



Divine Direction: How Providential Religious Beliefs Shape Foreign Policy Attitudes

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Despite recent scholarly and popular work regarding the role of religion in US foreign policy, we still know little about how religious factors affect the public's foreign policy views. This paper proposes one potential mechanism for influence—the connection of providential beliefs to foreign policy issues through a compelling religious frame—and tests the explanatory power of this approach through a nationally administered survey experiment. The “providential” orientation of respondents—the extent to which they believe in a divinely authored plan—is measured through questions that tap the nondenomination specific nature of religious beliefs. A multi-methods approach of means comparisons, logit analyses, and exact logistical regression indicates that when a foreign policy is framed in religious terms, providentiality is a significant predictor of support, even in the face of countervailing political beliefs. These findings highlight one mechanism through which religion can influence foreign policy attitudes, thereby demonstrating the value of further investigating the role of religious beliefs in politics.

From support for Manifest Destiny and the belief in America's “chosen” status (Bellah 1967; Toolin 1983; Mead 2001) to support for Israel and its claim to the Holy Land (Weber 2004; Pew Research Center 2008), religious considerations have often played a role in the public's assessment of foreign policy issues (Mead 2001; Inboden 2008; Magee 2008). Both scholarly and popular attention to the influence of religion on foreign policy has grown in recent years (e.g., Abrams 2001; Albright 2006; Johnston and Sampson 1994; Kengor 2004; Leffler 2004; Seiple and Hoover 2004), directing research efforts toward understanding the role of specific religious affiliations, such as evangelicalism, on political beliefs.¹ More recently, scholars have begun to focus on the specific mechanisms through which religion might influence foreign policy, motivated by mounting evidence that *religious beliefs*, which often cross-cut religious affiliations, might hold the most promise for future research (Guth 2009; Warner and Walker 2011).

Building on such research, this paper proposes one mechanism by which religion might affect foreign policy: activated providential beliefs. Providential beliefs are beliefs regarding the existence of a divinely authored plan and the role of human individuals in that plan. Providentiality is orthogonal to religious

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¹The label “Evangelical” and the broader attempt to classify conservative Protestants under a single label has been a source of some controversy. For a recounting of the variety of competing labels and their respective merits, please see Woodberry and Smith (1998) and Kellstedt and Smidt (1991).

affiliation; Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, and spiritual non-church-going populations contain providential and nonprovidential believers. This paper introduces a brief, nondenomination specific battery of questions designed to measure providentiality. Simply put, people who score highly on this battery believe that God has a plan and that they can help carry it out. Theoretically speaking, these types of believers—regardless of their specific religious affiliation—are more likely than nonprovidential believers or nonbelievers to see a divine mission in pursuing a specific foreign policy (e.g., fighting fascism, communism, or terrorism). They believe in a divinely authored plan, and they may see (or may be able to be persuaded to see) foreign policy as a means to that end. The presence of a compelling frame—a particular interpretation of a foreign policy that is emphasized over competing interpretations (Nelson, Clawson and Oxley 1997; Chong and Druckman 2007)—can persuade a providential believer that a particular foreign policy is in fact the will of God. Once this connection is made, a providential believer will be more likely to support the foreign policy in question.

A thought experiment may help elucidate the concept of providential beliefs, illustrate how they are distinct from other religious beliefs, and demonstrate their potential power in the foreign policy realm. Imagine two evangelicals attending one of President Bush's campaign events during the 2004 election season. Our two evangelicals are alike in many ways—both support the president and generally agree with his policies, both self-identify as evangelicals, and both are regular church-goers (perhaps even at the same church). The first, however, is a providential believer and the second is not.

At this campaign event, the president gives a speech in which US operations in Iraq are framed as a mission to spread God's gift of freedom. Specifically, the president declares that "freedom is a gift from the Almighty God for every person" and goes on to state that "we are freedom's defender. We welcome this charge of history, and we are keeping it."² For our nonprovidential believer, the freedom frame and the religious rhetoric in the speech may be appealing, but for the providential believer, these elements together can represent a declaration of God's plan for America—to defend freedom and ensure its availability for every person. The providential evangelical, firm in his or her belief that God intends for the United States to share and defend freedom, is likely to walk away from the speech feeling more strongly supportive of the president's foreign policies than the nonprovidential evangelical.

This hypothetical may help conceptually, but how can we know empirically whether the president's words had a different effect on providential and nonprovidential believers? How strong is this potential effect and what might its consequences be? Although the effects of President Bush's specific speeches are not examined here, a first look at the mechanism by which religious language, like the language used by President Bush in the speech above, might affect providential believers and their foreign policy attitudes is presented through the use of a controlled experiment.

