

## **Chapter 9**

### **Religion and American Public Opinion: Foreign Policy Issues**

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Although the study of religion's role in American political life has made enormous strides in the past two decades, the progress has been uneven. As other chapters in this volume reveal, scholars have put religious factors on the agenda in the fields of voting behavior, party politics and, to a lesser extent, public opinion. In recent years, there has also been a growing initiative to "bring religion into international relations" (see e.g. Johnston and Sampson 1994; Fox and Sandler 2004; Farr 2008). Indeed, several academic research centers are now devoted to that task. But few political scientists have considered the way that religion influences the foreign policy attitudes of the American public, despite J. Bryan Hehir's reminder that "religious convictions and concerns" have permeated U.S. foreign policy since World War II (Hehir 2001, 36).

This neglect of religion by political scientists has recently been highlighted by an enormous outpouring from journalists (Mead 2004, 2006; Phillips 2006; Clark 2007), historians (Boyer 2005; Guyatt 2007; Oren 2007), diplomats (Urquhart 2005; Carter 2005; Albright 2006), religion scholars (Northcott 2004; Urban 2006; Marsh 2007), sociologists (Martin 1999; Derber and Magrass 2008), philosophers (Singer 2004), and even literature and communications analysts (Domke 2004; Collins 2007). These authors have made strong claims both for the influence of religion on public attitudes on foreign policy and about its impact on political leaders. Such assertions are even more common overseas, both among intellectual elites and in the mass public. Indeed, no one reading

European journals of opinion, from *The Economist* to *Le Monde*, would doubt that European intellectuals believe that American foreign policy reflects religious influences, or that this notion has widespread appeal among ordinary citizens as well (Braml 2004; Kohut and Stokes 2006).

This emerging literature makes wide-ranging claims and draws from a capacious storeroom of religious labels. A major theme alleges a pernicious influence of evangelicals on American foreign policy transmitted through President George W. Bush, invariably regarded as a paradigm of that religious community's worldview. In this account, Administration policies have been shaped by key characteristics of an evangelical mindset: militarism, dogmatic unilateralism, dualistic moralism, nationalistic assertiveness, anti-scientific attitude, and apocalyptic attachment to Israel. This perspective is labeled variously as "fundamentalist," "premillennialist," "dispensationalist," "biblical literalist," or "messianic." And for most observers, these disturbing views are descended from those infusing earlier themes in American history such as Manifest Destiny or Special Providence (McCartney 2004; Judis 2005). Only a few observers find other, more redeeming, traits in the foreign policy concerns of evangelicals (Kristof 2002; Guth et al. 2005; Mead 2006; den Dulk 2007). In any event, literally thousands of articles in elite and popular journals of opinion—in the United States and abroad—have repeated and elaborated upon these arguments (see Guth 2006, and Kohut and Stokes 2006, for typical examples).

These claims are based on a simplistic view of American religion. Few such accounts consider the seventy-five percent of the American public that does not affiliate with evangelical churches, creating an analytic dualism that arrays evangelicals against

“secular” opinion (presumably everyone else).<sup>1</sup> Also ignored is the fact that Catholic and mainline Protestant churches, as well as American Jewish leaders, have long sought to influence both public attitudes and the decisions of policymakers, perhaps more doggedly and over a longer period than evangelical bodies. Nor does it consider the possibility that the growing unaffiliated or secularist public (Hout and Fischer 2002) may have truly distinctive foreign policy preferences as well. Thus, the emerging literature, both polemical and scholarly, often overstates the distinctiveness of one religious group, ignores the potential influence of others, and treats American religion in an invariably simplistic manner.

The task of understanding religion’s role in shaping public opinion on foreign policy faces other obstacles. While many observers exaggerate the impact of religion, other analysts counter such misunderstandings by denying its influence altogether. To take one example, Kohut and Stokes’ (2006) extensive and much-cited review of international and American opinion stresses that “with the exception of policy toward Israel, religion has little bearing on how they think about international affairs.” Despite the belief of many Europeans and Americans to the contrary, Kohut and Stokes (2006, 94) find “little evidence that faith drives support for the unilateralist U.S. foreign policy that has fueled anti-Americanism in recent years.”

As we shall see, there is substantial evidence that Kohut and Stokes are mistaken. But if political scientists are going to discover the threads of religious influence in attitudes toward American foreign policy, they must be willing to do the hard work of understanding American religion first. In this chapter, we focus on the ways that religious factors may influence public opinion on foreign policy issues. First, we review recent

political science perspectives on the shape of public opinion on foreign policy that have emphasized the coherence of competing public orientations toward American policy in the world. We then consider the extant work on religion and public opinion, discovering much incidental evidence that religion has had—and continues to have—considerable impact on those orientations, both during the Cold War and in its aftermath. The evidence is even stronger that religion has influenced critical religious and political elites: clergy, religious activists, party activists, and even legislators. This review concludes with an illustration of the advantage that a fuller accounting of religious factors can provide for analysts of public support for the “Bush Doctrine,” the central focus of much of the critical literature cited above, and a useful test case for the influence of religious factors on public opinion (McCormick 2004; Jervis 2005, 79-101).

### **Religion and Foreign Policy Attitudes in the Mass Public**

One of the most fascinating tasks confronting analysts of American foreign policy is to characterize public opinion on international issues. After World War II, the conventional wisdom was based on the “Almond-Lippmann consensus” (Holsti 2004, 25-40), holding that most Americans were uninterested in—and ill-informed about—international events, and that their orientation toward countries and issues lacked both coherence and stability. Given this lack of opinion constraint, public opinion exerted little, if any, impact on the policy process.

