Fighting from the Pulpit: Religious Leaders and Violent Conflict in Israel
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Abstract

Religious leaders greatly influence their constituents' political behavior. Yet, it is unclear what events trigger nationalist attitudes among religious leaders and why this effect occurs more among some religious leaders rather than others. In this paper, I examine the content of Israeli Rabbinic rhetoric during different military and political conflicts. Drawing on an original collection of Sabbath pamphlets distributed to Synagogues, I demonstrate that religious rhetoric is highly responsive to levels of violence for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I find that religious rhetoric and tone are more nationalist during conflict with the Palestinians, and that this effect is mediated by religious ideologies towards the state. In contrast, religious rhetoric does not respond to military conflict in Lebanon or other internal Israeli political conflicts. These findings highlight under what conditions religious leaders infuse conflict with a religious tone, arguably making it harder to gain support for political compromise among the religious public.