisis: The role of religion in responding to displacement'](#) policy paper developed as part of this project, which contains recommendations that arose as a result of the discussions at both workshops.
- Four blogs were published on *The Religion Factor* directly related to the workshops and these have attracted almost 1000 views, according to the blog's statistics. The blog posts can be viewed here:
 - ['The UN Refugee Convention 60 Years On – Time to Rethink Approaches to Protection?'](#)
 - ['The Religious/Secular Divide and the Global Displacement Crisis'](#)
 - ['Secularism, Security and the Limits of the State: The Displacement Crisis and the Role of Religion Part One'](#)
 - ['Secularism, Security and the Limits of the State: The Displacement Crisis and the Role of Religion Part Two'](#)
 - ['Faith and the Asylum Crisis: The role of religion in responding to displacement'](#)
- ['Meeting on Addressing the Asylum Crisis: Religious Contributions to Rethinking Global Protection'](#), European Parliament audiovisual (2014)

Latest Developments

- The edited volume provides an opportunity for scholars, policymakers and practitioners to continue to develop their thoughts in conversation with one another.
- There are plans to establish a European network of scholars, policymakers and practitioners on religion, asylum and displacement. This network would share ideas as well as influence policies and explore future research projects.
- The UNHCR also contacted the project partners to request a copy of the policy paper in order to circulate it internally to their networks. Hard copies of the paper have been sent to 18 MEPs and will also be sent to Members of Parliament in the UK and Australia. A number of NGOs have downloaded copies of the paper to be circulated in their networks, including the Danish Human Rights Institute and the Knowledge Center Religion and Development.
- Project partners submitted an application, which was successful, to hold a panel and roundtable at the British International Studies Association's 40th anniversary conference in London, June 2015. Participants from Islamic Relief, Church of England, Praxis, as well as scholars were present.
- The project's principal investigators, Dr. Wilson and Dr. Mavelli, are contributing a chapter on

religion and asylum in a forthcoming policy volume entitled *Shifts in the Sacred: Crossing Borders in Religion and Global Migrations*.

- The project partners have been invited to provide suggestions for training by Dr. Dennis de Jong, MEP bringing together policymakers on asylum and refugees in the EU, which will have long-term impact.
- Project partners have also been invited by Dr. Dennis de Jong to draft a second policy paper specifically designed for EASO (European Asylum Support Office) in order to advance the implementation of a set of good practices concerning religion and asylum.

PARTNERS: SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES (SOAS) AND BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY

Project title: *Gender, Religion, and Equality in Public Life: Perspectives from the United States and United Kingdom*

Principle Investigator(s): Dr. Lisa Fishbayn Joffe (US), Dr. Fareda Banda/Dr. Lynn Welchman (UK)
Associate Co-investigator(s): N/A

This project explored the role of religion in the struggle for women's equality around the world, particularly within the contexts of domestic and foreign law and international human rights policy. Through dialogues in Boston and London, participants from the academic and policy spheres discussed how the latest scholarship on the complex interplay between religious norms and legal frameworks may frustrate efforts to achieve gender equity in a number of societies around the world.

Workshops and Public-Facing Events

1. Closed-door workshop, 'Gender, Religion and Equality in Public Life: Perspectives from the United States and United Kingdom', School of Oriental and African Studies, London, May 2014
2. Closed-door workshop, 'Religious Law in Civil Courts', Brandeis University, Massachusetts, May 2014
3. School workshops on gender, led by Dr. Fareda Banda, February 2014

Findings

The following is a compilation of cross-sector findings from the first closed-door workshop at SOAS:

- Professor Frances Raday focused on how pitting gender equality against 'religion' was a false dichotomy. She spoke about the contested nature of religion and the exclusion of women from participating in the interpretation and construction of religious norms. She reiterated the universality of human rights and the primacy of the principles of non-discrimination and equality in all spheres.
- Professor Ziba Mir-Hosseini challenged dialogue participants by noting how aggressive secularism alienated women of faith who felt forced to choose between being feminists and religious adherents.
- John Eekelaar sought to look away from the Abrahamic faiths by focusing on a recent English Supreme Court decision which recognized Scientology as a religion, entitling adherents to be married by their religious leaders within their places of worship, provided they followed the legally enshrined formalities.
- Dr. Fishbayn Joffe examined the concept of 'get' in Jewish Law.
- Sara Hossain, a practitioner from Bangladesh, and Viviana Waisman gave practical examples of litigating for gender equality while navigating carefully so as not to trigger or exacerbate any religious tensions.

School workshops:

- Dr. Banda reached out to three local high schools (one of each sex and one mixed). The religious education director of a leading boys grammar school (selective state school) agreed to let Dr. Banda lead a session with male students in year 10 (aged 14) about gender. These students were keen to move beyond adult talk of gender and religion. Dr. Banda had the students write essays on their perspectives of gender and religion.

Initiatives and Partnerships

- This project developed into an exciting book with Routledge. The 15-chapter book is authored by the project's investigators and explores many of the themes and findings explored during the project's dialogues. A link to the book can be found in 'Articles/Videos' below.
- Hauwa Ibrahim inquired about becoming a research associate in residence at Brandeis University to explore the overlap between litigating in sharia and rabbinical courts. She was invited to participate in Brandeis' spring 2015 seminar on new approaches to Jewish divorce.
- The project themes have also been incorporated into teaching at the Master's level. Students in two SOAS courses, *Law and Society in the Middle East and North Africa* as well as the *Human Rights of Women*, have debated and discussed gender, religion and inequality throughout 2014. Students from these courses are doing dissertations and course assignments touching on at least two of the themes.

Articles/Videos

- [‘The State should not interfere in the practices of religious communities even if they discriminate’](#) Student papers produced at the school workshops.ⁱ
- [‘SOAS – Brandeis Workshop on Gender, Religion and Equality in Public Life: Perspectives from the United States and United Kingdom’](#) agenda (2014).
- [‘Women's Rights and Religious Law: Domestic and International Perspectives \(Law and Religion\)’](#), by Fareda Banda and Lisa Fishbayn Joffe, *Routledge* (2015).
- Some of the HBI blog posts were reposted in [My Jewish Learning](#) and [The Times of Israel](#). Their work was also covered in the [DailyBeast](#), which estimates a circulation of 1.5 million.
- [‘Getting the Get’](#) by Lisa Fishbayn Joffe, *Brandeis Alumni Magazine*; which has a hard copy circulation of 60,000.

Latest Developments

- Dr. Banda and Dr. Fishbayn Joffe edited and published a book in 2015 with Routledge Press (see link above) based on papers first presented at the workshops.
- Professor Samia Bano's book, 'Women, Mediation and Religious Arbitration' will be published in the Brandeis Series on Gender, Culture, Religion and Law by Brandeis University Press in spring 2017.
- The Boston Agunah Task Force, a collaboration based at the Gender, Culture, Religion and Law Project now provides advice and accompaniment to all women who appear before the Beit Din of Boston (rabbinical court) in divorce proceedings. The Task Force receives referrals from domestic violence advocates, therapists, lawyers and through the website, [Getyourget.com](#). The website also allows people to ask questions about the Jewish divorce process and receive personal assistance and advice from an expert in Jewish law. Contacts have come from across the US and Canada.
- As an indirect result of the grant, Hauwa Ibrahim has attended events at Brandeis University but did not complete the research associate application process. She organized an exploratory meeting at Harvard Divinity School on July 10-12, 2016 on women's role in steering youth away from violent extremism to prevent terrorism. Dr. Fishbayn Joffe was a respondent to a paper and organized for a graduate student in Jytte Klausen's *Western Jihadism Project* to present their work analyzing how people become radicalized online.

PARTNERS: BRITISH MUSLIMS FOR SECULAR DEMOCRACY (BMSD) – MUSLIMS FOR PROGRESSIVE VALUES USA (MPV) – DANISH INSTITUTE FOR STUDY ABROAD

Project title: *Let's Talk (and Walking the Walk)*

Principle Investigator(s): President Ani Zonneveld (US), Director Tehmina Kazi (UK)

Associate Co-investigator(s): Director Nancy Graham Holm (Denmark), Mr. Jakob Lindgaard (Denmark)

This project featured 'trialogues' in Washington, DC and London between policymakers, academics, and activists taking on topics such as Islamic perspectives of secular democracy, and navigating between the rights of religious and non-religious groups in secular democracy. The project's public component included open screenings of the documentary 'Ijtihad: Nine Muslims with Progressive Values', directed by Nancy Graham Holm of the Danish School of Media, followed by a moderated discussion. The project also produced three short PSA-style humorous videos on civic engagement. On the second day, in each city, there were closed meetings with a discussion between representative academics, activists, and policymakers.

Workshops and Public-Facing Events

1. Closed-door workshop, Capitol Hill, Washington, DC, April 2014
2. *Ijtihad* screening and public panel, Capitol Hill, Washington, DC, April 2014
3. Closed-door workshop, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, May 2014
4. *Ijtihad* screening, London, May 2014

There were 12 participants in the DC closed-door workshop, about 100 attendees at the short film screenings, and 13 participants at the closed-door SOAS workshop.