There is evidence that the American public’s interest in foreign affairs has not grown significantly in recent years, although some analysts would qualify that observation (Aldrich, Sullivan and Borgida 1989). Nevertheless, prominent scholars have

argued that public attitudes are in fact shaped by structured beliefs that are fairly stable over time, especially in the aggregate. In studies of the mass public (Peffley and Hurwitz 1993; Holsti 2004), elites (Chittick and Billingsley 1989; Holsti and Rosenau 1990), and both masses and elites (Wittkopf 1990; Page 2006), scholars have uncovered overarching attitude structures that allow citizens to be “cognitive misers.” For example, Wittkopf’s (1990) review of quadrennial surveys by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations (CCFR), found that Americans organize their attitudes around two dimensions: *militant internationalism* and *cooperative internationalism*. Taking a slightly different approach, Peffley and Hurwitz (1993) argued that the mass public derives specific opinions from two “postures,” *militarism* and *containment*. More recently, Benjamin Page (2006) has contended that Americans have *purposive belief systems* which, in aggregate, contribute to coherent sets of collective preferences on foreign policy issues. Although it is not possible to reconcile these various approaches entirely, it is clear that the dimensions involved include orientations toward the degree of American involvement in the world, willingness to use military force, and, finally, preference for unilateral or multilateral action on the part of the United States (see Barker et al. 2008).

Although scholars have made some progress in identifying such generalized orientations, there has been little sustained work on uncovering their cognitive and demographic antecedents. Ideology, partisanship, education, gender and other variables have been considered, but as Chittick et al. (1995, 323) noted a decade ago, “the truth is that we have hardly begun to identify such sources.” And religion is not often seen as a possibility at all. In an otherwise thorough review, Ole Holsti (2004, 163-239) does not even consider religion as a “background attribute” that might shape attitudes. In a similar

vein, Benjamin Page (2006, 233ff) argues (at least initially) that “demographic” characteristics such as religion contribute little to explaining policy preferences, at least in comparison with attitudes, beliefs and ideas largely independent of such traits. .

But is there evidence that religion influences attitudes on specific policies or, more importantly, on the basic orientations that structure public opinion? A review of relevant literature since World War II reveals severe limitations in our ability to answer this query. The problems discussed in Chapter 1 are especially evident in the foreign policy opinion literature. First of all, religious variables are seldom present in most opinion surveys, such as the important studies by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations (CCFR). Thus, we must often depend on analyzing occasional foreign policy items in other surveys that also contain at least one, and occasionally more, religious items. Although this lack of data has recently been alleviated in part by the advent of extensive polling on foreign policy issues by other organizations, especially the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, in most cases the number of religious variables available has been minimal, usually confined to crude measures of affiliation. Only rarely are detailed affiliation, doctrinal belief, and religious practice items present in the same survey with extensive batteries of foreign policy questions. Finally, there is seldom much explicit theorizing behind the choice of religious items or much understanding of how those variables might influence public attitudes on foreign policy (for a conspicuous exception, see Barker et al. 2008).

## **Religion and Foreign Policy Attitudes: The Cold War Era and Beyond**

The neglect of religion in foreign policy opinion studies is rather surprising in one respect, given Alfred O. Hero's (1973) pioneering (and massive) treatment, based on public opinion polls from the late 1930s up through the early years of the Vietnam War. An early leader in the study of public attitudes about foreign affairs, Hero had to work with broad religious affiliation measures, usually categories such as "Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish." He was careful to control for race when possible, and even for ethnicity among Catholics, but he lamented the paucity of belief and behavior items in the polls (Hero 1973, 8-12). Nevertheless, Hero's sophisticated understanding of American religion made even crude measures into useful instruments, revealing significant differences on important issues that often survived available controls.

Although the posture of religious groups varied with the specific international issues confronting the United States after 1936, Hero found some distinct patterns. Throughout the period, Jews were much more internationalist in orientation, followed by Protestants, while Catholics tended toward isolationism, as did Black Protestants. Such tendencies shifted somewhat after World War II, as Catholics and Black Protestants moved toward more internationalist attitudes, supporting American involvement abroad, and simultaneously providing stronger backing for multilateral institutions, such as the United Nations and international aid agencies. And while Catholics were more militarist and anti-Communist in the early Cold War ("militant internationalist"), by the late 1960s they were becoming less supportive of U.S. military ventures and more accommodating of détente with the Soviet Union and other Communist states ("cooperative internationalist").

Unlike later analysts less conversant with American religion, Hero was curious about the factors influencing religious differences in foreign policy opinion. At times, he thought religious differences reflected sociodemographic variation among believers: the isolationism of Black Protestants before the 1960s, for example, might be a reflection of their modest levels of education and income. Similar attitudes among “evangelical” Protestants might be due to the same background factors, while the internationalism of Episcopalians reflected their higher socioeconomic status. At other times, Hero saw the postures of specific traditions shaped by interest in the welfare of co-religionists abroad: American Jews’ concern for Jews in pre-war Europe and later, for Israel, fed their internationalism, as did Catholics’ worries about their Eastern European brethren under Soviet domination after World War II.

