

# A human security approach to religious freedom

## The religious minorities vulnerability assessment tool

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### Abstract

A number of characteristic aspects of religious persecution in Latin America are insufficiently recognized by existing theoretical frameworks and data collection tools, leaving many forms of what I call “vulnerability of religious minorities” unobserved. Adopting a human security perspective, I develop a methodology that allows us to observe how different forms of religious behavior can lead actors such as states, indigenous leaders and organized crime to restrict the religious freedom of a religious minority. I call this methodology the Religious Minorities Vulnerability Assessment Tool (RM-VAT). This tool covers human security threats faced by religious minorities in different spheres of society and in relation to their type of religious behavior, as opposed to simply administering a pre-defined questionnaire. The RM-VAT represents a valuable instrument to assess the vulnerability of religious minorities in ways and on levels not observed before. These new insights form a useful basis to support building resilience within these groups and raising awareness of their situation worldwide.

**Keywords** religious freedom, human security, vulnerability, active religious behavior, Latin America.

## 1. Introduction

In 2006, Grim and Finke lamented that “religion receives little attention in international quantitative studies. Including religion in cross-national studies requires data, and high-quality data are in short supply.” (p. 3) Today, this problem is not as acute, as increasing amounts of cross-country data on religion have become available (Fox 2011). Yet essential aspects of the vulnerability of religious minorities continue to be overlooked.

In April 2018, I visited the museum devoted to Monsignor Oscar Arnulfo Romero, the Salvadoran prelate murdered on 24 March 1980 while offering mass. It

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is generally believed that he was killed by a right-wing death squad for his public denunciation of social injustices and human rights violations. Romero was declared a martyr by the Vatican in 2015 (and canonized in 2018), but my guide at the museum told me that the canonization process was stalled for ideological reasons due to his presumed adherence to liberation theology. Moreover, because he was killed for political reasons, Vatican theologians disputed at length whether he qualified as a martyr. Eventually, they agreed that he did qualify because he was killed *in odium fidei* (“in hatred of the faith”).

The debate about martyrdom and canonization is an internal matter of the Vatican, but it reflects a broader misunderstanding of the vulnerability of religious engagement both within and outside academia. No one would disagree that social and political activism by religious people can be risky and even life-threatening in authoritarian contexts. However, risks related to religious engagement are rarely understood as violations of religious freedom, nor are they recognized as a consequence of behavior inspired by religious convictions. Often, the religious dimension of conflicts is readily discarded in favor of alternative explanations.

In this article, I argue that observation of the vulnerability of religious minorities can benefit from the human security paradigm. I first present a methodological review of the most common tools used to measure religious persecution. I argue that these tools are useful instruments but that they nevertheless overlook many significant threats to religious minorities. As a complement to existing tools, I justify the relevance of the human security perspective. I offer some suggestions on how to operationalize this framework to assess the vulnerability of religious minorities, and I describe the development of the Religious Minorities Vulnerability Assessment Tool (RM-VAT). I then discuss how the RM-VAT can contribute to improving existing religious freedom assessment methods.

## **2. Methodological review of religious freedom assessment tools**

The growing interest in documenting and measuring religious freedom has led to the development of a variety of “Religious Freedom Assessment Tools” (RFATs). RFATs were first created by faith-based organizations that had an interest in documenting religious freedom violations to inform their strategic planning. Some civil society organizations later integrated religious freedom into their monitoring instruments. In the 1990s, public and multilateral institutions gained interest in religious freedom issues and started developing monitoring instruments. Encouraged by the increasing interest in religious freedom by public institutions, various academic research projects started to develop RFATs in the 2000s.

Two broad types of RFATs can be identified: general datasets that include some variables about religious freedom and “pure” RFATs. In general datasets such as

the Cingranelli-Richards Human Rights Data Project (1981), the Minorities at Risk Project (1986), and the World Values Survey (1981), the treatment of religious freedom was generally very basic and did not contain the level of sophistication and complexity of the scholarly RFATs that emerged later.