Findings

The following is a compilation of cross-sector findings from both of the project's closed-door workshops:

- Progressive Muslims are not well established or well known among the general public. Some in the media question whether one can even be a 'real Muslim' and have progressive politics, an attitude that makes it difficult to get media attention.
- Policymakers at the London meeting were from NGOs, some with major influence and some with marginal influence.
- The workshops found that most British Muslims are more alert, politicized and organized than American Muslims. Geography and demographics explain this difference.
- American progressive Muslims are concerned about different issues than are British Muslims, which is evident from following the British press and Muslim bloggers.

Initiatives and Partnerships

- As a result of the working relationship between MPV and BMSD, Ani Zonneveld invited Tehmina Kazi and UK triologue participant Ghaffar Hussain from Quilliam Foundation to speak about progressive Islam, blasphemy laws and secular democracy at a side panel at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva organized by MPV (June 2014).ⁱⁱ
- Parallel to this initiative, Ani Zonneveld encouraged others who attended the UK Triologue to form a new alliance of progressive Muslims, *Alliance of Inclusive Muslims* (AIM). AIM was

organized with signatures and remains in development.

- Other initiatives as a result of the UK Trialogue include:
 - UK trialogue participant Farouk A. Peru wrote a detailed [account](#) of the London 'Ijtihad' film screening on his blog.
 - UK trialogue participant Sara Khan collaborated with Tehmina Kazi on procuring civil society support for a document that 'mirrors' discriminatory statements made by obscurantist preachers.
- An [article](#) which was written in *New Humanist* by Terri Murray on progressive Muslim movements was partially in response to a critical Facebook status on the London 'Ijtihad' film screening, made by a British imam.
- Two informational [videos](#) can be found on the BMSD website. These were used for informational campaigns.
- A BBC producer attended the London meeting and devoted his radio program the next day to the subject.

Articles/Videos

- ['Human Rights and Progressive Islam'](#), *Human Rights Council – Geneva*, presentations on YouTube (2016).
- British Muslims for Secular Democracy [information campaign videos](#).
- ['Can Islam be reformed? A reply to Aimal Masroor'](#) article by Terri Murray, *New Humanist* (2014) on progressive Muslim movements. This was partially in response to a critical Facebook status on the London 'Ijtihad' film screening made by a British Imam.
- ['Screening of the Documentary Ijtihad in SOAS'](#) by UK trialogue participant Farouk A. Peru, *Person Al Islaam* (2014).
- ['Debate: Moderate vs. Progressive Islam'](#), Nancy Graham Holm, *Huffington Post* (2014).

Latest Developments

- Ani Zonneveld, President of MPV in Los Angeles now runs her organization through the UN. Because of this, she's established chapters in Holland and Tunisia, and participated in many international conferences about tolerance and LGBT human rights.
- Tehmina Kazi, Director of BMSD has participated in countless conferences and forums about tolerance, secular democracy, human rights and religious freedom after the *Bridging Voices* workshops. What is missing is an ongoing link between the two organizations.
- The video spot, 'Feminism' was featured at a symposium at UC, Berkeley, sponsored by the Graduate School of Journalism on April 21, 2016.

PARTNERS: GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY – ROYAL HOLLOWAY – CARTER CENTER

Project title: *Religion, Conflict Resolution, and Digital Media in the Greater Muslim World: Dialogue Among Policymakers and Researchers*

Principle Investigator(s): Professor Abbas Barzegar (US), Professor Shawn Powers (US), Dr. Akil Awan (UK), Ben O'Loughlin (UK)

Associate Co-investigator(s): N/A

This project responded to the increasing role of religious institutions and networks in addressing social unrest, conflict, extremism and discord through arbitration and/or humanitarian assistance. The project sought to unravel the interplay between the governance and conflict resolution work of these organizations and the growing use of digital technologies.

The dialogues organized as part of this project brought together policymakers, scholars, and the media to specifically examine the role of Muslim institutions in the aforementioned aspects of international affairs. Project partners, including the British Council, were also involved in the organization of a Council on Foreign Relations dinner roundtable looking at the Syrian civil war, the rise of ISIL and ISIL's use of digital technologies. Through two dialogue workshops, there was a movement from general questions of religion, media, and conflict to the specific case of Syria. According to the project partners, this path is typical of high-quality social-scientific research which aims to address both broader, macro-level questions through analysis of micro-level trends and observations.

Workshops and Public-Facing Events

1. Closed-door workshop focused on countering radicalization, Senate House London, December 2013.
2. Debate at the British House of Parliament entitled 'Can religious media bring peace?' London, December 2014ⁱⁱⁱ
3. Closed-door workshop on religion, new media and violence (focusing on Syria), The Carter Center, Atlanta, May 2014^{iv}
4. Public panel on countering the roles of religion and media in the Syrian conflict, The Carter Center, Atlanta, May 2014^v
5. Closed-door Council on Foreign relations dinner roundtable on Syria, ISIL and digital technologies, Atlanta, October 2014.

There were 24 participants at the Senate House workshop in London, and 66 at the Parliament debate. Audio recording of the London workshop by Backdoor Broadcasting Inc. generated a lot of important interest, including the British Ambassador to Lebanon. There were around 25 participants at the Carter Center dialogue and 70 attendees at the Carter Center public panel. Around 20 Council on Foreign Relations members attended the CFR dinner roundtable.

Findings

The following points are findings from the London-based activities:

- Workshop participants arrived at a number of potential roles and techniques religious organizations could play in tackling conflict before, during and after violence. By drawing on experiences from a range of conflicts, regions and historical periods, these points were necessary at a general level. This also enabled the project team to develop more focused

questions for the specific case of Syria in the second dialogue.

The following points are findings from the Atlanta-based dialogues:

- Workshop participants were eager to build upon some of the conclusions expressed during the two-day session through the implementation of specific programs and activities. Among the most immediate and achievable projects included:
 - The creation of a consultative working group tasked with advising the Carter Center's Conflict Resolution Program on matters related to religion and conflict/resolution in the Muslim world, with a specific focus on the Syrian crisis.
 - The creation of a peace-asset mapping project that can help identify local-level actors and civil society leaders who have facilitated cease-fires, humanitarian assistance, and those involved in conflict mitigation.
 - A focused consultative workshop on Islamic law, constitutionalism, and religious pluralism aimed at strengthening the Carter Center's capacity in assisting political transition in Syria.
 - A collaborative research project which analyzes the religious narratives of various actors involved in the conflict. The aim of this endeavor is to gain a higher level understanding of the nuances of sectarian division and extremism in order to then strengthen reconciliation and peace building efforts in the future.
 - Research is needed to identify possible paths to constraining how geo-strategic interests shape regional affairs, including the identification of case studies whereby countries implemented step-by-step measures to create collective security agreements, increasing mutual interdependence and reducing regional tensions.

The general points that came out of these discussions concerned specific types of organizations:

- Religious organizations need to:
 - Create spaces for tackling social and political questions as well as religious ones, and to work with non-religious organizations when doing so.
 - Act as problem-solving mediators and assemble appropriate actors, religious or otherwise, that are needed to address social problems.
 - Move beyond supporting or mobilizing protest to participating in actual institution-building and longer-term policy formation and implementation.
 - Be sensitive to, and literate in, 'a diversity of diversities'. Meaning, religious leaders must be able to deal with nuance in inter-cultural relations as societies grow more diverse and complex.
- Media organizations need to:
 - Contribute to spaces of dialogue and allow social, political and religious questions to be asked.
 - Help publics understand other religions and cultures.
 - Appreciate the need for quiet, behind-the-scenes diplomacy and avoid reporting diplomatic dialogues in a sensationalist, over-dramatic and hostile manner.
- Academics need to:
 - Use big data to highlight peaceful, cooperative relations as well as hostile ones, and then explain the causes and conditions for such cooperation.
 - Support cultural spaces through which difficult political situations can be addressed by

artists and audiences with patience and nuance.

- All of these unique recommendations are supported by academic research, but require those with policy and practitioner experience to translate into action. The Atlanta-based dialogues were used to develop action points for the specific case of Syria.

Initiatives and Partnerships

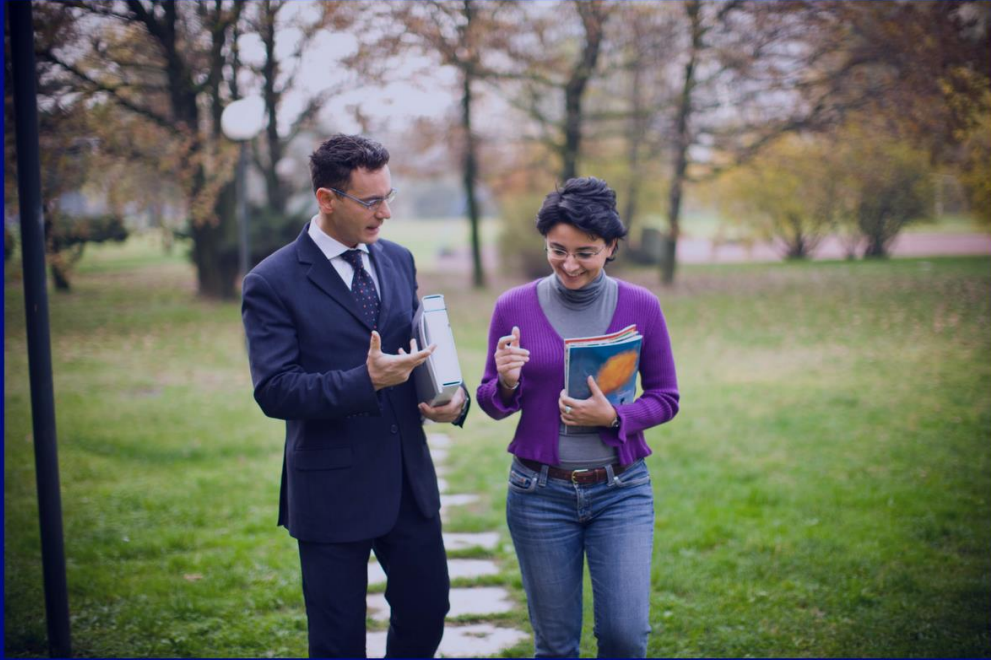
- New partnership with the Institute of Strategic Dialogue and the British Council for acquisition of an EU Commission grant, 'Bridging Transatlantic Voices' which is currently being delivered (2015-2018).
- Invitation to Council on Foreign Relations members in Atlanta for a sponsored dinner program in coordination with the British Council and The Carter Center (October 2, 2014).