After first offering a brief review of the state of survey research on religion and foreign policy, this paper introduces the theoretical reasoning behind the concept of providentiality and explores the power of activated providential beliefs on specific foreign policy attitudes through the use of a survey experiment. The results of this experiment show that employing a providential religious frame when describing a foreign policy leads to an increase in support for the policy among providential believers, compared to nonprovidential believers. Statistical analyses using predicted probabilities provide a measure of magnitude for these effects and indicate that religious beliefs may even

² The president did make exactly these statements on April 11, 2003 and October 30, 2003, respectively.

outweigh traditional political considerations when it comes to foreign policies that are couched in providential terms. These results contribute to our understanding of possible mechanisms by which religion may affect foreign policy attitudes and illustrate the potential explanatory value of accounting for religious beliefs.

Conceptualizing Religion

The main focus of research on religion, particularly in American politics and through survey research methods, has been on categorizing religious traditions, with less of a focus on religious belief and religious action (Kellstedt and Green 1993; Jelen 1998; Steensland et al. 2000; Layman 2001; Leege et al. 2002). Scholarship in this vein has led to a much more nuanced understanding of religious affiliation (miles from the “Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish” categorization common in prior academic generations) and has led to a greater emphasis on shared historical and theological developments when creating categories of religious belonging (Steensland et al. 2000; Smidt, Kellstedt and Guth 2009). Affiliation continues to play the central role in our understanding of the relationship between religion and politics, but research and theory both indicate that a greater focus on religious belief may improve our understanding of the topic (MacIver 1989; Jelen 1994; Guth, Green, Kellstedt and Smidt 1995; Guth, Fraser, Green, Kellstedt and Smidt 1996; Bader and Froese 2005; Finke and Adamczyk 2008; Guth 2009).

In fact, both Jelen (1994) and Guth (2009) have found that including belief measures in their statistical models greatly reduces—and in some cases even eliminates—the effects of affiliation. As Guth (2009) states, “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” (p. 258, emphasis in original). Beliefs thus form the critical link between the religious realm and the political, with direct and immediate effects (Wald and Smidt 1993:32). Of course, the ideal research design would include measures of belief, belonging, and behavior. Even in the less-than-ideal world of scholarly research, it is somewhat surprising that, of the three, belief has received comparatively less attention, although it may provide comparatively greater explanatory value.

Emerging research on the usefulness of studying religious beliefs holds particular promise for the field of foreign policy, demonstrating the statistically significant effects of both religious affiliation and belief on attitudes toward topics such as communism (Wittkopf 1990; Hurwitz, Peffley and Seligson 1993; Jelen 1994) and the Middle East (Mayer 2004; Boyer 2005; Daniels 2005; Guth, Green, Kellstedt and Smidt 2005; Smidt 2005; Phillips 2006; Baumgartner, Francia and Morris 2008). As Warner and Walker (2011), Bader and Froese (2005), Guth (2006), and others have pointed out, what is missing from the current literature is a theoretically grounded explanation of the mechanisms through which religion influences foreign policy. Without a strong theoretical reason to investigate religious beliefs—for instance, by including belief measures in foreign policy survey research—doing so is unlikely to result in an accumulation of knowledge.

The connection of providential religious beliefs to foreign policy issues is tested here as one causal explanation of how religion might influence foreign policy attitudes. The providentiality measure, discussed below, provides a specific, theoretically grounded measure of belief that is applicable across religious traditions and is easy to include in existing survey instruments. This study provides only a first test of the measure, however, and further research is needed to confirm its usefulness.

Providential Beliefs

The concept of providence, defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “the foreknowing and protective care of God (or nature, etc.), divine direction, control, or guidance” (providence, n. 1989), is not an unfamiliar one, but its application in the context of political science is more novel. People who hold providential beliefs see the intervention of the divine in daily and in global affairs. This tendency toward the providential—or providentiality—is measured here through a series of survey questions, described in the methods section below. People who score highly on this providential battery indicate a belief in a divinely authored plan and an active God who may use human beings to help accomplish that plan. Providential believers are guided through many of life’s decisions, including political decisions, by their belief in an ultimate purpose. Simply put, providential believers want to live according to God’s plan; they want to accomplish God’s will. This idea can be enormously powerful, particularly when providential believers are convinced that a specific political or policy position is in line with God’s will.