Most of the pure RFATs use a sociometric methodology. The best-known one is Global Restrictions on Religion, adapted by the Pew Research Center from the methodology developed by Grim and Finke (2006) at Penn State University. This instrument includes indices for two dimensions of restrictions of religion for adherents of any religion or belief: “government restrictions” and “social hostilities.” The methodology of the indices is based on the coding of 19 publicly available primary sources, among which the principal source is the International Religious Freedom Reports produced by the U.S. State Department (Grim and Finke 2011).

Following a similar sociometric methodology, the Religion and State (RAS) Project directed by Jonathan Fox (2011) at Bar-Ilan University “measures the extent of government involvement in religion.” His dataset uses a broader range of primary sources and focuses specifically on “the relationship between religion and the state apparatus.” The dataset developed in the framework of this project includes variables for Official Religion, Religious Support, Religious Restrictions, Religious Discrimination, and other topics. Additional variables measure policies including religious education, the registration of religious organizations, restrictions on abortion, restrictions on proselytizing, and religious requirements for holding public office or citizenship. A societal module was added to the RAS dataset in 2017. The variables measuring actions taken by societal actors describe societal discrimination and minority societal actions (Fox, Finke and Mataic 2018).

Although it was developed by a faith-based organization, the World Watch List of Open Doors International can also be considered a scholarly instrument since its methodological revision in 2012 and its academic validation by the International Institute for Religious Freedom, a network of scholars and universities specializing in religious freedom (Sauer 2012). Input for the World Watch List comes from questionnaires completed by both staff in the field and a network of external experts. The questionnaire design seeks to give expression to the degree of pressure experienced by Christians in five spheres of life: private, family, community, national, and church life. The questionnaire also includes a sixth block on physical violence, which cuts across the other five spheres of life.

Although each RFAT provides different results depending on its methodology and on what is observed specifically, their main contribution lies in their attempt to document, quantify, and compare situations of religious freedom worldwide. The relevance of RFATs is not in dispute, but there are at least four areas in which the data provided

by RFATs should be further complemented: they are insufficiently holistic, neglect the local scale, have a state bias, and use a restrictive definition of religion.

First, previous RFATs are insufficiently holistic, especially in the case of quantitative (sociometric) tools. Because of coding requirements, most RFATs simplify reality by focusing on a reduced number of variables. Measuring a fixed set of variables can be useful to enable cross-national comparisons and to observe evolutions of these variables over time; however, such approaches do not account for the complex interaction between socio-political factors that, under specific circumstances, can lead to situations of vulnerability for religious minorities.

In selecting the variables to observe, most RFATs adopt what could be called a “laundry list” approach. The problem with this type of approach, as Fox (1999: 443) notes, is that laundry lists are either so specific – “limited to various aspects or instances of the relationship between religion and violence and revolution” – as to be insufficiently comprehensive, or on the contrary so comprehensive that they have “extensive lists of factors contributing to religious violence and revolution.” In essence, laundry lists are subject to what Owen (2003b) refers to as a “measurement paradox”: they are never representative (exhaustive) enough, but the longer they are, the more difficult data collection becomes, particularly if the methodology requires cross-national comparisons. Another problem with the laundry list approach is that it lacks explanatory power, as Fox (1999:442) points out: “[Laundry lists] identify many pieces to the puzzle but do an incomplete job of putting that puzzle together.” Moreover, important explanatory factors in particular cases may not have been included in the datasets and risk being ignored in the subsequent analysis.

I realize that this shortcoming applies to quantitative methods in general. Indeed, any sociometric model inevitably simplifies reality. However, by focusing on a reduced number of variables to describe religious freedom, RFATs run the risk of overlooking specific human security threats to which religious minorities are vulnerable.