Hero also speculated that religious belief might influence attitudes in specific traditions: for example, white Protestants’ disdain for foreign aid might reflect the “Protestant work ethic,” while greater Catholic support for international programs might arise from Catholic social teachings. Of course, the absence of belief items in surveys made these observations purely speculative. Still, Hero was inclined to think that by the 1960s religious beliefs were becoming more important in shaping Americans’ foreign policy attitudes, a view supported by a good bit of circumstantial evidence.

A more testable hypothesis was that distinctive attitudes of specific traditions might stem from leadership cues, reflecting the considerable effort by mainline Protestant and Catholic denominational leaders to influence parishioners’ ideas about foreign policy, usually in a cooperative internationalist direction. But Hero was most puzzled by his finding that, despite leadership pronouncements, there seemed to be little or no difference



between regular church-goers and the less observant. This sparse evidence suggested that religious involvement was not an independent source of source of foreign policy attitudes, nor did it re-enforce the implications of theological beliefs, or buttress the impact of leadership cues among those in the pews (Hero 1973, 173).

Thus, Hero considered several possibilities for religious influence over public attitudes, but simply lacked the raw material for constructing a full understanding of that influence. No subsequent study focused on religion with his comprehensive sweep, but later analysts did introduce a multidimensional approach to religion—at least if their scattered findings are aggregated. Although the only study to use several religious variables simultaneously with a significant number of discrete foreign policy issues was Jelen's (1994) review of the 1990-91 ANES special panel study, we can combine his findings with a collection of other results to discover some intriguing patterns.

First, there is solid evidence that evangelical affiliation, orthodox doctrine, and high religious commitment fostered anti-communist attitudes and support for higher defense spending—the makings of the dimensions of “militarism” or “militant internationalism” discovered by foreign policy opinion analysts (Wittkopf 1990, 43-44;; Guth and Green 1993;; Hurwitz, Peffley, and Seligson 1993; Jelen 1994; Greeley and Hout 2006; Barker et al. 2008). These effects, however, varied by religious tradition and era. High religious commitment among Catholics encouraged anti-communist militancy after World War II, but then reversed effects during the 1970s and 1980s, perhaps with the Vietnam War (Gartner, Seguara and Wilkening 1997), or alternatively, with the bishops' letter on nuclear war (Wald 1992; Jelen 1994). Jews continued to hold distinctive internationalist attitudes, were more critical of the Vietnam War than other citizens (Gartner, Seguara and Wilkening

1997), but were more supportive of Israel (Greenberg and Wald 2001). Evangelicals, and especially theological dispensationalists, increasingly supported a strong alliance with Israel—one of the few amply demonstrated effects of religious affiliation and doctrine on foreign policy attitudes (Guth et al. 1996; Mayer 2004; Guth et al. 2006; Mearsheimer and Walt 2007; Baumgartner et al. 2008; Barker et al. 2008).

Like Hero, few studies have found that mainline Protestant affiliation produced distinctive foreign policy attitudes, despite the clear preferences of many denominational leaders and local clergy for “cooperative internationalist” policies. Sometimes this conclusion reflects the analytic use of mainline Protestants as a part of the omitted reference group in multivariate analysis (e.g. Jelen 1994; Page 2006), but more often it seems to have resulted from centrist stances of this large and diverse religious tradition. In the same vein, “non-affiliated” or “secular” citizens were usually ignored, as were other religious minorities, perhaps because of their small numbers. Some cross-national evidence hinted, however, that secular citizens may have been especially supportive of foreign aid and other “cooperative internationalist” ventures (Nelson 1988; Greeley and Hout 2006, 84). The growing number of secular citizens and of a variety of religious minorities certainly argues for their inclusion in any comprehensive analysis of contemporary attitudes (cf. Hout and Fischer 2002).

We suspect, then, that a full accounting of religious variables might not only help explain specific policy attitudes, but perhaps even attitudes toward the general orientations discussed by many scholars (Peffley and Hurwitz 1993). Of course, with the end of the Cold War, some scholars have detected the collapse of overarching frameworks for public understanding of foreign policy. Perhaps this reduces the relevance of religious factors (e.g.

with the demise of “Godless Communism”), but there are reasons to expect that religion might be even *more* strongly related to contemporary foreign policy views. First, the great elite and public debate over America’s role in the post-Cold War world still seems to elicit “purposive belief systems,” focusing on isolationism, multilateral cooperation, or unilateral interventionism (Page 2006). If, for example, Americans divide over whether the United States should engage in preemptive military actions, religious factors may influence those views through their impact on militarism, just as they did during the Cold War. In this vein, for example, Gary Jacobson (2005) found that “religious conservatives” more often accepted President Bush’s justifications for the Iraq War than did other citizens, corroborating earlier findings from a variety of polls (Guth 2004b). Even more fundamentally, Barker et al. (2008) have argued that “messianic militarism” may contribute to a general propensity to support militant policies abroad, based on core values of “traditionalistic Christian religion.”

Second, “Godless” Communism may well have been replaced as a competing value system by militant Islam. Samuel Huntington (1996) has famously interpreted contemporary international politics as a “clash of civilizations” rooted in conflicting religious worldviews. Even if this claim is overstated, religious values may still have a powerful effect on attitudes, as believers are influenced by their own traditions’ characteristic approach to religious competitors; some Americans, for example, might see Muslims as religious “enemies” (Cimino 2005; Smidt 2005). Other scholars have concluded that the conflict over globalization is dividing religious traditions, whether over international trade and its distributive effects or over the impact of massive immigration on domestic communities, raising the possibilities for cultural conflict (Daniels 2005).