But how does religion get connected to politics? At least in the United States, religion and politics are not innately linked. Many Americans claim that religion is very important to them, but they don’t see the relevance of religion to political belief or behavior (Patterson and Kim 1991). In order for religion to be brought to bear on citizens’ political beliefs, a bridge between the two must be built. Sometimes this “bridge” is built through personal religious experience. At other times it comes through the influence of family members or neighbors. But at times the construction is undertaken by religious or political leaders in the form of framing.

How an issue is framed often prompts recipients to think about that issue in a particular way. Framing works when the “emphasis on a subset of potentially relevant considerations causes individuals to focus on these considerations when constructing their opinions” (Druckman and Nelson 2003:730; see also Nelson et al. 1997). Thus, a providential religious frame of a foreign policy may prompt providential believers to take “God’s will” into account when making foreign policy decisions. Without a compelling frame, neither providentiality nor other religious factors should matter for a foreign policy decision. The frame is the key mechanism through which religious considerations are brought to be bear on what would otherwise be exclusively political choices.

In the experiment described here, providential beliefs are conceived of as a latent religious characteristic. For the providential believer, the belief that God has a plan is always present, but the specifics of that plan (e.g., God supports Israel, God opposes a mosque at Ground Zero, God wants the United States to lead the world, God wants the United States to destroy communism) may change over time and across circumstances. This theological orientation places providential political cues as one way of connecting providential beliefs with political realities.

A frame can thus cue the latent providential beliefs of an individual and thereby increase support for a foreign policy. The survey experiment conducted here tests this mechanism, illustrating how a providential frame can strengthen support for a foreign policy that might otherwise be considered only in political terms. Additionally, analysis of the data provided by the survey experiment allows us to see how powerful the influence of providential religious beliefs might be. Just because the beliefs are present doesn’t mean they will be the determining factor. Party identification, gender, religious behavior, or any number of other variables may prove more influential than religious beliefs, but there are strong theoretical reasons to believe that providential beliefs are persuasive.

Research Design

The purpose of the survey experiment is twofold: first, to test whether differences in the foreign policy attitudes of providential and nonprovidential believers arise when a providential religious frame is introduced, and second, to evaluate the strength of any differences. Specifically, the statistical analyses will allow us to evaluate the strength of religious beliefs and political beliefs when the two are placed in opposition to one another. If the results indicate that providentiality has strong predictive power, it will provide support for the idea that religious beliefs can influence foreign policy when a compelling frame provides the connection.

The survey experiment, an embedded experimental design of the type pioneered by Paul Sniderman and his colleagues (Sniderman and Piazza 1993; Kuklinski, Sniderman, Knight, Piazza, Tetlock, Lawrence and Mellers 1997; Sniderman and Carmines 1997), was funded by Time-sharing Experiments in the Social Sciences (TESS). The instrument was distributed by Knowledge Networks using a Web-based delivery mode to reach a nationally representative sample.³ The main methodological benefits of experiments relate to gains in *internal* validity (Carnevale and De Dreu 2005; Horiuchi, Imai and Taniguchi 2007), but the fact that this experiment was distributed to a randomly selected national sample also bolsters the *external* validity of the results. The survey experiment was in the field from July 11 to July 26, 2008 and garnered a total of 473 respondents, a response rate of 63.1%.⁴

Data and Variable Descriptions

Each respondent was randomly assigned to read and respond to one of three hypothetical presidential⁵ statements regarding intervention in an international political crisis: either one of the two experimental conditions or the control condition.⁶ Each statement describes a humanitarian and military intervention in response to a civil war in the country of Moldova. The control condition was “unframed,” whereas the experimental conditions contained either an international obligation frame or a providential religious frame (sometimes referred to as the “international” frame and the “religion” frame, respectively).

Specifically, the control condition ($n = 73$) was a statement announcing that the United States was deploying troops and humanitarian aid to respond to the crisis generated by the collapse of the government in Moldova. In the control condition, the justification for the intervention is left intentionally vague. Alternatively, in the first experimental condition ($n = 73$), the statement the respondents read was exactly the same, save for two strategically placed sentences

³ There is both excitement and concern regarding the use of the Internet as a survey-delivery instrument (Sills and Song 2002; Berrens et al. 2003; Dillman 2007). Knowledge Networks KnowledgePanel® overcomes many of the downsides of Internet-based surveys by providing a random sample of adults in the United States using random digit dialing sampling methods that cover 99% of the U.S. population. Homes of sampled individuals without internet access are provided with a WebTV in order to access the online survey questions. More information about Knowledge Networks' sampling procedures can be found in the document “KnowledgePanel® Design Summary,” available at <http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/knpanel/KNPanel-Design-Summary.pdf>, accessed September 29, 2009.

