

# The Contributions of Religious Civil Society to the Rule of Law

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The Rule of Law has profound connections with the ideal and history of freedom of religion or belief, both in theory and in practice. At the level of theory, the ideal of the Rule of Law would not have emerged without background notions of higher law rooted in transcendent religions, and without a recognition of the need to recognize the reality of religious pluralism in modern society. Stated differently, freedom of religion or belief is one of the fundamental pillars of Rule of Law institutions. As a practical matter, religious civil society has played a profound role in generating rule of law institutions, from the impact of dissenting religious believers in shaping the fundamental right to freedom of religion or belief, to contemporary efforts of religious civil society institutions to press for rule of law institutions, including the rights of religious communities to acquire legal entity status, and more generally, to hold governments around the world accountable for maintaining the full range of Rule of Law institutions. On the practical side, the presentation will give examples drawn from programs focused on religion and the rule of law in China, Vietnam, Nigeria, and various other countries.