Connected with the former critique, the predominant quantitative approach of the RFATs raises an issue related to scale. As they focus on cross-national comparisons, their unit of analysis is the national state. Although the methodologies of most RFATs indicate that they take local variations into account when relevant, their primary focus is at the national level.<sup>2</sup>

RFATs are macro-level indicators, meaning that, as Owen (2004) asserts, they are aggregates that conceal realities that can only be observed locally. Ignoring factors at the local level – which Stein Rokkan (2009 [1970]) refers to as the “wholenation bias” in political science – implies that the analysis contains a relatively high

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<sup>2</sup> Localized codings based on the RAS scheme have since been completed for Switzerland by Helbling and Traunmüller (2016).

level of generality; i.e., findings are not nuanced or specified depending on local particularities (Snyder 2001; Høyland, Moene, and Willumsen 2012; Glasius et al. 2018). The local – territorialized – expressions of the vulnerability of religious minorities therefore risk going unnoticed.

Although RFATs acknowledge that the observation of religious freedom violations should not be limited to the behavior of the national government, most of the variables chosen by most RFATs refer precisely to this aspect. Variables describing restrictions on religious freedom (or persecution of religious groups) by non-state actors are comparatively less used, with three exceptions: the Pew Research Center's Social Hostilities Index (considering the broad range of non-state actors, the social hostilities category is too broad for a single index in my opinion), the new societal module of the RAS Project, and Open Doors International's World Watch List since its methodological revision in 2012.

In general, RFATs tend to focus on traditional sources of persecution but do not consider non-state actors such as organized crime or indigenous authorities – very important in Latin America – as players that can restrict the religious freedom of religious minorities, either by taking advantage of their impunity or by effectively taking over control of government. The “over-attention on the state,” as Owen (2003a:10) calls it, thus makes it difficult to observe the role of non-state actors.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, another critical element is the way religion is considered and defined in RFATs. In my view, the adopted definitions of religion in the RFATs are too restrictive to account for scenarios of vulnerability of religious minorities that are not (exclusively) caused by a religious motive and/or are related to how religious minorities behave in society as a result of their religious beliefs. For example, the approach to religion taken by the Pew Research Center does not integrate most behavioral aspects of religion, defining a religious brand as “an organized group of committed individuals that adhere to and propagate a specific interpretation of explanations of existence based on supernatural assumptions through statements about the nature and workings of the supernatural and about ultimate meaning.” The RAS Project uses Fox's broad behavioral definition of religion, but nevertheless defines religious minorities only by identity.

Moreover, sociometric tools mainly consider only organized religious groups, ignoring new forms of religion such as new religious movements (or including

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<sup>3</sup> The predominant focus on the state can be explained by the following three factors. First, religious freedom was traditionally approached from a human rights perspective, which considers the state as the primary addressee of human rights violations. Second, the first RFATs emerged towards the end of the Cold War period, characterized by the widespread presence of communist regimes, during which religious freedom was restricted mostly by government action. Indeed, a large number of restrictions on religious freedom still originate from the state today. Finally, observing social dynamics related to religious conflict is more complex than observing whether religious freedom is respected by the state in law and practice; as a result, the state is the easiest actor to code.

them as part of a catch-all category in the case of the Pew Research Center). Thus, the RFATs' restrictive definitions of religion become a major limitation because it does not enable them to observe cases of vulnerability of religious minorities that result from their behavior rather than from their identity.

In general, RFATs look at religious identification and its consequences but not at the role of religion in society, and they insufficiently acknowledge the multidimensionality of religious freedom, i.e., the degree to which it is respected in each sphere of society. Moreover, the reviewed RFATs place their primary emphasis on variables related to religious identity (religious affiliation) and some forms of religious behavior (such as church attendance or following certain dress codes), while not considering how specific behavior of members of religious minorities, inspired by their religious convictions, can create vulnerability.