Articles/Videos

- '[Muslim NGOs could help counter violent extremism](#)', Abbas Barzegar and Shawn Powers, *Washington Post* Op-Ed (2015).
- '[Sectarianism, New Media and Conflict in Syria: A dialogue among policymakers, experts and religious actors](#)': Carter Center dialogue report, Abbas Barzegar and Shawn Powers, *academia.edu* (2014).

Latest Developments

- The project's work continues through the Bridging Transatlantic Voices program, funded by the EU Commission. The project is in its second year, looking at transatlantic Muslim NGO engagement in conflict zones. A [report](#) from the first year of this project *Civic Approaches to Confronting Violent Extremism* was produced.
- Professor Abbas Barzegar continues work under the Civic Approaches to Conflict Resolution in the Muslim World project at Georgia State.
- A second *Bridging Voices* grant was awarded for the third year of the project in partnership with Kadir Has University.



Year 2

Projects and Partners

PARTNERS: WORLD FAITH – 3FF – JOSH CASS

Project title: *Religious Literacy for Foreign Policy Professionals*

Principle Investigator(s): Director Frank Fredericks (US), Former Director Stephen Shashoua (UK)

Associate Co-investigator(s): Josh Cass (UK)

This project designed a new training program for professionals working at the intersection between religion and international affairs. The training was a workshop that draws on participants' personal experiences of the challenges in delivering work in the religion and international affairs space. The workshops also enabled participants to reflect on the complexities of the gaps, tensions, and synergies in policy, academic and practitioner narratives in the religion and international affairs space. By using real life, participant-led scenarios, the project team actively encouraged collaborative approaches to future problem solving and network development. The workshop was delivered twice with a broad range of participants including senior civil servants from a range of Ministries of Foreign Affairs and International Development Ministries, academics, and practitioners from NGOs.

By working together collaboratively, the funding also enabled the project partners – 3FF, World Faith, and Josh Cass – to deepen their strategic relationships.

Workshops and Public-Facing Events

1. Closed-door workshop, St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace, London, UK, February 2015
2. Closed-door workshop, El Hibri Foundation, Washington, DC, May 2015

In total 36 participants attended the two roundtable events, 17 at the London workshop and 19 at the Washington, DC workshop.

Findings

The following is a compilation of cross-sector findings from both of the project's closed-door workshops:

- The training designed by the project partners intentionally brought together participants from the spheres of policy, academia, and practitioners engaged with questions of religion in international contexts.
- At each stage of the design process, thought was given to the structure of the day. For instance, the project partners wanted the physical space to reflect the ethos of the project, so venues for the roundtables were sought with the intention to avoid the privileging of particular voices and to encourage conversation that could be transformative and paradigm shifting. For this reason, academic institutions and think tanks were avoided in favor of less traditional venues.
- Participants in both workshops highly valued being able to network with professionals from different sectors, in particular the NGO sector. Furthermore, they also recognized the intentional design of the workshops. This is something that the project partners would recommend to others considering similar work in the future.
- The project team gathered the following participant reflections:
 - There was value in hearing from individuals and organizations working on questions of religious engagement in a domestic as well as an international context.
 - Participants recognized that the learning and experience of those working in a domestic context could be of value to those working in an international context.
 - Participants welcomed the opportunity to reflect in a safe space on possible strategies for

engaging with stakeholders when questions of religion or belief were in play, especially in relation to situations where the stakes were raised.

- Participants welcomed the opportunity to network beyond their usual circle of partners.
 - Participants welcomed the alternative approaches to convening, as delivered by the project partners; they welcomed holding the meetings away from traditional think-tank spaces.
 - Participants valued the opportunity to work together with participants at different stages of their professional careers.
- Through these findings, the project team designed the following recommendations:
 - In many ways, the recommendations from this project reflect the findings of other *Bridging Voices* funded projects, most notably ‘Toward Religion-Attentive Foreign Policy’, which contains several highly relevant policy messages. For instance, recommendations such as emulating best practice regardless of where it originates, leveraging expertise and networks that already exist, and seeking areas of mutual interest and working in a spirit of mutual respect. These policy messages resonate with the findings of this project and indicate potential ways forward for the future development of the field.
 - Specifically, the following points are for individuals and organizations working to convene conversations around religion and international affairs. They should:
 - Think more broadly about those whom they invite to participate. The project partners spent time reflecting on whether religious leaders and theologians should be included and what the implication of inclusion might be. It is recommended that other individuals and organizations working in the field consider engaging with those working at a domestic level on similar areas. Furthermore, it is worth considering professionals working at different stages of their careers to take part in conversations.
 - Consider all aspects of the spaces that they create so as to ensure that all participants feel able to engage fully and effectively. Barriers to participation should be considered, and removed if possible. For instance, the project partners intentionally catered the roundtables vegetarian so as to remove any concerns about dietary requirements. In London, they went further and intentionally worked with a caterer (Spice Caravan) that was run by a migrant women’s collective. In this way, the choice of caterer also enabled conversation and dialogue to take place amongst participants and on themes relevant and connected to the broader themes of the roundtable.
 - Embed activities and spaces, which create opportunities for participants to collaborate and build relationships with people and organizations approaching this field from a different perspective. Where possible, activities planned by organizers should in themselves facilitate this process. However in addition, and where that is not possible, space should be made for relationship building. Participants in the roundtables valued this opportunity, especially with individuals and organizations new to them.

Initiatives and Partnerships

- With the support of the grant from *Bridging Voices*, the project partners have launched a new initiative, the Forum on Religion and International Affairs (FRIA). FRIA is a joint initiative of 3FF and World Faith and is the vehicle by which future iterations of the training developed during the

Bridging Voices grant will be delivered. Further details on this exciting new initiative can be [here](#).

Articles/Videos

- [‘Religious Engagement Training for Foreign Policy Professionals’](#) handout pack (2015).

Latest Developments

The project’s partners continue to work collaboratively. As mentioned above, the partners have now launched FRIA and are actively pursuing opportunities to deliver further iterations of the training which *Bridging Voices* supported. The following is a list other developments which were the result of the grant:

- A relationship between New Horizons (participant at London workshop) and Hofstra University (participant at Washington, DC workshop) has developed; they successfully submitted an application to the *Bridging Voices* program.
- Various participants have delivered material tested at the roundtable events within their own institutions (Yale, University of Virginia, and State Department).
- World Faith was invited to deliver elements of the training at the Foreign Services Institute in Washington, DC.
- 3FF was invited by a participant from the London roundtable to host a Foreign and Commonwealth Office-sponsored delegation from Sudan that will be visiting the UK as part of a Coexistence project.
- Project partners were invited to attend a *Bridging Voices* review meeting in Washington, DC in July 2016.
- Project partners have begun to explore the possibility of working with a fellow *Bridging Voices* partner based at Cambridge University.
- 3FF were invited to present at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Freedom of Religion and Belief conference on the role that interfaith initiatives can play in tackling xenophobia and violent extremism.

PARTNERS: UNIVERSITY OF EXETER – COMMUNITIES ENGAGING WITH DIFFERENCE AND RELIGION (CEDAR) – GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY – CHATHAM HOUSE

Project title: *Islam, Secularism, and Security in Central Asia and Beyond*

Principle Investigator(s): Dr. David Montgomery (US), Dr. John Heathershaw (UK)

Associate Co-investigator(s): Dr. Marlene Laruelle (US), Mr. James Nixey (UK)

This project considered the place of political Islam in Muslim-majority countries which also have strong experiences of secularism, chiefly in post-Soviet Central Asia. Academics and policy participants explored how radicalism can emerge from confrontation between political Islamic groups and the state's assertive Islamic secularism and how the state's associated security discourse has shaped Muslim groups' faith and behavior. The dialogues produced short written pieces on related policy challenges for a general and policymaking audience. In each dialogue location, day one comprised all-day closed-door dialogues between academics, policy-makers and think tank/NGO representatives and day two comprised a roundtable event that was open to the public.

Workshops and Public-Facing Events

1. Closed-door workshop, Chatham House, London, UK, November 2014
2. Public talk, Chatham House, November 2014
3. Closed-door workshop, George Washington University, Washington, DC, April 2015
4. Public talk, George Washington University, April 2015

There were over 40 attendees at the public talk at Chatham House, and over 50 attendees at the public talk at George Washington University. Around 38-40 participants were at the closed-door dialogues.