Third, American religious leaders are playing an increasingly vocal role in addressing foreign policy. As noted above, mainline Protestant councils and clergy have continued a long tradition of “prophetic witness” on international issues, usually in a “cooperative internationalist” or even pacifist vein (Kurtz and Fulton 2002; Tipton 2007), but they have now been joined by evangelical Protestants, who are widely believed to have a more “militaristic” perspective on foreign policy (Marsh 2007; Barker et al. 2008). Similarly, both the Vatican and the American Catholic bishops have expressed views on a vast range of questions, from UN population control policies to the recent war in Iraq (opposing both).

Although Hero concluded that the pronouncements of denominational leaders and church council officials were not heard very far away from headquarters in the 1950s and 1960s, by the 1970s local clergy were in fact increasingly divided on foreign policy issues along theological lines. The earliest studies of Protestant clergy attitudes by Hadden (1969) and Quinley (1974) found clear divisions over defense spending, the Vietnam War, support for the United Nations, and action on world poverty. Theologically liberal “New Breed” clergy were clearly on the “cooperative internationalist” side, while theological conservatives were less active politically, but favored “militant internationalist” policies. Such divisions deepened by the early 1990s, as increasingly active theological conservatives favored higher defense spending, demanded support for Israel over the Palestinians, expressed skepticism about strategic arms limitation treaties, and gave backing to the *contras* in Central America, with theological liberals arrayed on the other side (Guth et al. 1997; Tipton 2007). Needless to say, the policy stances of religious elites

still differ substantially by tradition (and especially by theology), but if parishioners hear and heed such messages they may exhibit distinctive attitudes (Guth 2007a).

A final trend pointing to the heightened relevance of religion is the assimilation of foreign policy issues into the structures that shape domestic politics. Not only are domestic economic and social issues increasingly intertwined with international ones, but the very ideational constructs that inform domestic political choices—ideology and partisanship—now have more influence over foreign policy attitudes (Holsti 2004; Page 2006, 238-39). From the late 1980s to the present both partisanship and ideology have played a greater role in shaping citizen responses to international questions (Brewer et al. 2004; Jacobson 2005). This tendency may well reflect diverging stances of Republican and Democratic elites on international issues, as residues of the Cold War elite consensus disappear and as domestic divisions extend into international issues (cf. Powlick and Katz 1998; Layman and Carsey 2002; Green and Jackson 2007).

All this integration has occurred as partisanship and ideology have been infused by religious and cultural factors. This raises the possibility that the religious effect may often be indirect, transmitted through partisanship and ideology, often obscuring the total impact of religious affiliation, commitment, and beliefs. Although there is only fragmentary evidence available on this point, religious factors certainly seem to have structured the foreign policy attitudes of political activists and elites in much the same way that they have divided clergy. A massive study of large financial contributors to party PACs and finance committees in the late 1980s showed that religious commitment was strongly related to a scale tapping “hardliner/accommodationist” attitudes (Green, Guth and Fraser 1991), while a secondary analysis of the same data showed that the felt proximity to the Christian

Right among activists strongly predicted support for “militant internationalism,” and proximity to the mainline National Council of Churches predicted support for “cooperative internationalism” (Aguilar et. al 1997; cf. Barker et al. 2008). In the same vein, analysis of U.S. House voting from 1997 to 2002 showed that doctrinal traditionalism among members was negatively correlated with foreign policy liberalism (“cooperative internationalism”), but that affiliation with minority religious traditions (black Protestant, Hispanic Catholic, Jewish or secular) had a positive influence. In addition, congressional district religious membership, especially of evangelicals, had an additional independent impact, reducing support for cooperative international policies. Both findings survived controls for partisanship and other important predictors (Guth 2007b). Narrower studies of U.S. Senate and U.S House voting and bill sponsorship on issues related to Israel similarly demonstrated the importance of the member’s religious affiliation, with Jews and evangelical Protestants most supportive, but with less evidence of additional impact from constituency religious composition (Oldmixon et al. 2005; Oldmixon et al. forthcoming).

Thus, as party and ideology become more relevant to foreign policy attitudes, and as religious and political elites increasingly reveal religious differences on foreign policy questions, citizens may in fact exhibit distinct religious profiles on these issues, just as they do on domestic ideological and partisan alignments (Layman 2001; Guth 2004a; Barker et al. 2008). Of course, the causal direction may still be at issue: do religious perspectives influence partisanship and ideology, and thereby have an indirect effect on foreign policy attitudes? Or are the foreign policy views of religious groups shaped by cues from political leaders, and “absorbed” in conformity with religious citizens’ ideological and partisan

commitments? In either case, religion plays an important role in shaping attitudes and deserves attention.

At this point we consider the one major recent scholarly work incorporating religion in a rigorous analysis of foreign policy attitudes. Benjamin Page's *The Foreign Policy Disconnect* (2006) uses the 2002 and 2004 Chicago Council on Foreign Relations mass public and elite studies to investigate the sources of public opinion and its impact on policy elites. Fortunately, recent CCFR mass public surveys incorporate basic religious affiliation questions (Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Other, No Religion), and differentiate "evangelical" and "mainline" Protestants with a religious identity question ("fundamentalist, evangelical, charismatic, or Pentecostal" vs. "moderate to liberal"). Although this approach has many of the conceptual and measurement deficiencies discussed in Chapter 1, such drawbacks are partially offset by the size of the national sample and the range of policy questions asked (although split-half survey design often vitiates these advantages in specific analyses, both by limiting the number of cases for analysis and precluding much scale-building).