⁴ While this response rate is not exemplary, it is well within the standards of the discipline (Johnson and Owen 2003). Half of these respondents received other experimental conditions not reported here. The total n for the analysis presented here is 222.

⁵ The president is identified as the author of the statements because presidents are seen as the leaders of American civil religion (Pierard and Linder 1988; Hughes 2003). A statement by the president that includes religious language is more likely to be credible and accepted than a similar statement by another government official. However, the experimental statement is hypothetical and set in a future time in order to prevent contamination from the respondents' feelings towards the current president.

⁶ The full control and experimental conditions are available in the Web appendix materials.

justifying the intervention on the grounds that the United States was party to an international agreement, the Black Sea Stability Maintenance Treaty, that required the intervention. The second experimental condition ($n = 76$) also contained the same description as the control, but in this case, the intervention was justified with the use of providential religious language. Two extra sentences regarding the divinely blessed status of the United States and its God-given duty to intervene to help in Moldova's civil war were inserted for the religious condition.⁷

The survey instrument contains standard controls for gender, ideology, and party identification, a question regarding the respondents' willingness to support United States involvement internationally, a question regarding the frequency of prayer, and a question regarding the frequency of church attendance.⁸ A *Religiosity* measure was created by adding together respondent values on the two questions regarding the frequency of prayer and church attendance, with higher values indicating greater levels of religiosity. This combined religiosity measure is often used in public opinion surveys (Yankelovich 2005), and combining these two simple measures avoids the potential biases of using just one or the other (Wald and Smidt 1993).⁹

Three questions are used to measure providentiality and are combined to create the providential scale employed in the following analyses, simply by summing the respondents' answers to the three providential questions. The combined measure of *Providentiality* is continuous, with values ranging from 0 to 11, where higher numbers indicate greater levels of providentiality. The three questions are provided below, with the coding for each response option in parentheses.

1. Would you say that religion provides little to no guidance in your day-to-day living (0), some guidance (1), quite a bit of guidance (2), or a great deal of guidance (3) in your day-to-day life?
2. The course of our lives is decided by God. [Strongly Disagree (0), Somewhat Disagree (1), Neither Agree nor Disagree (2), Somewhat Agree (3), or Strongly Agree (4)]
3. God has a plan and I have a part to play in it. [Strongly Disagree (0), Somewhat Disagree (1), Neither Agree nor Disagree (2), Somewhat Agree (3), or Strongly Agree (4)]

The interitem covariance for the three providential measures was .85, with a Cronbach's alpha statistic of .79, indicating that these separate measures are tapping into a similar underlying belief. Because providentiality is not often measured in survey research (but see Dougherty et al. 2011 for a recent study that finds significant political effects with a similar concept), it is prudent to examine the relationship between providentiality and other important variables. Although many religious-based measures are similar, the religiosity and providentiality measures used here are correlated at 0.35, indicating that although related, they are measuring separate concepts. There has also been some concern in the literature about religious measures serving as simple intervening variables to convey political views or party affiliation (Page and Bouton 2006). This does not appear to be the case with providentiality, which is correlated with party identification at 0.12

⁷ Although the statement is modeled after presidential language from the Judeo-Christian civil religious tradition of the United States, no specific religious doctrine or tradition is mentioned, leaving the interpretation applicable to many religious believers.

⁸ The full question wording and response coding are provided in the Web appendix materials.

⁹ Unfortunately, due to survey limitations, religious "belonging" measures were not included in the survey (Leege and Kellstedt 1993). Although some research has shown that the inclusion of belief measures may render the effects of religious affiliation statistically insignificant and therefore of less importance for this study, this shortcoming will hopefully be corrected by future studies, so that more can be learned regarding the relationship between providentiality and religious affiliation.

and ideology at 0.29. There is a weak correlation between ideology and providentiality, but providentiality is certainly not functioning as a proxy for ideology.

Similarly, the international involvement measure used here correlates with providentiality at 0.17. This measure asks respondents to place themselves on a 7-point scale where one end represents the idea that “the United States should only worry about its own government and not get involved with international problems” and the other end represents the idea that “the United States should be involved in promoting peace and stability in the world.” There thus does not appear to be an inherent relationship between international orientation and providentiality—a question about approval for the UN (not included in the models here) correlates with providentiality at only -0.0002 .

Of course, while providential beliefs are not limited to any particular religious tradition in theory, they may be correlated with some more than others in practice. A critically important variable missing from the data used here is a measure of religious denomination; it would be particularly useful to have a measure of evangelicalism to compare to providentiality. Collecting these data, in addition to measuring providentiality in non-Christian and non-US populations, represents the most important task for future research.

