

<b>CHURCH &amp; STATE:</b>	<b>BYU Student Looks at Religious Tolerance and Democracy</b>
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For his honors thesis, BYU political science student, Daniel Butler, has been studying the impact religious tolerance has on democratization in nations around the world. The idea first came to him after serving an LDS mission in Russia and traveling to Ukraine for Study Abroad.

He gathered statistics from the Center for Religious Freedom's Religious Tolerance Rankings, noticing that where most research groups look at "negative freedoms," such as terrorism and human rights abuses, they don't list positive freedoms. "Freedoms to do things, of free speech, religious freedom," he says. Butler likes that religious tolerance incorporates other positive freedoms, such as speech and assembly.

Instead of looking at nations across the board, Butler studied them across their borders. Specifically, he analyzed countries' shared beliefs over shared borders as a determinate of religious tolerance by government institutions. For example, in South America many countries share religious beliefs that create a common culture and influence government decisions.

**BUTLER ATTRIBUTES THE PURSUIT OF HIS  
INTEREST FOR GETTING INTO STANFORD'S  
GRADUATE PROGRAM**

**AND FOR RECEIVING A COVETED  
FELLOWSHIP FROM THE NATIONAL SCIENCE  
FOUNDATION.**

Butler includes three important variables in his test for religious tolerance: democracy, population size and national wealth. His findings indicate, for example, that in highly populated countries government elites are more likely to restrict religious freedom because they see it as competition for hearts and minds and a possible threat to their control (religion tends to unite its members). In wealthier nations the populace is less likely to be discontent and therefore less likely to rebel. In response, governments are more apt to grant their citizens greater freedoms, including religious freedom.

Butler correlated his data with that of other governmental and non-governmental sources, including the U.S. State Department, and presented his research to faculty members in June for his honors thesis. He will graduate this August and is headed to Stanford to work on his doctoral degree in Political Science.

The senior from St. Paul, Minnesota changed his major from biochemistry after he was persuaded, indirectly, by one of his professors to change his course of study, and the direction of his life. “He was so excited about what he taught,” observes Butler, “that I wanted to be as excited about what I was studying.” He soon changed his major to political science.

Butler’s interest lies in politics, statistics and research. He has conducted several research studies as an undergraduate, with one of them – a combined effort with political science professor, Ray Christensen – being published in a scholarly journal this fall. Butler attributes the pursuit of his interest for getting him accepted into Stanford and for receiving a coveted fellowship from the National Science Foundation. The NSF only grants about 10 scholarships a year to political science students.

**“PROFESSORS WOULD LOVE TO HAVE STUDENTS CO-WRITING PAPERS IF THEY WERE SHARING IN THE RESEARCH WORK,” SAYS BUTLER.**

Showing professors a willingness to help out and do research is the key to being able to do extracurricular work for one’s classes, Butler believes. “Professors would love to have students co-writing papers if they were sharing in the research work.”

“I’ve been lucky to have good mentors,” he adds, and he values the research assistantships he’s had. “I saw how he (Christensen) was doing it, how he was carrying out his methodology. I could use those same tools as I looked at my (research) questions.”

As advice to other students looking into the possibilities and advantages of doing research, Butler says they must change their thinking a little. Instead of putting off the most difficult theory and research courses in one’s major, he recommends taking those classes early in order to better understand and use the fundamentals of research. “Too often people say, ‘This is a hard class, I’ll take it last,’ and as a result their papers suffer,” he says. He says it also helps students know if the major they’re in is going to be the one they are passionate about.

From a student who has used research to get ahead in school and move on to a highly respected graduate program, Butler’s advice is worth heeding.