Page argues that demographic factors explain little variation in important attitudes, at least in comparison with *basic attitudes*, such as preferences for international involvement, partisanship, and ideology, but he includes dummies for four religious traditions—evangelicals, Catholics, Jews and Muslims—in analyzing specific policy attitudes. And a careful perusal of text, notes, and tables soon leaves the reader with the impression that religious affiliation may be more important than the author initially suggests. This is especially true of evangelicals, who stand out on many issues: in favor of defense spending, skeptical of the UN and other "multilateral" projects, supportive of Israel

and against a Palestinian state, opposed to the Kyoto Protocol on global warming, in favor of military action against terrorism, negative toward remaining Communist regimes and “Axis of Evil” nations, favoring expanded homeland security programs and intelligence gathering abroad.

All this evidence points to evangelicals as a key source of public support for “militant internationalism” or perhaps, “unilateralist internationalism,” a bit like the popular literature suggests (and in conformity with the careful analysis of Barker et al. 2008). Other religious groups are less frequently distinctive: Catholics were more positive about defense spending and homeland security, more likely to oppose diplomatic relations with Cuba and Iran, but also more supportive of at least some multilateral institutions and of a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty. They also put higher priorities on stopping illegal drugs from entering the country, spreading democracy to the rest of the world, and protecting American workers from the effects of globalization. And despite their small numbers in the sample, even Jews and Muslims were distinctive on some issues, and especially on orientations toward specific nations, such as Israel and predominantly Muslim countries.

In Page’s analysis the influence of religious affiliations often disappears when *basic attitudes* and *foreign policy goals* are incorporated in the equation, suggesting that they work indirectly through those variables. Thus, it is impossible to determine the total effect of religious affiliation on a specific policy item. And since mainline Protestants, other religions, and the unaffiliated constitute the omitted reference group across the analyses, there is no way to assess the influence of these affiliations. In addition, as the CCFR surveys included no measures of religious belief or practice, Page could not test



their impact, although he assumed that religious involvement would increase the affiliation effects (Page 2006, 268).

Although Page speculated little about the religious differences he found, he belatedly recognized their significance: “We were surprised by the potent effect upon quite a few foreign policy opinions of certain religious affiliations, especially evangelical Protestantism,” concluding that the “current centrality of evangelical Protestants in Republican Party politics has important implications for the making of U.S. foreign policy when that party is in power” (Page 2006, 234). Thus, although Page’s assessment of the contribution of religion shifts almost visibly from the beginning to the end of the book, his data and analytic approach made it impossible to say much about critical issues: the sources of evangelical attitudes, the influence of other religious traditions or secular citizens, or the effects of religious belief and behavior. Nevertheless, his path-breaking work not only confirms the importance of religion in shaping public opinion on foreign policy, but also tends to confirm the contentions raised by the new literature cited at the beginning of this chapter. It is to a test of these arguments that we now turn.

### **Religion and Foreign Policy Attitudes: A Full Accounting and an Example**

To illustrate the advantages of a fuller accounting of religious variables in explaining public attitudes on foreign policy, we use an example directly relevant to the central contentions of the recent literature on religion and foreign policy: public support for the *Bush Doctrine*. This much-controverted strategic posture emphasizes the necessity of pre-emptive U.S. military action to ward off potential dangers to its security, willingness to take action unilaterally without international backing, asserts special

responsibilities of the United States for world order, and supports Israel as a linchpin of Middle East policy (McCormick 2004; Jervis 2005). Indeed, many of the complaints cited earlier are directed at the religious contribution to these foreign policy stances.

To test for religious support for the Bush Doctrine, we use the 2004 National Survey of Religion and Politics (NSRP), conducted by the University of Akron and cosponsored by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. This survey is unique in possessing both a comprehensive battery of religious measures and a considerable number of foreign policy items. In Table 1 the dependent variable, support for the Bush Doctrine, is a factor score based on five such items (see the appendix for information on variable construction).<sup>2</sup> The table reports results from several alternative models of religious influence. As demographic controls, we use standard variables identified by many scholars as influencing foreign policy attitudes: political knowledge, education level, income, gender and age (Holsti 2004; Page 2006).

First, we evaluate the utility of the type of religious measures available in major polls on foreign policy attitudes, such as the CCFR surveys used by Page (Model 1) and by many Pew Research Center reports (Model 2) by replicating those variables in virtually identical form in the NSRP data. Next, we introduce fuller models based on the expansive religious batteries of the 2004 NSRP: one using a more detailed affiliation measure (Model 3), one that adds religious belief, behavior, and movement measures (Model 4), and finally, one that incorporates Page's *basic attitudes* to see whether religion has a direct impact on foreign policy attitudes, or such influence is channeled primarily through other, more proximate variables (Model 5).

Although our interest is in the religious roots of support for the Bush Doctrine, we note that demographics do have some impact on public attitudes. On balance, higher income predicts greater support, while extended education, political knowledge, age and female gender work in the other direction. Model 1, using the CCFR/Page religious classification and the four religious dummies he tests, shows evangelicals quite supportive of the Bush Doctrine, followed at a distance by Catholics and Jews. Muslims, on the other hand, are less positive than the omitted reference group of all other religious and non-religious citizens. These results are quite compatible with Page's findings in *The Foreign Policy Disconnect* (2006) on issues where evangelicals have distinctive policy preferences. Together with other demographic variables, the religious dummies explain almost eight percent of the variance, also comparable to Page's results on the sorts of policy preferences embodied in our Bush Doctrine score.