Findings

The following is a compilation of cross-sector findings from both of the project's closed-door workshops:

Shortly before the first dialogue, principal investigators Dr. Heathershaw and Dr. Montgomery published a report with Chatham House that challenged the current mainstream thinking on Islamic radicalization in Central Asia. In the dialogues, day one compared and contrasted the relationships between Muslim populations and purportedly secular states around the world. In day two, a roundtable of experts discussed the implications of Heathershaw and Montgomery's report in front of a general audience comprising of academics, journalists and other interested parties. This report was translated into Russian in spring 2015 and distributed in Kyrgyzstan during a research trip.

The project received the following findings from its participants:

- From academics:
 - A comparative perspective on the ways in which states, generally considered to be secular, interact with their Muslim populations can highlight general trends.
 - Cross disciplinary dialogue in this subject is very rewarding.
 - One of the most pressing questions is how to make research more policy relevant.
- From policymakers:
 - Need to consider the resilience of secularized modes of Islam, both its official governance

and public expression.

- Pay more attention to processes of social exclusion.
- Be careful in the choice of research methods for the study of Islam and security.

Initiatives and Partnerships

- At Exeter, a research group on religion and secularism has emerged involving four of the participants and around 15 colleagues from across the social sciences and humanities. One of the dialogue participants (Dr. Fabio Petito) spoke on the group's away day.

Articles/Videos

- A survey was conducted among participants in July, 2015, 8 months after the London workshop and 3 months after the Washington, DC workshop. Please see the attached [feedback](#). Oral feedback was very positive, with participants particularly appreciating two levels of dialogue – between different academic disciplines and between the scholarly and policymaking communities.
- [‘The Myth of Post-Soviet Muslim Radicalization in the Central Asian Republics’](#), by John Heathershaw and David W Montgomery, *Chatham House* (2014). This report is available in English, Russian and Chinese has been frequently cited in the US and Russian-language media. According to the Chatham House download statistics, the paper has been downloaded 1,406 times. The summary page has had 3,356 unique page views and readers spent on average 3:33 minutes on the page. In the Chatham House administrator's own words, this is ‘really impressive’, as it means the entirety of the summary is being read.
- 19 articles (see [web links](#)) were written by dialogue participants or by journalists and commentators, making significant reference to the dialogues and their participants. Most of these are in foreign publications citing UK-based contributors and work.
- Media coverage:
 - The Chatham House paper, the two workshops and the principal investigators (Heathershaw and Montgomery) have received a high volume of media coverage. This [document](#) lists all 21 web links. Drs. Montgomery and Heathershaw believe the high level of interest in these events and themes is due to the contemporary nature of the topic addressed.

Latest Developments

- Drs. Heathershaw and Montgomery, three participants and a non-participant are writing an article about the challenges of research on Islam and the state for the *Review of Middle East Studies*, the journal of the Middle East Studies Association of the United States.
- Drs. Heathershaw and Montgomery have had more frequent formal and informal contacts with policy participants at the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office and US Department of State, particularly as the pressure on the Islamic party in Tajikistan has increased, as well as with the US Department of Defense, on research approaches to understanding the relationship between Islam and security.
- Edward Lemon, a PhD candidate in the department of politics at the University of Exeter and a participant of the London dialogue, has done an increased amount of work with the media as his profile has increased, appearing in media interviews, becoming the Tajikistan correspondent for *Eurasianet*, and being commissioned to write an article for the journal of the *Royal United Service Institute*.

PARTNERS: UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS – INSTITUTE FOR GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT – GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

Project title: *Toward better international policymaking: understanding the role of religion in priority regions*

Principle Investigator(s): Dr. Dennis Hoover (US), Dr. Emma Tomalin (UK)

Associate Co-investigator(s): Dr. Thomas Farr (US), Dr. Jane Lindsay (UK), Dr. Judd Birdsall (UK)

This project brought together regional specialists from the academic and foreign policymaking communities focused on two regions: the Horn of Africa and the Middle East/North Africa. In two workshops, these specialists focused on the role of religion and religious actors in regional foreign policy, development and conflict stabilization. Participants in these workshops worked towards the production of a set of working guidelines to help practitioners engage in ‘religion-related’ policymaking, to work with religious actors, understand religious dynamics and the influence of religion, and learn from previous cases.

Workshops and Public-Facing Events

1. Closed-door dialogue, ‘Understanding the role of religion in the Horn of Africa’, Washington, DC, January 2015
2. Closed-door dialogue, ‘A conversation focused on the Middle East and North Africa’, London, UK, March 2015

The Washington, DC workshop had 30 people attend and the London workshop 21 people. Podcasts of some of the main presentations were produced; presentations by Brian Grim and Katherine Marshall were made available on the Berkeley Center YouTube channel, which drew 565 views.

Findings

The following is a compilation of cross-sector findings from the London workshop:

- The main findings fell into three categories: capacity, conceptualization, and culture.
- Under capacity, it was recommended the UK’s Foreign and Commonwealth Office improve its ability to engage religious actors and dynamics by appointing a director of religion and global issues who would be responsible for developing a cross-government religious engagement strategy. In establishing this director, the FCO should emulate best practice from the international development community and leverage the considerable expertise which already exists within the diplomatic service.
- A number of conceptual issues were also highlighted which limit policymakers’ understanding of ‘religion’ as a foreign policy issue. The report from these dialogues therefore recommended diplomats and policymakers:
 - Avoid the charge of ‘instrumentalization’ by seeking areas of mutual interest and working in a spirit of mutual respect.
 - Understand the urgent need to move beyond the ‘world religions’ paradigm given the lived reality of religion is fluid and does not fit the neat descriptions provided by this model.
 - Look for ‘lived’ as well as ‘official’ religion and in particular, move beyond engagement with official religious clerics as they may not be truly representative of the populations they claim to represent.
 - Be aware of problematic labels and be attuned to the subjectivity of key terms used in

discourses about religion. In most cases, it is preferable to use a longer descriptive phrase than a one-word label.

- Develop the confidence to know when not to engage religious actors in the pursuit of foreign policy objectives.
- Recognize 'religion' means more than Islam and pay greater attention to both majority and minority religions in different contexts.
- Understand the importance of getting to grips with Christianity as it emerges as a non-Western phenomenon and understand the various international models of religion-state relationship and the way this influences public policy.
- Recognize religious freedom is a strategic mainstream foreign policy priority, not merely a human rights issue, as a growing body of research is finding strong positive correlations between religious freedom and social stability, political moderation, and economic development.
- Be aware of the ambivalence of religion in its relationship to public policy goals. Religion can be both a source of extremism, persecution, and conflict, as well as a positive force for health, education, development, humanitarian assistance, and other social goods.
- Focus on human security as well as international security, recognizing that religiously-inspired threats to security often emerge out of experiences of violence and disruption that generate new modes of collective action and ideological diffusion.

Initiatives and Partnerships

- Shortly after the January workshop in Washington, DC, the project partners were in communication with the State Department and learned that the report had been shared with the Religion and Global Affairs Office, particularly the conceptual recommendations. One of the research teams discussed the report at the State Department in October 2015.

Articles/Videos

- ['Toward Religion-Attentive Foreign Policy: A report on an Anglo-American dialogue'](#), Judd Birdsall Jane Lindsay and Emma Tomalin (2015). This report includes a series of 15 'policy messages'.
- ['Faith in the Special Relationship: A New Report Argues the US-UK Alliance is Strengthened by Diplomatic Cooperation on Religion'](#), by Judd Birdsall, Jane Lindsay, and Emma Tomalin, *Huffington Post* (2016).

Latest Developments

- An article for the *Journal of Religion and International Affairs*, based on the project report and its findings, is being prepared (to be finalized).
- Dr. Tomalin has been developing research with an AHRC grant on 'Religions and Sustainable Development Goals'.
- Dr. Tomalin and Dr. Lindsay are planning to submit a bid to the Global Challenges Fund based on the questions still arising after this project, specifically on the questions relating to religion in MENA and the Horn of Africa.
- Dr. Fabio Petito (Sussex) and Dr. Dan Philpott (Notre Dame), Year 2 *Bridging Voices* partners, liked the format and content of the report and commissioned Dr. Birdsall to author their *Bridging Voices* policy report on transatlantic approaches to promoting FoRB.
- Feedback was given from a senior UK civil servant that this work is 'already contributing' to the promotion of this agenda in the UK Government.
- The report has been shown to FCO ministers and was presented in July 2016 at an FCO meeting in London.

PARTNERS: LANCASTER UNIVERSITY – RELIGION NEWS SERVICE – UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI – NEWSEUM

Project title: *Shining Knight or Trojan Horse? Political, Academic, and Media Portrayals of Religious Freedom in US and UK Foreign Policy*

Principle Investigator(s): Professor Debra Mason (US), Dr. Linda Woodhead (UK)

Associate Co-investigator(s): Director Brian Pellot (US/South Africa), Director Charles C. Haynes (US)

This project addressed some critical questions about religious freedom policies in the US, UK, and Europe. Key challenges were identified including areas in which religious freedoms may conflict with other rights and freedoms. Much of the dialogues' focus was on religious freedom initiatives (US and UK) directed at the Middle East and Europe, and the impact of media coverage of international religious freedom policy on domestic politics and the implementation of the policy itself.

Workshops and Public-Facing Events

1. Closed-door dialogue, London, UK, February 2015
2. Public panel, Westminster Faith Debate on FoRB, London, UK, February 2015
3. Closed-door dialogue, Newseum, Washington, DC, April 2015
4. Public panel, Newseum, Washington, DC, April 2015

More than 50 academics, policymakers, civil society representatives and media practitioners were engaged in this project as close door dialogue participants. Public events in the US and UK included around 200 attendees.