Returning now to the research design, after reading the hypothetical foreign policy statement, each respondent was asked whether she or he approved or disapproved of the action described in the speech (coded 0 for disapprove and 1 for approve). The response to this question is the dependent variable used frequently in the statistical analyses.

As mentioned above, this research design is set up to answer two main questions: first, whether differences in the foreign policy attitudes of providential and nonprovidential believers arise when a providential religious frame is introduced, and second, to evaluate the strength of any differences. Hypothesis 1 is the hypothesized answer to question 1. The statistical manipulations presented in the results section below also allow us to evaluate religious beliefs and political beliefs head to head; Hypothesis 2 is the predicted outcome of this direct comparison and the hypothesized answer to question 2.

Hypothesis 1: *Providentiality will be a significant predictor of approval in the religious frame condition, with providential believers being more likely to approve of the foreign policy than nonprovidential believers.*

Hypothesis 2: *The influence of providentiality will be strong enough to outweigh relevant political beliefs when the two are in conflict.*

Results

I evaluate these hypotheses in the following three sections through a variety of statistical methods, beginning with a simple comparison of mean approval values across conditions and levels of providentiality. The difference in means tests address **Hypothesis 1** directly. I then use two approaches to model approval of the foreign policy as a function of *Providentiality*, *International Involvement*, and the other control variables discussed above. The choice of model is made challenging by the fact that, due to the multiple experimental conditions and average response rate, each condition ended up with only about 75 respondents. The modeling choices available for an N of this size are all suboptimal. I address this challenge through a two-pronged approach, using two models that, while suffering from different individual weaknesses, together suggest that the common findings are robust. First, I employ logit analyses and predicted probabilities as the main method and discuss the results in detail below. The logit models speak directly to **Hypothesis 1** and indirectly to **Hypothesis 2**, with the predicted

probabilities providing a direct test of **Hypothesis 2**. Second, I buttress these findings with additional exact logistical regression models that test **Hypothesis 1** directly and **Hypothesis 2** indirectly. The results of each approach support the hypotheses, providing for greater confidence in the findings overall.

Means Comparison

The first and simplest step in evaluating **Hypothesis 1** is to examine the differences in levels of support between providential and nonprovidential believers across the three conditions. Because the survey experiment was distributed to a random national sample, there is good reason to take the results of this comparison at face value (indeed, some political scientists would argue that no further statistical analyses are necessary; for instance, see Freedman 2009). The providential independent variable is continuous, making difference of means tests cumbersome, and so three providential categories were created using obvious cut points in the data (i.e., points at which major increases or declines in the number of people in each category were apparent). The first and least providential category contains respondents whose providential score was between 0 and 3, the second and moderate providential category ranges from 4 to 9, and the most providential category contains those whose score is either 10 or 11 on the 11-point scale. This approach results in a simplified, categorical view of providential religious beliefs. The mean approval for each category across the three conditions is presented in Table 1.

The results of this comparison reveal two things. The first is support for the idea that providential believers are different from other respondents. In both the control and the religious conditions, the mean approval for high providential believers is statistically significantly different—and higher—than that for either nonprovidential believers or moderate providential believers. The fact that this difference is manifest in the religious condition (where the providential religious content is activated by a religious frame) and not in the international agreement condition supports **Hypothesis 1**. The fact that this difference is also seen in the control condition is unexpected. Perhaps, the providential believers did not wait for a religious frame of the issue; when the presentation of the foreign policy was left vague, these respondents may have supplied the frame themselves. Comparing these means is the first basic test of the data to see whether there are any differences between providential and nonprovidential believers across conditions. In order to further examine these relationships, we turn now to statistical models.

Logistical Regression

Next, I test **Hypothesis 1** using separate logit models for each condition. Logit models are appropriate given the binary nature of the approval measure.

TABLE 1. Mean Approval of High, Moderate, and Low Providential Believers Across Conditions

	<i>Control</i>	<i>International Agreement</i>	<i>Religious</i>
High Providential	0.8	0.7	0.714
Moderate Providential	0.431	0.55	0.355
Nonprovidential	0.286	0.307	0.1
Difference in means between high and nonprovidential	0.514*	0.393	0.614*
Difference in means between high and moderate providential	0.368*	0.15	0.358*
<i>N</i>	73	73	76

* $p < .01$.