Model 2 reproduces the classification strategy often used by the Pew Research Center and other polling organizations, based on broad religious traditions, with white Protestants differentiated by "born-again" status. The main analytic difference from Page's strategy is that we have incorporated mainline and black Protestants in the regression, removing them from the omitted reference group. As in Model 1, the analysis reveals that evangelicals are significantly more positive toward the Bush Doctrine than other groups, but also shows mainline Protestants joining white Catholics and Jews in providing more modest backing. Black Protestants do not differ significantly from the omitted reference group of all other religious and non-religious respondents. Model 2 not only tells us more about the influence of specific groups than Model 1 but it also does slightly better in prediction, explaining almost nine percent of the variance.

What if we use a more detailed accounting of religious affiliation? Model 3 is based on religious affiliation variables from the 2004 NSRP. Although the choice of smaller traditions to analyze is somewhat arbitrary, we included several that we expect should differ from significantly from the national mean. The results exhibit the advantages of a more accurate and detailed measure of religious affiliation. First, while we discover once again that evangelicals buttress support for the Bush Doctrine (now with aid from Mormons), we are also able to pinpoint sources of opposition. In this analysis, black Protestants tend to oppose the Doctrine, as do members of non-Christian faiths (other than Judaism and Islam), secular respondents (those with no religious affiliation or salience), and explicit agnostics and atheists. Mainline Protestants and white Catholics—and, interestingly, Muslims—on the other hand, do not differ from the omitted centrist reference group made up of Hispanic Protestants and Catholics, all other Christian groups (such as Eastern Orthodox), and religious but unaffiliated citizens. As a result of the more accurate affiliation measures (and choice of omitted reference groups closer to the center of opinion), Model 3 produces a fifty percent improvement in variance explained by the demographic and religious affiliation variables alone. Substantively, it also portrays a modest “culture war” developing over foreign policy, anchored by evangelicals at one end, with seculars and various religious minorities at the other (Hunter 1991; Fiorina 2005; Barker et al. 2008).

Can we do better with additional religious measures? In theoretical terms, the vast literature cited earlier seems to require measures of religious belief and behavior. Although some authors are content to blame “evangelicals” (however defined) for the undesirable trends they see in American opinion (Derber and Magrass 2007), others

emphasize theological conservatism, Protestant premillennialism or dispensationalism (Judis 2005; Guyatt 2007), American “civil religion” (McCartney 2004), religious “dualism” or “moralism” (Domke 2004), or simply, American religiosity (Kohut and Stokes 2006). Obviously, if researchers are to justify the time and space for more religious items to test such assertions, they must produce substantial improvements in explanation.

Although we do not have space to test all the variant hypotheses offered in such accounts, we can illustrate the payoff from more sophisticated religious measures. In Model 4 we introduce several religious scores discussed in Chapter 1: theological traditionalism, religious activity or behavior (*religious involvement* in the table), and traditionalist religious movement identification. In addition, given arguments about the nature of public support for the Bush administration that stress moralistic dualism and belief in civil religion, we have included measures of both. As the table shows, the addition of religious belief, behavior and movement measures more than doubles the variation explained in Model 3, and triples that explained by Models 1 and 2, a dramatic improvement.

Not surprisingly, belief and behavior measures reduce the effects—often to insignificance—of religious affiliation (cf. Jelen 1994). Although evangelicals, Mormons and Jews are still slightly more likely to support the Bush Doctrine, and black Protestants more likely to oppose, the resistance of other religious groups is accounted for by their scores on belief and behavior measures. Indeed, adherence to civil religion, theological traditionalism, moral absolutism, and identification with traditionalist religious movements produce potent support for the Bush Doctrine. Although high religious

involvement is also associated with support for the Doctrine at the bivariate level, the sign reverses when the other religious measures are in the equation. In the absence of conservative religious beliefs, then, religious involvement actually works *against* support for the Doctrine (cf. Green 2007 and Barker et al. 2008 for similar findings and provocative speculations on this reversal). All these findings suggest considerable empirical warrant for the recent jeremiads by Bush Doctrine critics—and caution about accepting Kohut and Stokes' (2006) dismissal of religion as an influence over Americans' attitudes on foreign policy. Just because Americans *say* that their foreign policy views are not consciously influenced by religion does not thereby demonstrate the absence of religious influences.

We should emphasize that the extensive religious data in the 2004 NSRP permits many other kinds of analysis as well. For example, does dispensationalist theology bolster support for the Bush Doctrine, as suggested by many scholars (e.g. Northcott 2004; Weber 2004; Boyer 2005)? Including a variable tapping dispensationalism in Model 4 shows that this theology, while strongly correlated with support for the Bush Doctrine at the bivariate level, does not add explanatory power to the religious factors already in the equation (data not shown). Does theological traditionalism have a greater impact in some traditions than in others? A test with interaction terms for theology within the major Christian traditions shows that traditionalism's effect does not vary significantly by tradition. Does belief in religious pluralism—the idea that all religious traditions offer a way to salvation—enhance opposition to the Doctrine? Not beyond that produced by the other religious variables. Nor does a citizen's use of religious information sources or hearing pastoral pronouncements on related issues make any

difference. The sole exception is on the Mideast, where evangelicals are more supportive of Israel if a congregational leader addresses that region (cf. Barker et al. 2008). Does involvement with Religious Right and Religious Left groups influence attitudes? Not beyond that predicted by the variables already in the equation. These latter findings tend to confirm Alfred Hero's conjecture that direct influence of religious leaders and groups on foreign policy attitudes is minimal—and that the more likely impact is indirect through inculcation of explicitly *theological* understandings, with consequent implications for public attitudes.