Findings

Project partners noticed a perceptible shift among all participants, especially among some of the policymakers, concerning the importance of cross-sector engagement on FoRB foreign policy implementation. Closed-door dialogue participants listened to one another and openly engaged with critiques and recommendations of their own sectors' policies in this regard.

Participants also expressed a desire for more concerted dialogue efforts and action on international FoRB beyond the US-UK nexus; this was addressed more thoroughly at the Washington, DC dialogue.

The project team compiled the following findings from the project's activities:

- Issues of thought, conscience, religion and belief should be understood as fluid and context driven. Governments that engage with different theological traditions must learn that such fluidity precludes monolithic views of religious groups and actors. To accurately reflect realities on the ground, engagement should be based on research and dialogue.
- Freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) should be transparently balanced with a state's own national interests.
- FoRB and human rights should be conceptualized as and incorporated into political goals, economic goals and security interests.
- More cross-national and cross-sector collaboration should be undertaken in the realm of religious freedom and foreign policy. These dialogues were a start, and the project partners expect the International Panel of Parliamentarians on Freedom of Religion or Belief (IPPFoRB) to lead the way to some extent moving forward.
- Partnerships between governments and civil society actors on the ground can make a big

difference and should be stimulated.

- Foreign policies should consider FoRB from the start, but not necessarily address it directly from inception.
- FoRB is one of the most difficult freedoms to advance because actors are polarized due to different assumptions regarding religion and FoRB.
- US policies are focused on countries of particular concern. Instead, they should focus on countries of particular opportunity. The US and the EU have certain leverage in particular countries, especially when it comes to bilateral communication. This can be used to encourage FoRB-positive legislation.
- Religious communities, not just handpicked leaders, should be involved in advancing FoRB in foreign policies.
- It is important to leave room for alternative models of tolerance that might differ from Western secular understandings of the concept but may work better with local dynamics and values.
- Empowering local media to see, understand, and recognize positive FoRB stories are an important step. This includes raising awareness of the possibilities of social media. Academics must move faster and use different channels to disseminate their research, not just via traditional, i.e. slower, methods of publishing.
- In secular democratic states, it is often presumed that theology should not factor into foreign policy discussions. This assertion may be no longer viable given varied interpretations within religions. In order to engage with ongoing conflicts and discussions, theology must be understood in ways that do more than affirm existing stereotypes that get translated into media.
- Classification language in foreign policies should be avoided whenever possible. For example, language often backfires by placing people into particular boxes that might not fit, which can inadvertently alienate them.
- It is necessary to take into consideration all the available technologies to promote FoRB and human rights in general.
- It is necessary to reflect on the link between foreign activities and domestic contexts in US and UK policies. Coherency in this regard is critical, both for maintaining international standards as the background against which foreign diplomacy is seen and judged by other states.
- Governments should not declare 'religious conflicts' when religion is not the primary motivating factor.
- An international network of journalists replicating the International Panel of Parliamentarians model could be useful in enhancing accurate reporting on FoRB in foreign policy.
- FoRB actors should emphasize linking religious freedom and foreign policy with emerging countering violent extremism (CVE) debates and initiatives, employing an inclusive interfaith approach.
- FoRB should be properly integrated into states' national security plans.
- Ongoing domestic religious freedom debates should not distract from or hinder international FoRB efforts. FoRB must be taken seriously and addressed in tandem with complex human rights and equality issues.

Articles/Videos

- '[Religious Freedom and Foreign Policy](#)', by Brian Pellot, *Religious News Service* (2015). Videos and photos from the Washington, DC public event; also found on [Newseum website](#).
- [Footage from the Washington, DC](#) event will be featured in a forthcoming documentary by Jerome Socolovsky at Voice of America
- '[How far should concern with religious freedom shape foreign policy?](#)', Westminster Faith Debate public event (2015).

- [‘Bridging Voices Conference: Final Program’](#) (2015).

Latest Developments

- Participating closed-door dialogue members of IPPFoRB have continued to collaborate on joint statements and projects. Additionally, the following closed-door and public panel participants have collaborated: Charles Clarke and Linda Woodhead (research on religious education in Britain); Adam Dinham, Linda Woodhead, Debra Mason and Brian Pellot (on the emerging Religion Media Centre in Britain), Debra Mason, Nate Walker and Charles Haynes (on religious freedom education projects at the Newseum); John Kinahan, Andrew Smith, Andrew Copson, Michael DeDora, Nazila Ghanea and Brian Pellot (on implementing HRC 16/18 on combating religious intolerance AKA the Istanbul Process); Brian Grim and Cole Durham (on religious liberty and business); Nazila Ghanea and Kishan Manocha (on the OSCE’s FoRB efforts); Peter Petkoff and Cole Durham (on academic approaches to religious liberty); USCIRF and Pew Research (on tracking religious liberty violations); Jay Michaelson and Religion News Service (on reporting religious liberty issues within the context of LGBT rights). Other projects and collaborations are still emerging.
- Expected long-term impacts of this project include greater awareness, understanding and cooperation among policymakers and researchers on the topic of international religious freedom, more accurate and nuanced media coverage of the topic, greater knowledge of the core issues of contention and collaboration among general publics in both the UK and US, and, most importantly, viable solutions to improve policymaking efforts.
- In London, Sue Breeze, Former Head of the Equality and Non-Discrimination Team in the Human Rights & Democracy Department of the FCO, gave a thorough overview of her team’s efforts to improve the state of FoRB internationally. Baroness Elizabeth Berridge, who heads the All Party Group on International Religious Freedom (APPG) and is a founding member of the IPPFoRB, briefed participants on the APPG’s work in both London and Washington, DC.
- It is anticipated that several participants will apply for HRDP funding from the FCO in the coming year to carry on this work with British support beyond the US and UK.

PARTNERS: UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX – NOTRE DAME UNIVERSITY – EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE – INTERNATIONAL CONSORTIUM FOR LAW AND RELIGION STUDIES (ICLARS)

Project title: *Freedom of Religion and Belief (FoRB) and Foreign Policy: A transatlantic dialogue for a multilateral approach to religious freedom*

Principle Investigator(s): Dr. Daniel Philpott (US), Dr. Fabio Petito (UK)

Associate Co-investigator(s): Dr. Olivier Roy (Italy), Dr. Silvio Ferrari (Italy)

This project identified, addressed and discussed differences on both sides of the Atlantic in approaches to international religious engagement and religious freedom policy. The project critically evaluated the effectiveness of these approaches and contextualized them within broader foreign policy strategies. In bringing together relevant academics and policymakers from the US, UK, and Europe to discuss these particular issues, the project ultimately aimed to outline and develop a transatlantic multilateral approach to such policies.

Workshops and Public-Facing Events

1. Closed-door dialogue, 'Developing multilateral approach to Freedom of Religion or Belief: a European perspective', Wilton Park, February 2015
2. Public event, 'Global Religions in a Postsecular Age: How to understand the role of religions in contemporary global politics?', University of Sussex, February 2015
3. Closed-door dialogue, 'International Religious Freedom: Toward a Model of Transatlantic Cooperation,' Georgetown University, Washington, DC, October 2015

The Wilton Park closed-door dialogue engaged 55 participants. The first day of the Georgetown event was attended by approximately 200 participants including interested students and general public, the second day was a closed-door event with 65 leading international policymakers, academics, civil society and religious representatives. The public roundtable at the University of Sussex was attended by about 100 participants.

Findings

The following is a compilation of cross-sector findings from both of the project's closed-door workshops:

- Out of the dialogues, seven main recommendations for European and North American foreign policymakers have emerged which are presented in detail in the Policy Brief authored by Drs. Fabio Petito, Dan Philpott, Silvio Ferrari and Judd Birdsall.
- More broadly, in terms of outcomes, several points of conceptual consensus emerged from the dialogues:
 - Religious freedom policy should be conducted not only by central governments but also by building 'religious freedom constituencies' in countries around the world. What emerged through the dialogues was favor for a more transnational and civil society approach that builds links with religious leaders, human rights organizations, parliamentarians and activists who favor religious freedom.
 - Groups of states pursuing common causes together or international institutions such as the EU, Council of Europe, OSCE and particularly the UN are the most effective means to combat FoRB violations. Third party actors have an invaluable role to play in providing reliable country and international reports and access to victims' stories.
 - Over the course of the project's second dialogue, discussions found that religious freedom is not a 'West vs. the rest' principle, but rather a principle that finds favor, as well as disfavor, in countries in every region, including the West. Because of this, there is

potential for a transnational movement for religious freedom. However, for this potential transnational movement to be effective, general knowledge of the world religions is foundational, as well as strengthening the knowledge of the different ways in which the universal human right of FoRB is understood and implemented in the various cultural and religious traditions of the world. One must take into account the notion that freedom of religion and belief is embedded in different cultural contexts and that these contexts inevitably affect the way in which the right of freedom of religion or belief is conceived and formulated in legal terms. Without this consideration, no effective promotion of this right is possible.