TABLE 2. Results of Logit Models by Condition

Variable	Control		International Agreement		Religious	
	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error
Providentiality	0.3148	0.2125	0.3068	0.2227	0.3209*	0.1634
Religiosity	0.1475	0.3333	0.2427	0.3905	0.3874	0.3062
International Involvement	1.115*	0.4044	0.6458*	0.2373	0.3429	0.2139
Gender	1.347	0.8417	0.9369	0.8546	1.231	0.6294
Party Identification	0.2609	0.2501	-0.0838	0.2302	0.0641	0.2060
Ideology	-0.4597	0.3516	-0.1278	0.3264	-0.1811	0.2498
Constant	-6.8901	2.4148	-0.4322	2.528	-4.880	2.0412
Pseudo R^2		0.30		0.22		0.16
N		73		73		76

* $p < .05$.

Support for the foreign policy action in Moldova serves as the dependent variable, with the following independent variables as described above: *Providentiality*, *Religiosity*, *International Involvement*, and the general controls of *Gender*, *Party Identification*, and *Ideology*. The results of the logit analyses for all three conditions are presented in Table 2.

In the control condition, the hypothetical presidential statement recounts the troubles in Moldova and declares that the United States will deploy troops and humanitarian aid to assist. Explicit justifications were not provided for the foreign policy in this unframed condition. The results of the logit model for the control condition are presented in the first column of Table 2 and reveal that only one variable was statistically significant: *International Involvement*. Predictably, respondents who supported an active international role for the United States were more likely to approve of the intervention. Neither *Providentiality* nor *Religiosity* was significant. The theoretical role of providential beliefs outlined above emphasizes the importance of a link between religion and politics—operationalized in this experiment as a religious frame of the foreign policy—to activate providential considerations. Thus, the fact that such a link is missing in the control condition, and neither *Providentiality* nor *Religiosity* is significant, is suggestive evidence in support of **Hypothesis 1**. Here, the control condition model accounts for a good amount of the variance, with a pseudo R^2 value of 0.30.

The control condition provides a helpful baseline against which to evaluate the effects of providential beliefs in the religious condition—the condition of real theoretical interest. The first experimental condition similarly provides a baseline for comparison, as it presents a justification, but one that is not religious in nature. In the first experimental condition, intervention in the crisis in Moldova is justified on the basis of an international agreement. The logit model here is the same as for the control condition, but in this second model, approval for the international agreement experimental condition serves as the dependent variable. The results are presented alongside those of the control condition in Table 2. The international agreement model also shows support for *International Involvement* as the only statistically significant variable. This finding is expected, given that the foreign policy action described was explicitly framed in terms of an international agreement. Overall, the international agreement model explains somewhat less variance than the control model does, with a pseudo R^2 value of 0.22.

The final logit model takes approval for the foreign policy action justified in religious terms as the dependent variable, while keeping the rest of the model

the same. In this case, the providential beliefs variable does reach statistical significance, reported in the far right column of Table 2. Of the three models, *Providentiality* only predicts approval when the foreign policy is framed in providential religious terms. Thus, the logit models indicate that providential believers do differ from nonprovidential believers in terms of their foreign policy views, but only when those views have been cued with a providential religious frame—a finding directly supportive of **Hypothesis 1**.

We can also find indirect support for **Hypothesis 2** in the results of the logit model of the religious condition. Unlike the prior two models, *International Involvement* is not significant in the religious condition.¹⁰ The measure of approval for international involvement is both intuitively and statistically a major predictor of approval for intervention, and was significant in prior models, making the absence of its significance in this model, together with the significance of *Providentiality*, a first indication of support for **Hypothesis 2**.

The results of the religious condition do not find, as most framing studies do, that the frame is equally persuasive on any randomly sampled audience. The frame here only “works” on providential believers. This finding is important for two main reasons. First, religion is often considered distinct from politics, especially in the United States. These results indicate just how simple it may be to connect the two. Second, these results provide the first indication that, even in the case of an explicitly political issue, religious considerations may have a stronger influence than political considerations.

The variance explained in the religion model is lower than for either the control or international agreement conditions, with a pseudo R^2 value of .16. This finding indicates that the religious frame invokes a number of considerations that are not captured by the measures included in this model (the complex nature of these relationships providing another reason to not rely on means comparisons alone). The inclusion of *Providentiality* does improve the fit of the model in a significant way, however. Running the same logit model without *Providentiality* as an independent variable resulted in a pseudo R^2 value of 0.10. Including the providential beliefs measure increases the variance explained by more than 50%. A likelihood ratio test confirms that this difference is significant: $p=.037$.