### **3. The relevance of human security for the observation of the vulnerability of religious minorities**

The human security paradigm emerged in the 1990s as an alternative to the traditional security discourse in the period following the end of the Cold War. Although it had been used earlier – it has philosophical roots in early liberal philosophical writings (Owen 2003a:7-10) – the term “human security” was formally introduced in the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) 1994 *Human Development Report*. Conceptually, Owen proposed a definition of human security that has the merit of being concrete and specific, while remaining true to its original conceptualization by the UNDP:

Human security is the protection of the vital core of all human lives from critical and pervasive threats. Individuals require protection from environmental, economic, food, health, personal and political threats. (Owen 2003a:38)

Although religion is not usually considered in human security literature, this paradigm introduces a new way to consider security and conflict that is particularly relevant for the analysis of the vulnerability of religious minorities. As Owen (2004:21) claims, “The very point of human security is to shift our attention to threats usually not considered, and most likely not measured.”

Two shifts introduced by the concept of human security, as highlighted by Glasius, are particularly relevant. First, the state security paradigm that based a state's sovereignty on its control of a territory is reversed and replaced by a view of state sovereignty that is dependent upon the way the state serves and supports its people. It puts the focus on the security of the individual citizen and on every human being. It also recognizes the participation of nongovernmental actors in the security field.

This shift has implications for the observation of threats to religious minorities at the pertinent level of analysis, which often is the subnational level. A traditional security focus would not even consider conflicts involving religious minorities before they become manifest. Furthermore, a traditional security focus that looks mainly at interstate conflicts (or inter-ethnic conflicts, in the case of conflict theory) would not take transnational threats or threats against a minority group into account. This shift away from vertical understandings of security opens the door for the recognition of the responsibility of non-state actors, such as drug cartels or indigenous authorities, for human rights abuses of religious minorities.

Second, the shift towards the subjects of security is equally relevant for the observation of the vulnerability of religious minorities. One practical consequence of this shift is that it views vulnerable individuals and groups not only as victims that require protection, but also as active agents that can be empowered to engage the threats they face (Glasius 2008:44), in line with Rodin (2014). The most relevant feature of this shift, however, is its open-ended outlook. It constitutes an invitation to inventory the human security risks that threaten a religious minority in the broadest possible way. Because of its open-ended feature, the human security perspective is therefore not constrained by any predetermined laundry list of indicators that might be too limiting.

Notwithstanding its paradigm-shifting features and its considerable resonance among both policymakers and academics, the human security perspective has remained contested because of its perceived conceptual vagueness, which poses a series of measurement and operationalization challenges. Indeed, how can human security be measured if there is no clarity about what this concept entails (Owen 2003a, 2004; Deibel 2005; Werthes and Bosold 2006; Glasius 2008)?

Owen's approach to human security addresses these challenges in a way that is also useful for assessing the vulnerability of religious minorities. First, Owen recommends observing human security at the most pertinent geographical level (the subsidiarity principle), which will often be the subnational level. Borrowing from geography, he suggests conceiving human security as "an analytical concept with a specific meaning in a specific place. Human security in one location means something very different than human security in another" (Owen 2003a:1). The relevant human security threats in a particular location must be inventoried (preferably using the input of experts) and data must be collected to describe these threats. Owen recommends doing this without respect to motive, responsible actor, legal category, or any other variable. Once the threats have been observed, they can be analyzed and interpreted, without pre-defined analytical categories getting in the way of the observation of human security threats.

Owen thus suggests getting rid of any predetermined sets of factors or indicators (laundry lists) and instead focusing "only on relevant threats, those that surpass the human security threshold" (2003a:41), which he defines, following Alkire, as

anything that threatens “the vital core of all human lives in ways that advance human freedoms and human fulfillment” (2003:2). This suggestion is relevant for the observation of religious minorities’ vulnerability to human security threats, because it does not restrict the observation to a set of pre-defined categories such as the indicators of an REAT or the variables of a theoretical model. It also does not limit the observation to the national level. Specifically, it allows us to observe threats that existing frameworks fail to detect but that nevertheless constitute human rights abuses, such as threats that are the result of religious behavior, do not have a religious motive, are perpetrated by non-state actors, or can be observed only at the subnational level. Such an approach inevitably sacrifices the opportunity for quantitative cross-national comparisons, but it increases the possibility of observing threats that are usually not considered.