Do religious factors influence public attitudes directly? Or, as Page asserts, is their influence primarily indirect, through partisanship, ideology, and more general predispositions toward American involvement in the world? The final test for religious variables is to include them in a full model with the *basic attitudes* emphasized by Page, Holsti and other scholars as the contemporary foundation of foreign policy attitudes. In Model 5 we add Page's *active part internationalism* to control for citizens' general propensity to favor American global involvement (Page 2006, 70-72). In addition, we incorporate two ideological and two partisan measures, with moderates and true independents as the reference points (scored 0). This procedure captures any asymmetrical effects, say, of strong liberalism or strong conservatism.

The results in Model 5 are impressive. First, as Page might predict, *active part internationalism* produces stronger backing for the Bush Doctrine, as do Republican identification and, to a lesser extent, conservatism. Liberalism and Democratic partisanship naturally work in the other direction, though not with as much force. Second, although religious variables contribute powerfully to partisan and ideological

identification (see Chapter 1) and thus to support for or opposition to the Doctrine, their influence is by no means entirely indirect. *All* the belief and behavior measures retain substantial and significant coefficients, although these are reduced somewhat by the introduction of the political predispositions, which they influence. The religious affiliation coefficients, on the other hand, almost disappear, with only the dummy variables for Jews and agnostics/atheists retaining significance. All in all, Model 5 performs impressively, explaining almost 44 percent of the variance.

By comparison, if political predispositions are added to Models 1 and 2, the variance explained is significantly less—38 percent in each case. And some of the affiliation dummies remain significant while partisanship and ideology become more important, as they capture a part of the “lost” religious influence (data not shown). On the whole, then, the analysis shows that we gain a better understanding of the religious influence over foreign policy attitudes by a more complete specification of religious variables: clearly it is religious and quasi-religious *beliefs* that are the most important factor, not affiliation *per se*, which is at best a weak proxy for those beliefs. And these religious factors have a considerable impact, working both through other political predispositions and, in at least the case of the Bush Doctrine, directly as well.

### **Conclusions**

We have argued that there are significant advantages to the inclusion of religious measures in surveys of foreign policy attitudes. Not only is there evidence that religious factors have influenced public opinion on foreign policy for many decades, but there is also reasonable suspicion that religious differences shape contemporary American



opinion on a wide range of policy questions. As our test case involving the Bush Doctrine shows, sensitive religious measures can help us understand the sources of partisan and ideological divisions over foreign policy in the mass public, and certainly among religious and political elites.

Of course, not all scholars and pollsters will want to use the full batteries of religious items used in the quadrennial National Survey of Religion and Politics. At a minimum, though, they would be well-advised to include detailed denominational screens, one or two religious practice items (especially attendance at religious services), and, if possible, questions on theological traditionalism, moralism, and civil religion (see Chapter 1).<sup>3</sup> Such questions will permit them to address the question of how religious variables influence foreign policy attitudes, and how these influences interact with other important demographic and ideational variables.

In this task the most promising line of inquiry is also the most difficult. As we have seen, not only have many of the authors addressing religion and foreign policy stressed various theological factors in their explanations, but empirically, belief factors have the strongest influence on foreign policy attitudes. Yet these are the most costly and difficult data to acquire. As a result, despite the outpouring of books and articles connecting theological perspectives (ranging from dispensationalism to liberation theology) with elite and public attitudes, there are few empirical studies that test these relationships, and most are based on local or purposive samples (e.g. Williams et al. 2006). Even the best studies often incorporate very limited religious belief measures, designed to tap only religious conservatism (e.g. Barker et al. 2008). The growing diversity of American religion makes it even more difficult to design survey instruments

that can assess the varying theological perspectives of myriad religious groups. But the importance of this intellectual project requires that pollsters and scholars develop a new appreciation for the power of religious influences and new techniques for measuring and assessing those influences.

## Endnotes

1. Even one of the few political science works to consider the influence of religion on foreign policy attitudes, the otherwise insightful article by Barker et al. (2008) focuses exclusively on “evangelicals,” without any consideration of how religious factors might influence other religious and secular communities.
2. We have used the Bush Doctrine score here for purposes of illustration, but analysis of the five individual items reveals very similar patterns of religious influence, although the variables predicting support for Israel are somewhat distinctive.
3. The work of Barker et al. (2008) suggests that items tapping dogmatism, nationalism, and authoritarianism might be useful additions, although these may well overlap with our measures of moralism and civil religion.

## Appendix on Variables for Table

*Bush Doctrine* is a factor score derived from a principal components analysis of five items tapping support for the Iraq War, willingness for the United States to take preemptive military action, support for Israel in the Middle East, preference for unilateral action by the United States over multilateral action in international affairs, and the belief that the United States has a special role to play in world politics. *Theta reliability* = .70. Additional items that might be incorporated include the respondent's evaluation of President Bush's foreign policy and preference for putting the task of spreading democracy as a high priority for American foreign policy. Inclusion of these items improves the reliability of the score even further and, when the score is analyzed produces very similar results to those in the Table. We have omitted the evaluation item from the score as it might run the risk of conflating partisan with policy considerations in the analysis. We thank Benjamin Page for this suggestion. We decided to omit the spreading democracy item on the dual grounds that it was a "goal" rather than a policy question, and was also measured with a substantially different metric than the other items.