Predicted Probabilities

Although the coefficients in a logit model cannot be interpreted directly, using predicted probabilities, we can interpret the relative impact of the independent variables of interest and test **Hypothesis 2** explicitly by evaluating the impact of *Providentiality* even for those individuals who would otherwise be extremely unlikely to support the foreign policy in Moldova. Thus, Monte Carlo simulations were used to expand the data set, provide a measure of magnitude (Simon 2000), and allow predicted probabilities for a hypothetical respondent to be calculated and then the level of adherence to providential beliefs to be systematically manipulated. Predicted probabilities are traditionally calculated by setting all the variables to their mean or modal values and then changing the value of the variable of interest—in this case, *Providentiality*. Applying the technique here results in a hypothetical individual who is male, fairly religious, holds moderate ideological views, identifies as a political independent, and expresses some support for international involvement.

The predicted probabilities of approval for the three conditions in this analysis are displayed in Table 3. Each row presents the predicted probabilities for the

¹⁰ Of borderline statistical significance in this model is gender ($p=.051$), with men more likely than women to support the intervention in Moldova.

TABLE 3. Predicted Probabilities of Approval When All Variables are Held to Their Mean and *Providentiality* is Varied from Highest to Lowest, Across all Three Hypothetical Foreign Policy Statements

	<i>Low Providential</i>	<i>High Providential</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Religion	17.27 (17.71)	82.78 (10.38)	65.51
Int'l Agreement	32.96 (29.08)	89.44 (10.57)	56.48
Control	30.38 (26.74)	87.58 (12.25)	57.20

(Notes. The predicted probabilities are based on the multivariate results in Table 2.

The hypothetical individual is male, fairly religious, holds moderate ideological views, identifies as a political independent, and expresses some support for international involvement.

The estimates were generated using the CLARIFY package (King, Tomz and Wittenberg 2000). The standard errors generated by CLARIFY are in parentheses.)

TABLE 4. Predicted Probabilities of Approval When all Variables are Held to Their Mean Except *International Involvement*, Which is Set to its Minimum, and *Providentiality* is Varied from Lowest to Highest, Across all Three Hypothetical Foreign Policy Statements

	<i>Low Providential</i>	<i>High Providential</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Religion	8.89 (12.01)	64.26 (18.99)	55.37
Int'l Agreement	5.67 (11.42)	36.05 (23.64)	30.38
Control	3.16 (8.75)	29.56 (26.80)	26.40

(Notes. The predicted probabilities are based on the multivariate results in Table 2.

The hypothetical individual is male, fairly religious, holds moderate ideological views, identifies as a political independent, and is strongly opposed to international involvement.

The estimates were generated using the CLARIFY package (King et al. 2000). The standard errors generated by CLARIFY are in parentheses.)

specified condition, the first column presents values with *Providentiality* set to its lowest value, the second column presents values with *Providentiality* set to its highest value, and the final column presents the difference between the two. The results of this analysis provide additional support for **Hypothesis 1**—changing the level of providential adherence in the religion condition from the lowest to the highest results in a 65-point jump in approval. This increase is higher than for either of the two other conditions—just as the difference in means was greatest in the religion condition difference in means test reported above—indicating once again that *Providentiality* is a significant factor when it comes to approval for the religiously framed foreign policy.

In order to subject **Hypothesis 2** to as rigorous a test as possible, I set religious and political preferences at odds. Table 4 shows the results of calculating the predicted probabilities by setting *International Involvement* to its lowest value instead of to its mean. Thus, the hypothetical respondent in this analysis is strongly opposed to the United States getting involved internationally. All other variables retain their mean or modal values.¹¹ The previous logit analyses indicated that *International Involvement* is a powerfully predictive variable; setting it to its lowest value here allows for a test of what might happen when political beliefs and religious beliefs pull in opposite directions.

Table 4 presents the results of this analysis in a similar format as Table 3. Of particular interest is the column on the far right, which represents the change in predicted approval as *Providentiality* is shifted from its lowest to its highest level. For each of the conditions, there is an increase in support, displayed in

¹¹ For comparison's sake, predicted probabilities were also calculated with *International Involvement* set to its highest value and *Providentiality* varied from lowest to highest. The results are similar to those in Tables 3 and 4, but with higher absolute levels of approval. The results are included in the Web appendix materials.

TABLE 5. Results of Exact Logistical Regression

Variable	Control		International Agreement		Religious	
	Coefficient	Odds Ratio	Coefficient	Odds Ratio	Coefficient	Odds Ratio
Providentiality	0.189	1.208	0.115	1.155	0.194*	1.214
International Involvement	0.848*	2.335	0.527*	1.694	0.262	1.299
N	73		73		76	

* $p < .05$

the far right column, but the greatest increase by far is in the religious condition, where the probability of supporting the foreign policy action described moves from about 9% to 64%, a very large 55-point increase. The increases for the other two conditions are somewhat smaller—for the control condition the increase is less than half of the increase for the religious condition.