Owen further emphasizes that the data collection process must be flexible; any form of available information, whether quantitative or qualitative, can be used, as long as it is relevant to describing the identified human security threats. Glasius et al. (2018:64-66) make a similar point concerning the limitations of information gathering in authoritarian contexts. Again, this point is useful for observing the vulnerability of religious minorities, because standardized datasets that describe the specific human security threats to which they are vulnerable probably do not exist. Through piecing together public information from various sources, legal analysis, and anecdotal evidence such as interviews and news reports, a picture of the specific vulnerability of a determined religious minority can emerge.

Owen proposes to apply existing methodologies for hazard identification and risk assessment – commonly referred to as vulnerability assessments – as tools to measure human security. A great number of vulnerability assessment tools (VATs) have been developed in recent years in different academic disciplines and policy fields. Originally, the focus of hazard identification research was on tracking environmental disasters (Barrows 1923; Cutter 1996; Food and Agriculture Organization 2003; Tresman 2004; UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction 2004). The application of this field progressively broadened from physical events to hazards caused by human actions, such as technological failure. Later, VATs were applied to energy supply, transportation, and communication systems (Makoka and Kaplan 2005). VATs are also used in the field of information technology, to assess the vulnerability of computer systems to security risks. With the trend of broadening the application of VATs to minorities, it is only a small additional step to apply VATs to religious minorities.

#### **4. Construction of the Religious Minorities Vulnerability Assessment Tool**

A new vulnerability assessment tool should enhance the strengths of the REAT approach while at the same time overcoming most of its shortcomings. This goal can



be achieved by applying the VAT methodology, which must be adapted to observe the position of religious minorities. The following requirements of an ideal tool to assess the vulnerability of religious minorities can be enumerated. It must:

- Be sufficiently open-ended, contextual, and forward-looking to comprehensively observe the vulnerability of religious minorities (no laundry list and consideration of all threats, not only executed threats);
- Take the local scale into account, i.e., it must have the capacity to observe pertinent dynamics at the subnational level;
- Take non-state actors into consideration;
- Focus on the minority suffering the human rights abuses, so that self-identified religious minorities, even within intra-ethnic contexts, can be considered;
- Adopt a broad definition of religion that accounts for its behavioral dimension; and
- Acknowledge the multidimensional nature of religious freedom (as a concept that is expressed in different spheres of society).

The human security approach, complemented by the VAT methodology used by Owen, suits a great number of the formulated requirements, or at least approximates them to a large extent. Regarding the first requirement, I do not use any predetermined sets of indicators (laundry lists) as REATs do, but I try to inductively uncover the most pertinent human security threats to which the selected religious minority is vulnerable.

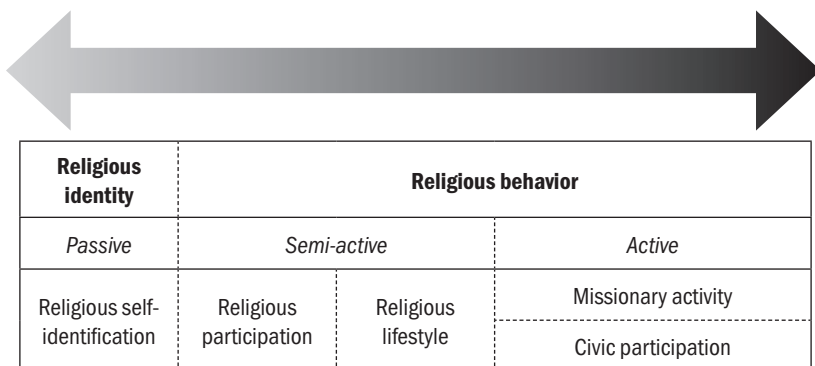
The second requirement is directly inspired by Alwang, Siegel, and Jorgensen (2001) and Owen (2003a), who recommend the observation of vulnerability at the most pertinent geographical level. It follows that the RM-VAT must have the flexibility to zoom in to the subnational level that is most relevant for the observation of human security threats. It is also inspired by the literature on subnational undemocratic regimes (O'Donnell 1993; Snyder 2001; Gibson 2005; Dabène 2008; Giraudy 2012).