- A third point to emerge from the dialogues is the complementarity of religious freedom with other goods and principles; FoRB cannot be considered in total isolation. Not only are FoRB violations generally symptomatic of wider political repression of human rights and fundamental freedoms, but also FoRB promotion can be a catalyst for wider acceptance of human rights norms and facilitate other beneficial social, economic and cultural improvements in society. Effective FoRB promotion, as well as effective strategies to counter terrorism exploiting religious extremism depends on an improved practical level of religious literacy and greater informed commitment to FoRB principles on the part of state and non-state actors alike, seeking to promote human rights.
- A willingness to engage in genuine bilateral and multilateral dialogue with religious communities is also needed based on listening and respectful discussion.

Initiatives and Partnerships

- Several European and North American policymakers, including a significant number of FoRB Ministry of Foreign Affairs policymakers that participated to the dialogue, took the opportunities offered by these two events to further advance the coordination and cooperation on FoRB promotion. These indirectly contributed to the strengthening and establishment of some important FoRB initiatives:
 1. The strengthening of IPPFoRB.
 2. The creation of the Canadian-led International Contact Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief.
 3. The Commonwealth Initiative on Freedom of Religion or Belief.
- Many key leading figures pioneering these transatlantic initiatives – Baroness Elizabeth Berridge, Knox Thames, Ambassadors Andrew Bennet and David Saperstein – participated in the project dialogues and have likely both benefitted from the insights of the dialogue and made an impact on others through their own insights.

Articles/Videos

- ['Developing a multilateral approach to freedom of religion or belief: a European perspective'](#), Wilton Park (2015), summary of key points from dialogue 1.
- ['International Religious Freedom: Toward a Model of Transatlantic Cooperation'](#), Berkley Center (2015), summary of key points from dialogue 2.
- ['Developing multilateral approach to Freedom of Religion or Belief: a European Perspective'](#), Wilton Park conference report (2015), widely circulated to relevant governments, IOs, NGOs, FBOs and other relevant stakeholders.
- ['A Conversation on Religious Freedom and its Social Implications'](#), Judd Birdsall, *Cornerstone* (2017).
- ['Religious Freedom Over There: Can it Span the Atlantic?'](#), Daniel Philpott, *Arc of the Universe*

(2015).

- [‘Religious Freedom and the Vicissitudes of Power’](#), Peter Berger, *The American Interest* (2015).
- [‘Global Religions in a Postsecular Age: How to Understand Religions in Contemporary Global Politics’](#), by Sussex Centre for Conflict and Security Research, *YouTube* (2015). A video of the roundtable discussion at Sussex University.
- [‘Freedom of religion and belief’](#), *Wilton Park* (2015) podcast recorded at the February conference, featuring Elizabeth Berridge, Chair APPG and Mahmoud Afifi, Director, Human Rights Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Cairo.
- [‘International Religious Freedom: Toward a Model of Transatlantic Cooperation’](#), *Religious Freedom Project, Berkley Center* (2015). Five videos (about 1 hour and half each) covering the first day of the Georgetown dialogue (including keynote addresses by Peter Berger and Ambassador Saperstein).
- [‘FoRB – Recognising our differences can be our strength: Enhancing transatlantic cooperation on promoting Freedom of Religion or Belief’](#) (2016). A policy brief on freedom of religion and belief in international law and a meeting at the House of Lords on September 7, 2016. The main contribution of the policy brief concerns the need to take religious and cultural diversity into account in the international advocacy of FoRB.

Latest Developments

- Several of the scholars offered findings from their research that is likely to prove mutually beneficial and will possibly promote future collaborative work.
- Based on the insights and presentations at the conference, collaboration may emerge among several of the policymakers, particularly in the realm of promoting multilateralism and intergovernmental cooperation.
- The project’s dialogues were the first in a year-long series of events on policy associated with the International Religious Freedom Act, which will produce a revised edition of *The Future of US International Religious Freedom Policy*. This is a publication that will be produced by the Religious Freedom Project at Georgetown University. The dialogues have contributed integrally to that series and publication.
- From the point of view of Milan University, new relations have been established with the centers in University of Birmingham and University of Notre Dame dealing with the issue of FoRB. This may lead to a presentation of the policy brief at the ISPI in Milan.



Year 3

Projects and Partners

PARTNERS: GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY - KADIR HAS UNIVERSITY

Project title: *Gapping the Bridge: Reconsidering the Role of Muslim Civil Society in Conflict Zones*

Principle Investigator(s): Professor Shawn Powers (US), Professor Abbas Barzegar (US)

Associate Co-investigator(s): Professor Efe Sevin (Turkey)

This project built upon two years of multi-institutional research and programming collaboration by Georgia State University principal investigators to look at countering violent extremism (CVE) and the role of development-focused Muslim NGOs operating in transitioning conflict zones. This practice-oriented research project asked the following guiding question: Can Muslim NGOs and faith-based civil society networks provide solutions to shared global challenges of social conflict and political violence in the MENA region? And, what role do digital communications play in the process? Project partners examined the accomplishments and challenges of Muslim NGOs in transitioning or conflict zones and asked how models can be scaled and examine best practices.

Two dialogues convened policymakers and NGO practitioners to discuss the particular complexities of the Muslim faith-based development and aid sector operating in and near conflict zones. The dialogues sought to explore barriers to integration between the faith-based humanitarian organizations in Muslim societies and the mainstream international development sector. A policy report will be made available to the policymaking and academic communities in September 2017 after further research and workshops.

Workshops and Public-Facing Events

1. Closed-door dialogue, Kadir Has University, Istanbul, Turkey, December 2015
2. Public talk with Shaarik Zafar, Special Representative to Muslim Communities at the US Department of State, Kadir Has University, December 2015
3. Closed-door dialogue, Washington, DC, August 2016

Findings

The following is a compilation of cross-sector findings from both of the project's closed-door workshops:

- All participants arrived at the consensus that Muslim faith-based organizations play a critical role in contributing to conflict prevention, mitigation, and post-conflict stabilization efforts.
- However, participants also agreed that severe gaps exist in knowledge about the global Muslim NGO landscape in addition to the shared conclusion that Muslim faith-based organizations—save for the exception of one to two organizations—were in need of drastic capacity building support.
- Participants expressed their eagerness and willingness to continue participation in policy dialogues and even explore collaborative programming possibilities designed to overcome the barriers identified in the *Bridging Voices* dialogues.

Initiatives and Partnerships

- Workshop presentation, Abbas Barzegar, *Bodies and Borders in Flow: Islam and Community from Black American Muslims to Syrian Refugees* for 'Politics and Democracy in Our Time: Technologies, Genealogies, Conjunctures', Emory University, Atlanta April 15-16, 2016 sponsored by the interdisciplinary workshop in colonial and postcolonial studies.
- Partial findings were presented at the Annual Meeting of The International Studies Association (March 16-19, 2016):
 - Shawn Powers, 'Peace Mapping: An Analysis of the Conditions Contributing to

- the Micro-level Conflict Resolution in Syria'
 - ['Gapping the Bridge: Reconsidering the Role of Muslim Civil Society in Conflict Zones'](#), Abbas Barzegar, *Georgia State University*.
- For 2016-17 the Civic Approaches team at GSU in partnership with the British Council and the Institute for Strategic Dialogue continued policy-level research in the Muslim NGO sector under the auspices of the EU Commission grant, *Bridging Transatlantic Voices*. The themes of discussion and participant pool for Bridging Transatlantic Voices workshops — held in Brussels and New York City — are heavily informed and enriched by the programming enabled by *Bridging Voices* in Year 3.

Articles/Videos

- ['Muslim NGOs can be a force to help rebuild Syrian society'](#), *Tampa Bay Times* (2016).
- A comprehensive report on Muslim NGO engagement in and around conflict zones will be released in September 2017 through the Bridging Transatlantic Voices program.

Latest Developments

- Over the course of their *Bridging Voices* grant, the Civic Approaches team developed a strong working relationship with the Office of Religion and Global Affairs at the US Department of State, which provided participant and networking level support. Former officials there, including Shaarik Zafar and Dr. Peter Mandaville, stressed the importance of the project's contribution on better understanding the Muslim NGO landscape and have pledged to continue to support it.
- The UN Interagency Task Force on Faith-Based Organization Engagement has participated in the project's work through its director, Azza Karam, and the project team has been invited to participate in dialogues run by the Task Force at UN headquarters in New York City.
- Convened by the German Ministry for Economic Development, a new international non-governmental organization, Partnership on Religion and Development (PaRD), will focus exclusively on coordinating international development goals with FBOs and religious communities. The project team was invited to participate in the launch of the PaRD as research-level stakeholders.

PARTNERS: UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM – INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS LIBERTY ASSOCIATION – STEFANUS ALLIANCE INTERNATIONAL

Project title: *Joint Action for the Common Good: Global Parliamentary Strategies for Advancing the Freedom of Religion or Belief*

Principle Investigator(s): Deputy Secretary General Dwayne Leslie (US), Dr. Andrew Davies (UK)

Associate Co-investigator(s): Knox Thames (US), Baroness Elizabeth Berridge (UK)

This project aimed to bring together high-level parliamentarians, scholars, policymakers and diplomats to discuss case studies and blueprints on the issues of religious persecution and freedom of religion or belief. The project joined with the International Panel of Parliamentarians on FoRB, a new informal network comprising parliamentarians from around the world committed to combatting religious persecution and advancing freedom of religion or belief, as defined by Article 18 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. With support from the *Bridging Voices* partners, and other foundation, academic and NGO partners, IPPFoRB was able to convene a global conference on the fringes of the UN General Assembly in 2015. Parliamentarians gathered in New York to discuss the promotion of FoRB, and particularly what impact parliamentarians from across the world can have when they come together and commit to joint action towards a common good. This unprecedented gathering of parliamentarians, civil society, government representatives, and academics created a distinctive platform for dialogue on FoRB between peers.

