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Response to Zeev Maoz

In his response to my open letter Zeev Maoz admits that “we [Maoz & Henderson] did make a mistake, and the mistake is mine.” He admits that this mistake is a “grievous error.” He explains how the error occurred. He also begins the process of reanalyzing the data using a correct version of the RAS data thought he uses the round 3 version of the Religion and State dataset (RAS3) rather than RAS2. I urge him to continue this process and post the new results as an online appendix or perhaps correct the PDF version of the book.

Maoz and I both agree that, in his words, “Fox's entire argument is based on the use of 1989 data which his dataset doesn't cover (he correctly states his data starts at 1990.)” My argument was and remains that results from faulty data cannot be considered reliable. Nearly all of my critiques derive from that basic principle. Maoz admits to this error and has begun the process of correcting it. I find this aspect of his response completely appropriate and satisfactory.

There are still a few less important issues he does not address to my satisfaction. First, he does not discuss whether the 1989 data used for the book included the 21 not-yet-independent countries I list in my original critique. However, as he admits that the 1989 data in its entirety was a mistake and has removed the 1989 data from the data he is using to correct the book's analysis this point is essentially moot.

Second, he claims “all of our data, methods, measured, and estimation procedures are fully documented, both in the text of the various chapters, and even more so in detailed appendices at the end of each empirical chapter.” Yet there is no appendix at the end of chapter 2 which contains the analysis at the core of my critique. I examined all appendices and found no answers to the questions I pose in my original open letter. I am willing to retract this statement should Maoz refer me to a direct quote (or quotes) with a page reference (or references) from the book that answers all the questions I pose regarding the lack of proper documentation in the book.

Third, in his corrected analysis he explains that in order to calculate his what he now calls “normalizing” of the RAS data he, in a manner still not fully explained, he takes into account the number of states included in the COW dataset. I find it odd that he would essentially use the number of observations in one dataset (COW) to modify a dataset with a different number of observations (RAS). This is especially true as he explicitly discusses in his response how RAS and COW conceive of independent political entities differently. I am not convinced that this method for “normalizing” is valid but at least he provides more clarity on how he arrived at this result. I am perfectly happy to let the readers decide whether they are convinced by this result, though it might be more (or perhaps less) convincing if Maoz would share the exact formula and method used to “normalize” the RAS data in a manner that could be replicated when he posts his full corrections to the book online.



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However, these issues are minor in comparison to the data error that Maoz concurs occurred. I would never have taken the step of writing the open letter over these issues alone.

There are additional aspects to Maoz's response in which he presents some occasionally colorful critiques of my critique, the RAS dataset, my academic work, the religion and IR community in general, and my choice of venue for the open letter, among other things. I will leave it to you to read them in his response as I do not care to address them other than to note that (1) Zeev Maoz and I continue to disagree greatly on the nature and validity of much of the literature on religion and world politics. Such disagreements are a normal part of academic discourse and, as I stated in my open letter, Zeev Maoz and Errol Henderson are entitled to their opinions. I expect the larger academic community will decide for themselves on these issues, which is as it should be. (2) While my family name is Fox, I have no association of any kind with Fox News nor, to my knowledge, does anyone else in my family.

Rather, I prefer to concentrate on what I consider the core issues of my original critique. I believe I have addressed them. I feel that Maoz has satisfactorily admitted to my core critiques and has begun to address the issue appropriately. In that spirit, I thank Zeev Maoz for admitting his error as well as encourage him to continue the process of performing all analyses on the book with the corrected data and to make all of these results available in some manner to the wider academic community.

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