The third and fourth requirements are implicit in human security's "shifting security" feature and the shift towards the subjects of security, respectively, as described by Glasius (2008). One important difference from Owen and other approaches to human security is that I focus on one specific group rather than on a particular territory. The focus on specific groups is not uncommon among VATs (Hoogveen, Tesliuc, Vakis, and Dercon 2004), even though human security has never been applied to religious minorities.

As for requirements five and six, they are dealt with by using a behavioral definition of religion and a multidimensional conception of religious freedom, respectively, to guide the application of the RM-VAT. This is, of course, the main departure from existing approaches to human security, which do not explicitly focus on religion. Inspired by Fox (1999, 2013) and (Hall 1997), I define religion as follows:

A belief system that includes a more or less coherent set of beliefs in which reference is made to (a) transcendental being(s), which is seen by its adherents as important for who they are and which influences their individual and collective behavior.

To operationalize this behavioral definition of religion, I develop a continuum of religious identity and behavior, ranging from religious self-identification and participation to missionary activity and civic participation (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Continuum of religious identity and behavior – Source: Author's elaboration

To account for the multidimensional nature of religious freedom, I propose that human security threats can be understood as restrictions on religious expression that can be observed in different spheres of society (Petri and Visscher 2015). Based on this model, six spheres can be distinguished: family, church, the social sphere (school and health care), business (the marketplace), culture (media, arts and entertainment), and government.

In line with the open-ended feature of human security, this categorization offers the advantage of broadening the traditional perspective on religious freedom beyond the church sphere (freedom of worship) and beyond issues related to the separation between church and state. It also serves as a handy memory aid to identify human security threats to which religious minorities are vulnerable but that may not immediately be taken into consideration in discussions of religious freedom or persecution.

After listing all threats, I categorize them using two variables: the continuum of religious identity and behavior and the spheres of society in which they are manifested. This allows me to interpret the human security threats I observe as 'restrictions of religious expression within any sphere of society', in agreement with the multidimensional nature of religious freedom (Figure 2).

| Spheres of society                                 | Continuum of religious identity and behavior |                                |                           |
|--|--|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
|  | Religious identity                           | Semi-active religious behavior | Active religious behavior |
| Family sphere                                      |  |                                |                           |
|  |  |                                |                           |
|  |  |                                |                           |
| Church sphere                                      |  |                                |                           |
|  |  |                                |                           |
|  |  |                                |                           |
| Social sphere<br>(school and health care)          |  |                                |                           |
|  |  |                                |                           |
|  |  |                                |                           |
| Business sphere<br>(marketplace)                   |  |                                |                           |
|  |  |                                |                           |
|  |  |                                |                           |
| Cultural sphere<br>(media, arts and entertainment) |  |                                |                           |
|  |  |                                |                           |
|  |  |                                |                           |
| Government sphere                                  |  |                                |                           |
|  |  |                                |                           |
|  |  |                                |                           |

**Figure 2.** Tool for the assessment of human security threats by sphere of society.

Source: Author's elaboration.

## 5. Improvements to religious freedom assessment tools

The RM-VAT is essentially a tool to organize data on human security threats and coping mechanisms. Thanks to its inductive nature, the RM-VAT makes it possible to observe religious freedom violations that are overlooked by REATs. It could inspire changes to the methodologies of the REATs that could easily be implemented so as to expand their scope. After all, qualitative research regularly produces insights that have informed the development of quantitative tools. In this way, the REATs would still be subject to the limitations that characterize quantitative analysis in general, but they could cast their net a little wider by measuring other variables that can be compared in a large *n*-format.