Workshops and Public-Facing Events

1. Closed-door dialogue, ‘Multinational Efforts to Promote Freedom of Religion or Belief’, New York City, September 2015
2. Public panel, New York City, September 2015
3. Closed-door dialogue, IPPFoRB Steering Group Meeting, London, February 2016
4. Closed-door dialogue, Academic Strategies for Training Parliamentarians, London, July 2016

92 Parliamentarians from 47 countries, representing 8 world religions attended New York during the dialogue. The London workshop was intended for the IPPFoRB steering group only, and the academic training session was attended by a small group of academics.

Findings

The following is a compilation of cross-sector findings from both of the project’s closed-door workshops:

- While there was agreement on the importance of fundamental freedoms, there was much debate about the varying definitions of FoRB. It became clear there was different emphasis, and the principle of FoRB was viewed through a different lens, depending on the geographic context of the participants.
- The discussions focused on how the IPPFoRB network could best serve its members and what resources are desired for parliamentarians to be effective in their own communities and support each other through a broader network.
- Each parliamentarian spoke during closed sessions. They spoke of their local communities, of the local pressures on their parliaments, and the challenges they experienced. Many of these were shared challenges and the act of sharing was beneficial, however some of these were unique challenges and the act of sharing informed international colleagues of the realities faced daily.

- How can IPPFoRB, and similar networks, support regional capacity to develop education around FoRB? It is vital that the importance of FoRB is understood and included within policy decisions. This action is not isolated to parliamentarians but requires the support and willingness of government, non-government organizations and religious leaders of all denominations.

The following conclusions came from the London meeting on the issue of further academic support on the issue of FoRB:

- There was a clear difference in how freedom of religion or belief was defined by different participants at the New York conference. Was it in the importance of religion, belief or worship? With each element so closely related, it can be difficult to separate, however the nuances which were used made it clear that understandings varied dramatically. How can academia support new research on this question?
- There was also a strong call for academic support and academic research on the following questions: what is meant by religious freedom; where and how does religious extremism come in; and what about terrorism? A critical debate is needed on the reasons why FoRB is important and should be valued, why there are violations of FoRB across the globe. Additionally, focus is needed on ways in which parliamentarians are best positioned and supported to ensure protections.
- Many of the parliamentarians alluded to being 'a lone voice' in the crowd – the crowd of other parliamentarians and legislative agendas. With so many issues and concerns woven into new legislation, some being connected to human rights although not all, further dialogue must examine how academia, civil society and policymakers offer support and capacity to parliamentarians to encourage concrete advocacy aims. Furthermore, how can academia, civil society and policymakers provide legislative support to help review, and ultimately form, legislation which places FoRB at the center?

Initiatives and Partnerships

- The very fact of the gathering of parliamentarians from different corners of the globe is a positive outcome in itself. The conversations and the issues raised provided the foundations of a rich network of advocacy around FoRB.
- There were a number of concrete outcomes as a result of the New York conference:
 - All parliamentarians signed a New York Resolution.
 - Regional Domestic Networks, similar to that of the APPG in the UK, were pledged and have since started. The Latin American delegation joined together to form an inter-parliamentary group focused on FoRB. The group currently has 16 Members, from El Salvador, Peru, Chili and Panama.
 - Three letters to three governments outlining concern at violations of FoRB were signed by delegates and sent to the respective government Embassies.

Articles/Videos

- '[New York Resolution for Freedom of Religion and Belief](#)', IPPFORB (2015), IPPFoRB released a Resolution at the New York conference.
- '[Multinational Efforts to Promote Freedom of Religion or Belief](#)' (2015). A report produced from the New York conference on civil society recommendations.
- '[Multinational Effort to Promote Freedom of Religion or Belief – Joint Action for the Common Good](#)', United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner (2015). Ivan Šimonović's keynote speech (United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights)

Latest Developments

- Funding from the *Bridging Voices* project and other major funders have led to an expansion and invigoration of IPPFoRB, which continues to operate.

PARTNERS: YES AKADEMIA – WOOLF INSTITUTE – NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY - L'INSTITUT UNIVERSITAIRE DE TECHNOLOGIE DE MONTREUIL

Project title: *Press Start Dialogues*

Principle Investigator(s): Executive Director Kevin Murray (US), Executive Director Neil Scott (UK)

Associate Co-investigator(s): Director Max Boulanger (France), Dr. Sami Everett (UK)

This project promoted improved understanding of the role religion plays in Europe and the US amongst youth through the lens of the United Nations Climate Change Conference, COP21. Through dialogues organized in France and the US, discussion focused on how youth social entrepreneurs, policymakers, academics, civil society and decision-makers could create social change through exploring their own cultural and religious identities, while focusing on questions related to environmental protection. The youth who participated in the project produced recommendations and presented their findings mainly during the COY11 youth conference and at the COP21 in Le Bourget, France as well as during a public dialogue at Northeastern University. Youth fellows then shared their projects on the internet through Facebook and Twitter in order to create new spaces to share their thoughts. They continue to collaborate across borders to build their initiatives and integrate concepts of inter-faith and the environment in their work.

Workshops and Public-Facing Events

1. Closed-door dialogues, 'Press Start Dialogues', South of France and Paris, France, September and October 2015
2. Public panel and discussion, 'Press Start Dialogues', Northeastern University School of Law, November 2015
3. COY11 youth fellow presentations, Villepinte, France, November 2015
4. COP21 youth fellow presentations, Le Bourget, France, December 2015

Global Potential France was able to gather 14 youth participants from France to become youth fellows of the Press Start Dialogues. Fifty-one other participants shared their experiences and dialogued with the youth participants in the South of France as well as in Paris. Another 50 participants joined the Press Start Dialogues in Boston in November 2015 at Northeastern University School of Law.

Findings

The following is a compilation of cross-sector findings from both of the project's closed-door workshops and public events:

- During a presentation at the COY11, Press Start Dialogues youth fellows interacted with Sulak Sivaraska, a Buddhist monk with a passion for action against climate change. He stressed the importance of actions which come from within; internal not external. For him, humanity has a spiritual connection with the Earth and this connection is bound up in our very existence. In both cases, youth fellows at the COY were shown that inter-religious dialogue and climate change go hand-in-hand.
- At COY11, Press Start youth fellows had the opportunity to lead a workshop alongside project representatives from Northeastern University, focusing on social entrepreneurship, inter-cultural exchange, and climate change. It was a positive session where pertinent points were made, with examples from the projects of the Press Start youth fellows.
- Moving forward, it is important for young people from Europe and the rest of the world to continue

to discuss openly in terms of inter-religious dialogue and direct action to combat climate change. Platforms like the COY11 and COP21 provide an open space to discuss big issues which touch both spirituality and climate change. These forums are vital and should be encouraged throughout the year in different forms, bringing people together in the name of making a positive difference in the world. The COP22 was another great opportunity for the project partners to include young social entrepreneurs in the dialogue around these key topics.

- The project team found that integrating workshops on more sensitive topics throughout a long-term program such as the Press Start Dialogues (which lasted 100 hours over a year, September 2015 to September 2016) is effective because youth and stakeholders have the time to work together and learn from each other, creating lasting networks and impact.

Initiatives and Partnerships

- Thanks to the Press Start Dialogues, Global Potential (now called YES Akademia in France) works in partnership with Via Le Monde, an agency within the Department of the Seine-Saint-Denis around Paris which focuses on international solidarity. Via Le Monde allowed Press Start youth fellows to participate in the COY11 and the COP21 events.
- Since these events, Press Start youth fellows have used the same debate format during that period to increase participation on topics concerning faith and climate, most recently at Bobigny on December 7, 2016.

Articles/Videos

- '[Clap de fin pour la formation Press Start](#)', *Le Courrier de l'Atlas* (2015).
- Press Start youth fellow diploma ceremony and announcements [article](#), *Yes Akademia* (2015).
- '[We partnered with Global Potential](#)', *Veggie Magnifique* (2015).
- '[COP21](#)', *YouTube* (2016). Youth from Press Start sharing their experiences on inter-religious dialogues and climate with other youth.

Latest Developments

- Youth fellows who benefited from the Press Start Dialogues program in 2015 are still in contact today and partner on projects together. They are continuing their dialogue through a [Facebook group](#) and have continued to meet every month since Press Start Dialogues.
- Press Start Dialogues continues as a program, led by Yes Akademia, today. On January 21, 2017, the President of the inter-religious not-for-profit in France, [Co-Exister](#), presented at one of the latest Press Start workshops. Many of the program's fellows also visited a synagogue, a mosque and a Hindu temple during that week. Thanks to Press Start Dialogues, they continue to be curious about inter-faith topics and engage with others to share their passions and interests related to social enterprises.