*Active Part* taps Page's (2006) "active part internationalism" by asking respondents how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the statement, "the U.S. should mind its own business and let other nations get along as best they can on their own." Although this NSRP question is slightly different than the CCFR item, the marginal distributions for agreement and disagreement are almost identical in the respective 2004 surveys.

*Theological Traditionalism* is the factor score described in chapter 1 of this volume, utilizing five belief questions appropriate to the religious traditions of the vast majority of Americans. *Religious involvement* is the religious activity or behavior measure also described in chapter 1, based on five common religious practices. We should note that a single measure of attendance at religious services is only slightly less powerful than the full factor score.

*Moralism* is a single Likert-scale item asking how strongly the respondent agreed or disagreed with the statement: “There are clear and absolute standards for right and wrong.”

*Civil religion* is a factor score derived from a principal components analysis of nine items tapping the respondent’s preferences for religion in public life. These include the perceived importance of religious faith to the respondent’s own choices, whether or not the President should have a strong religious faith, the appropriateness of the involvement of religious groups and institutions in the political process, and similar queries. *Theta reliability* = .87.

*Traditionalist movement* is the alternative religious movement measure described in chapter 1, based on two questions asking respondents whether they usually identified with those attempting to preserve or to modernize their own faith tradition.

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**Table 1**  
**Support for Bush Doctrine by Religious Variables, National Survey of Religion and Politics, 2004**  
 (standardized OLS regression coefficients)

	<i>Model 1</i> <i>Demographics</i> <i>And Tradition</i> <i>(Evangelical by</i> <i>ID)</i>	<i>Model 2</i> <i>Demographics</i> <i>And Tradition</i> <i>(Evangelical</i> <i>Born-Again)</i>	<i>Model 3</i> <i>Demographics</i> <i>And Tradition</i> <i>Based on</i> <i>Detailed</i> <i>Affiliation</i>	<i>Model 4</i> <i>Demographics</i> <i>Tradition,</i> <i>Beliefs and</i> <i>Behavior</i>	<i>Model 5</i> <i>Demographics</i> <i>Tradition,</i> <i>Beliefs,</i> <i>Behavior, and</i> <i>“Dispositions”</i>
<b>Demographic Controls</b>					
Political Knowledge	-.05*	-.05*	-.05*	-.03	-.08***
Education	-.07**	-.06**	-.06**	-.01	-.03
Income	.11***	.12***	.13***	.10***	.04*
Female	-.06***	-.07***	-.08***	-.08***	-.04**
Age	-.07**	-.08**	-.08***	-.03	-.04*
<b>Religious Tradition</b>					
Evangelical	.23***	.27***	.22***	.07**	.01
Latter-day Saints	----	----	.08***	.05**	.01
Mainline Protestant	----	.07***	.01	.02	-.02
White Catholic	.05*	.08***	.03	.03	-.01
Jewish	.06***	.07***	.06**	.10***	.08***
Muslim	-.06**	----	.01	-.03	-.03
Black Protestant	----	-.01	-.05*	-.10***	-.02
Other Non-Christians	----	----	-.07**	-.03	-.02
Secular	----	----	-.10***	-.02	-.01
Agnostics/Atheists	----	----	-.14***	-.03	-.05*
All Others	----	----	----	----	----
<b>Beliefs and Behavior</b>					
Civil Religion				.28***	.15***
Traditionalism				.16***	.08***
Moral Absolutism				.16***	.12***
Religious Involvement				-.10***	-.10***
Traditional Movement				.08***	.05**
<b>Political Predispositions</b>					
“Active Part”					.23***
Strong GOP					.25***
Strong Conservative					.09***
Strong Liberal					-.07***
Strong Democrat					-.08***
<b>R squared</b>	<b>.079</b>	<b>.086</b>	<b>.125</b>	<b>.270</b>	<b>.438</b>

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ ;  $N = 2731$

Start by marking "Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy" as Want to Read: Want to Read savingâ€¦! Want to Read.Â

Holsti surveys changing perceptions of the effect of public opinion on foreign policy since World War I. According to Holsti, this war transformed the issue of public participation in foreign affairs from a theoretical into a practical one that many postwar leaders had to confront. World War II and its immediate aftermath are equally significant. The Vietnam War stimulated a new wave of theory and research that challenged many aspects of the post-World War II view of public opinion. Not only is there evidence that religious factors have influenced public opinion on foreign policy for many decades, but there is also reasonable suspicion that religious differences shape contemporary American opinion on a wide range of policy questions. As our test case involving the Bush Doctrine shows, sensitive religious measures can help us understand the sources of partisan and ideological divisions over foreign policy in the mass public, and certainly among religious and political elites.Â

As we have seen, not only have many of the authors addressing religion and foreign policy stressed various theological factors in their explanations, but empirically, belief factors have the strongest influence on foreign policy attitudes. Policy Preference Mood: the domestic policy mood of the American public, net % of people who want more government. Stimson Index of Policy Mood. Higher score = more government, liberal; lower score= less government, conservative.Â

Methodology: Collected all public opinion studies on all question types on domestic and foreign policy issues. 6000 individual survey questions from 1935-1985, aimed at Chicago and Columbia. Especially looked at questions that were administered twice to gauge change over time.