First, the REATs could be improved by developing variables that describe overlooked aspects that the RM-VAT reveals, such as the multidimensionality of religious freedom, notably religious freedom violations that occur in spheres of society other than the church sphere. This improvement could be implemented by creating more variables that constitute proxies for each of the spheres. To some degree, the World

Watch List of Open Doors International already does this, because it has elaborated a list of questions for five “spheres of life” (private, family, community, national, and church), but it does not specifically consider the social sphere or the business sphere. The RAS Project covers elements of some spheres, but could also be expanded. Particular attention should be given to variables describing subjective elements such as fear, frustration, or discouragement. RFATs could also be somewhat more flexible in their data collection process by broadening the number of sources used, which, particularly in the case of the Pew Research Center, is limited.

RFATs could also take the role of non-state actors in restricting religious freedom more fully into account. The Pew Research Center’s Social Hostilities Index (SHI) and the societal module of the RAS Project already do so, but these indicators could be unpacked to a larger extent. To account for subnational variation, RFATs could be applied below the national level, in line with the broader trend of discovery of the subnational dimension; for example, the V-Dem (n.d.) project takes the subnational level as its unit of analysis when making comparisons regarding the quality of democracy. Most RFATs state in their methodologies that they take relevant subnational factors into consideration, but only in a few instances do they actually treat the subnational level as their unit of analysis. Apart from some pilots by the World Watch List and the RAS Project, this has not been done systematically.

Another major blind spot in most RFATs is that they insufficiently account for behavioral characteristics of religion. To address this issue, RFATs could develop more variables that describe forms of semi-active and active religious behavior. Alternatively, the availability of more survey data about such variables would be helpful. In two 2018 reports, the Pew Research Center stresses the sociological relevance of making the distinction between religious identification and religious behavior in a Western context (2018a, 2018b). In Mexico, the RIFREM survey is a useful source of information about semi-active forms of religious behavior, but lacks questions about more active forms. A practical problem with existing surveys that needs to be addressed is that we often cannot determine to what extent active forms of religious behavior, of which only a few measurements exist and often only at the national level (one exception is the Latin American Public Opinion Project at Vanderbilt University, which collects data at the state and municipal levels), are a consequence of religious convictions.

## **6. Concluding remarks**

Due to space restrictions, in this article I have covered only the threat assessment, which is the most substantial part of the RM-VAT. My tool also contains two other parts, a specificity assessment and a resilience assessment, which I discussed in two earlier volumes of this journal (Petri 2016, 2017). The specificity assessment seeks to determine how specific these forms of discrimination are to religious groups and behav-

iors. The resilience assessment aims to do justice to the agency of religious minorities and to observe the coping mechanisms religious minorities use or could use to defend themselves against human security threats. In my PhD dissertation, *The Specific Vulnerability of Religious Minorities*, I apply the RM-VAT to three Latin American case studies, based on original fieldwork: (1) the vulnerability of actively practicing Christians caused by criminal violence in the states of Nuevo León, Tamaulipas and San Luis Potosí, Mexico; (2) the vulnerability of cultural dissidents among the Nasa ethnic group in the *resguardos indígenas* (indigenous reserves) of the southwestern highlands of Colombia; and (3) the vulnerability of Christians in Cuba.

I developed the RM-VAT as a result of my dissatisfaction with existing frameworks and tools to adequately observe the vulnerability of religious minorities in selected Latin American contexts. The methodology I developed enables us to cast the net wider than existing frameworks and tools, thanks to the inclusion of behavioral aspects of religion and the conceptualization in terms of spheres of society, and to consider all pertinent threats, including those that have a lower degree of specificity. Although the RM-VAT indeed observes aspects of the vulnerability of religious minorities that are not detected by existing tools and frameworks, it is not necessarily better on all points. For example, the RM-VAT is not suited for cross-national whole-of-country rankings and comparisons as the RFATs are. The RM-VAT also does not claim any causality or generalizable explanatory power, as other frameworks do. Therefore, the RM-VAT should be viewed as a complement to existing frameworks and tools, which continue to have their place. The RM-VAT merely highlights dimensions that are less intuitive but at the same time very real in terms of the human security concerns they raise.

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