PARTNERS: NEW HORIZONS IN BRITISH ISLAM – HUSSEIN RASHID – BRITISH COUNCIL

Project title: *Engaging with Sunni-Shia Dynamics*

Principle Investigator(s): Dr. Hussein Rashid (US), Mr. Dilwar Hussain (UK)

Associate Co-investigator(s): British Council (US)

This project explored the context of the Sunni-Shia dynamic, specifically as it relates to sectarianism in Muslim communities and the role of diaspora in the US and UK. The dialogue and public event engaged Sunni and Shia leaders, policymakers, NGO representatives, activists, and academics to engage under-represented voices, consider questions of approaches to dialogue and to broaden the consideration of the Sunni-Shia dynamic to include a greater understanding of the lived diversity of these religious traditions. The dialogue conversations will be turned into a user-friendly resource for policymaking professionals.

Workshops and Public-Facing Events

1. Closed-door dialogue, 'The Policy Relevance of Shia-Sunni Relations in US and UK' SOAS, London, UK, December 2016
2. Public forum, 'Beyond Shia and Sunni', Birkbeck, University of London, December 2016

The closed-door dialogue engaged around 20 attendees from policymaking, academia and civil society. There were around 40 attendees at the public forum. One of the videos produced during the public forum has also reached over 600 hundred people on social media in the first ten days of its usage.

Findings

The following is a compilation of cross-sector findings from the project's closed-door workshop:

- The sector must ensure that forums for liaising/conversation between Sunni and Shia communities and policymakers are more representative of both communities.
- The dialogue discussed the major question of how to enhance institutional memory/continuity in policymaking on the issue of Sunni-Shia dynamics. Dialogue participants found that problems are often dealt with, but when there is a change in, for example, the civil service, knowledge and experience is lost.
- The dialogue raised basic awareness of the presence of diverse Muslim identities, but also remained realistic about how much this will get traction amongst policymakers. Generic 'Muslim' solutions as a 'one size fits all' are not always useful/applicable.
- Dialogue is needed with policymakers to learn more about their needs and interests, and to explore how community groups can support them in their roles, as well as avail of their help.
- Improved liaising is needed between Shia and Sunni leaders/activists in providing briefings on issues of concern to policymakers and academics.
- The dialogue found a critique of 'Sunni normativity' must be made with policymakers, academics and journalists in order to create a more accurate understanding of minority identities and needs.
- The project team acknowledges that the issue of building more positive relations between the two major branches of Islam is not going to be easy to deliver or measure, but there will be signs of progress that can be monitored, such as delivery of common agendas and action points that are mutually agreed.

Initiatives and Partnerships

The participants were very interested in taking the discussions and practical ideas forward. This was a key focus of the dialogue on the second day and a number of ideas were suggested for future collaboration and activity:

- Facilitation of local events in Shia and Sunni mosques using the birthday of the Prophet as a common/shared focus.
- Café- type discussions held in Sushi bars ('Sushi' being a moniker for Sunni-Shia collaboration) and filmed for wider audiences, showing Sunnis and Shias in discussion and conversation.
- Creating videos to demystify Sunni and Shia practices and differences.
- Producing joint community statements and comments on various issues.
- Guidelines for how the two religious communities talk about each other and address issues of sensitivity to the other community.
- Joint briefings for policymakers and journalists on issues that may pertain to Shia-Sunni relations.

Articles/Videos

- ['Beyond Sunni & Shia'](#), Facebook page and video (2016). Highlights from the #NoSectarianism public forum.

Latest Developments

- Long-term impact beyond the dialogue will be difficult to measure at this time, but the project team is committed to conducting more dialogues of this type in order to keep working on the agenda.
- In terms of the impact on policy, this impact may be demonstrated more tangibly through the usage of future resources produced by the project team and the delivery of training/raising of awareness around the subject.
- The project team believes there will be greater awareness between Shia and Sunni communities and a greater awareness by policymakers and journalists around the diversity and presence of both communities (and some of their sub-divisions) of Islam. In the long-term, this will bring nuance to the work of journalists and policymakers.

PARTNERS: INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC DIALOGUE – UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE – GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

Project title: *Reclaiming religious narratives from violent extremists: how governments and religious bodies can work together effectively to counter extremist messaging*

Principle Investigator(s): Dr. Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana (US), Melanie Smith (UK)

Associate Co-investigator(s): Dr. Shana Cohen (UK)

This project focused on academics, policymakers and religious actors sharing knowledge and best practice related to countering extremist religious narratives with particular aim to concentrate lessons learned on the narratives promulgated by ISIL. Within the context of countering extremist messaging, this team explored the role of women in countering violent extremism (CVE) efforts, particularly in religiously conservative cultures. Most importantly, the team asked how greater female involvement in counter-messaging, especially from Muslim women, can change the perception of counter-messaging as being Western, male-dominated, top-down and aggressive, and how greater involvement of Muslim women can improve the effectiveness of counter-extremist messaging.

Workshops and Public-Facing Events

1. Closed-door dialogue: 'Violent Extremism, Interfaith Relations, and Government', St. Edmund's College, University of Cambridge, June 2016
2. Closed-door dialogue: 'Gender, Religion and Countering Violent Extremism', Georgetown University, September 2016

There were 19 participants at the closed-door dialogue at the University of Cambridge and 26 participants at the closed-door dialogue at Georgetown University.

Findings

The following is a compilation of cross-sector findings from both of the project's closed-door workshops:

- There is a need to work collaboratively towards developing an enhanced understanding of the intersection between gender, religion, and CVE.
- The sector should transform CVE discourse to focus on 'positives', formulating what the situation should look like in contrast to current focus on a securitized discourse.
- Based on grassroots-driven research, scholars need to ask new questions, challenge established terminologies and frameworks to create more dynamic responses to the rapidly evolving field of radicalism and extremist violence that will inform the theories of change and institutional and legal frameworks.
- The sector must establish better tools to quantify and measure the counterfactuals involved in assessing the impact of programs that are designed to prevent radicalization and violent extremism. Such strategies could be appropriated from the field of peace and conflict prevention, e.g. through conflict analysis, and by developing and comparing different scenarios and trajectories of radicalization with the observed levels of extremism in a given community following an intervention.
- The sector must engage local communities, notably women, youth and religious actors, in monitoring and evaluation activities to ensure greater sustainability of CVE interventions.
- The sector must acknowledge women's role in CVE and step up women's empowerment on the local, regional, national and international levels by providing adequate resources, technical

assistance, networks, and education.

- The sector must keep an open dialogue and support credible local voices, including female and religious leaders, and other traditionally marginalized communities, and amplify the work that is already being done on the ground.
- The sector must ensure that policies developed are rooted in communities and responsive to their needs by conducting a needs assessment and stakeholder analysis, and build mutual trust between these stakeholder groups by identifying best practices and lessons learned.
- The sector must provide more opportunities through seminars and conferences to bring together policymakers, scholars and civil society actors on local levels to include the perspective of all stakeholders.
- The sector must create safe spaces for religious women to effectively engage in countering extremism as well as patriarchal tendencies in their faith groups and communities.
- The sector must improve accountability, e.g. by using conditionality for women's participation in CVE programs.

Initiatives and Partnerships

- While some of the participants were initially questioning whether it was relevant or useful to link religion, gender and CVE, the discussions indicated that there was a better understanding of the importance of taking an intersectional approach to the issue. Additionally, the dialogues brought together groups that are not often working with each other, for example, those who are working on the issues of religion and women or women and CVE or CVE and religion.

Articles/Videos

- [‘Violent Extremism, Interfaith Relations & Government’](#) dialogue summary report, St Edmund's College, University of Cambridge (2016); includes policy recommendations.
- [‘Gender, Religion and Countering Violent Extremism’](#) dialogue summary report, Georgetown University (2016); includes policy recommendations.

Latest Developments

- The project ended in October 2016, and therefore the principal investigators are developing follow-on action. The workshops initiated a dialogue between the various representatives from different sectors – policy, academia, activism, civil society – and so it is likely participants will work and collaborate together on these issues in the future.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ Special thanks to Ms Helen Thomson at Sutton Grammar.

ⁱⁱ Presentations can be found in the YouTube link under the Articles/Videos section.

ⁱⁱⁱ Religious violence is in the fabric of London, from Guy Fawkes' gunpowder plot in 1605 to the Fenian Dynamite campaign of 1883 and the 7/7 bombings of 2005. The media of the day have been central to the design, enactment, and response each time and religious groups have always played a role in mitigating tensions and finding solutions. This event brought together policy practitioners with experience of countering violence associated with Irish republicanism and jihadist extremism with academics that have produced systematic theories of religious and political violence and, in particular, how a changing media environment conditions radicalization and counter-radicalization. The workshop concluded that understanding risks and finding best practices were urgent goals.

^{iv} Georgia State University, in collaboration with the Carter Center, convened a closed-door workshop for a small group of policymakers, experts, and religious actors to think critically about the challenges posed to the international community by the Syrian civil war and ensuing humanitarian crisis. The workshop outlined solutions to medium and long-term problems such as sectarian conflict, political reconciliation, and nation-(re)building.

^v As the Syrian conflict enters its sixth year over nine million people have been displaced, the education system is in ruin and the country's medical system is near total collapse. With religious extremism on the rise and opposition groups divided, the prospects for peace remain elusive for the near future. While much international attention is focused on political processes that will lead to a cessation of conflict and a peace settlement, Syria's humanitarian crisis continues to deepen. Governments and private donors are focused on the challenges of meeting immediate needs for food, shelter and medical care. But, what are the prospects for the future? This public discussion with policy, NGO and academic experts provided an opportunity for stakeholders to share their perspectives on the challenges of post-conflict reconciliation and redevelopment in Syria.