The results displayed in Table 4 are particularly striking given that this hypothetical respondent is strongly opposed to international involvement. Despite this strong opposition, when the intervention is framed in religious terms, the providential respondent will support the intervention with a 64% probability. These results indicate that providential beliefs can influence foreign policy attitudes even in the most unlikely of circumstances. This finding supports **Hypothesis 2** regarding the power of *Providentiality* when pitted against competing political views.

Exact Logistical Regression

As a check on the results from the logit models, we can use exact logistical regression, a statistical tool more commonly used in the medical sciences, to provide greater certainty when working with very few cases (Mehta and Patel 1995; King and Ryan 2002). However, because this statistical tool was designed for use when the N is very small (i.e., less than 20), it is not possible to run a complete model. The results presented in Table 5 represent an abbreviated model containing only the *Providentiality* and *International Involvement* independent variables (the only two variables to reach significance in the logit models). Thus, the exact logit is a suboptimal model, but it provides a useful check on the logit results, where the relatively small number of cases leaves some room for doubt.

The results of the exact logit models support the findings of the logit analyses and directly bolster **Hypothesis 1**. In both the control and international agreement conditions, support for *International Involvement* comes up statistically significant. Only in the religious condition is *Providentiality* significant. Although the coefficient in the religious condition may look small, the odds ratio illustrates that for a one-unit increase in *Providentiality*, we can expect to see about a 20% increase in the odds of approving of the religiously framed foreign policy. We can also find indirect support for **Hypothesis 2** in the results of the exact logit models. Here again we see the empirically powerful variable of *International Involvement* come up insignificant in the religious condition, where it is possible that *Providentiality* muscled it out.

Conclusions

From the front pages of the newspapers to the pages of scholarly journals, religion (and its political implications) is receiving a lot more attention these days. Despite the increased attention, there is still a lot that we don't know about religion and politics. One thing in particular that remains unclear is a mechanism

for exactly *how* religion might influence political attitudes. This study takes religious beliefs—an aspect of the scholarly work on religion that has traditionally taken a back seat to affiliation and behavior—as the starting point for providing an answer to the question of *how* and introduces the concept of providential religious beliefs. The results of the multi-method approach employed here indicate that providential beliefs paired with a compelling religious frame is one potential pathway through which religion might influence foreign policy. When providential religious beliefs are brought to bear on a foreign policy issue through framing, the result can be a major shift in foreign policy attitudes. Although preliminary, these findings indicate that religious beliefs may deserve a second look.

The fact that these results are so preliminary means that the door is open for further research on the effects of religious beliefs, and providential beliefs in particular. This study is limited by the population surveyed—US respondents may be particularly receptive to providential foreign policy frames given the historical tradition of the United States as a divinely favored nation—and by the questions included—the limits of space prevent the potentially useful comparison of providentiality and religious affiliation. Further research is needed to understand whether or not the providentiality measure employed here can travel (Mockabee et al. 2001), and in what ways this measure may be related to other belief and belonging measures currently used in the discipline.

Beyond academia, these findings also have implications for policymakers and the spin doctors who prepare policies for public consumption. The results of the survey experiment indicate not only that activated providential beliefs influence foreign policy attitudes, but also that providential religious considerations are strong enough to outweigh even fervently held political beliefs. This does not necessarily mean that every presidential hopeful should start employing providential religious frames when discussing his or her foreign policy goals. Doing so may gain support from strong providential believers, but it may come at the cost of alienating nonbelievers. Looking back at Table 1, we see that one reason the difference in means test was statistically significant in the religion condition was because support from nonprovidential believers was so low. Providential religious frames may therefore be better suited for a small prayer meeting where the frame recipients are friendly and known than for a nationally televised address where the audience is much more diverse.

The complexities are just beginning to be explored through this initial study. The literature has been moving toward a greater understanding of the role that religious beliefs—in addition to religious behavior and religious affiliation—can play in the dynamic and complicated relationship between religion and politics. The contribution here is the provision of preliminary evidence that activated providential beliefs may be one mechanism through which the influence of religion is felt. Additional research is needed to assess the relationship between providential beliefs and other measures of religious belief, as well as between providentiality and religious affiliation—relationships which are not examined here. In short, evidence from this study indicates that religious beliefs in general and providentiality specifically may warrant greater consideration when it comes to evaluating foreign policy attitudes.

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