

Religiosity and Social Welfare: Competing Influences of Cultural Conservatism and Prosocial Value Orientation

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ABSTRACT This research examines the hypothesis that religiosity has two competing psychological influences on the social welfare attitudes of contemporary Americans. On the one hand, religiosity promotes a culturally based conservative identity, which in turn promotes opposition to federal social welfare provision. On the other hand, religiosity promotes a prosocial value orientation, which in turn promotes support of federal social welfare provision. Across two national samples ($N_s = 1,513$ and 320) and one sample of business employees ($N = 710$), reliable support for this competing pathways model was obtained. We argue that research testing influences of nonpolitical individual differences on political preferences should consider the possibility of competing influences that are rooted in a combination of personality processes and contextual-discursive surroundings.

A guiding feature of American capitalism has been the notion that minimal government intervention in the economy produces optimal social outcomes. Beginning in the 1930s, however, a large (and electorally successful) segment of the American population came to support a far greater degree of government intervention in the economy, following the mass experience of hardship accompanying the Great Depression. Since this time, federal economic intervention has been aimed in part at promoting the material welfare of Americans through programs such as unemployment insurance, Social Security, and

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various forms of poverty relief. Since the 1930s, the predominant electoral division in American politics has largely centered on support of (vs. opposition to) federal social welfare provision (Gerring, 1998).

What psychological factors contribute to attitudes toward the role of government in economic life? The recent worldwide economic downturn and current debates about the proper level of domestic spending make it especially important to understand the psychological factors that make people favor versus oppose federal social welfare provision. One important set of psychological factors, and our focus here, are those associated with religiosity.

Religion has historically exerted a great influence on American politics and social organization, but the nature of this influence has varied considerably across the country's history (Wilcox & Fortelny, 2009; Wilson, 2009). America's political culture is said to have been shaped in part by the Protestant ethic, which promotes individualism and personal responsibility in economic affairs (Weber, 1905/2002). However, through much of the 19th century, religious activism often promoted policies that would nowadays be described as economically liberal, such as free universal public education, restrictions on child labor, and the economic policies associated with the Populist movement (Hofstadter, 1955; Howe, 2007). This may be regarded as consistent with the emphases on assistance to the needy, procommunity behavior, and general prosocial values that characterize most, if not all, major religions.

Recently, however, religiosity has become associated with a "conservative" orientation toward politics, primarily based on a cultural conservatism encompassing traditional stances on issues such as abortion and homosexual rights (Guth, Kellstedt, Smidt, & Green, 2006; Layman & Green, 2005; Olson & Green, 2006). In political discourse, a "conservative" orientation toward politics is said to include not only cultural traditionalism but also an unfavorable view of federal social welfare provision, which is regarded as "liberal." Thus, a religiously based cultural traditionalism is packaged with opposition to social welfare under the label of conservatism.

The thesis of this article is that the two features of contemporary American religiosity described above—its link with prosocial values and its association in discourse with the label of conservatism—lead religiosity to have two opposing psychological influences on social welfare policy preferences. Religiosity is defined here as level of commitment to religion, including the perception that religion is important in one's life and the performance of religious behaviors (A. B. Cohen

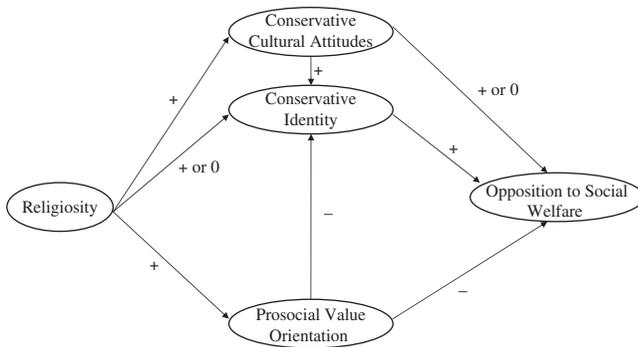


Figure 1

Theoretical model depicting competing influences of religiosity on social welfare attitudes.

et al., 2009; Hill & Pargament, 2003; Layman & Carmines, 1997; Stark & Finke, 2000). Religiosity appears to have increased in political relevance in recent decades (Fiorina, Abrams, & Pope, 2006; Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2005). Prior research has demonstrated relatively small and inconsistent relations between religiosity and social welfare attitudes (Davis & Robinson, 1996; Jelen, 1990; Johnson, Tamney, & Halebsky, 1986; Layman & Green, 2005; Olson & Carroll, 1992; Tamney, Burton, & Johnson, 1989; Will & Cochran, 1995). We will introduce theory and evidence suggesting that the absence of a strong, reliable association between religiosity and social welfare attitudes reflects the presence of two competing psychological pathways connecting these constructs. We argue that these competing influences operate on a between-persons level: Among some Americans, religiosity promotes a culturally based conservative identity that favors opposition to federal social welfare provision, whereas among other Americans, religiosity promotes a prosocial value orientation that favors support of federal social welfare provision. We subject this competing pathways model, displayed in Figure 1, to empirical test.

Religiosity and Opposition to Federal Social Welfare Provision

We argue that some contemporary religious Americans experience a force compelling them to oppose federal social welfare provision. Specifically, motivation for consistency among aspects of the self and the contemporary context of American discourse combine to pull a subset of religious Americans toward opposition to social welfare.

Motivation for Consistency

Psychological theory and research suggest that people are motivated to maintain consistency among the various beliefs, attitudes, values, and identities that comprise the self-system (Festinger, 1957; Heider, 1946; Rokeach, 1968a, 1973; Schwartz, 1992). Though there is disagreement about the mechanism underlying the phenomenon, it is well established that people adjust their various self-relevant cognitions to bring them into line with one another (Aronson, 1969; Cooper & Fazio, 1984; Elliot & Devine, 1994; Festinger, 1957; Harmon-Jones & Mills, 1999; Steele, 1988). Furthermore, integration of values and related aspects of the self is associated with positive well-being, suggesting that such integration satisfies a fundamental human need (Deci & Ryan, 1991; Donahue, Robins, Roberts, & John, 1993; Emmons & King, 1988; Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000; Sheldon & Kasser, 1995).

Other work has focused specifically on the psychological rewards that people experience when they act consistently with their identities (Sherman & G. L. Cohen, 2006; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). According to self-categorization theory, when a particular social identity is made salient by the social context, the individual's beliefs, attitudes, and values become guided by the norms associated with the relevant group membership (Turner, 1991; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). Indeed, people adopt the beliefs, attitudes, and values displayed by individuals with matching identities, perhaps because of motivation to bring beliefs, attitudes, and values into line with identities (G. L. Cohen, 2003; Goren, Federico, & Kittilson, 2009; Mackie, Worth, & Asuncion, 1990; Malka & Lelkes, 2010). Situationally induced salience of particular identities seems to amplify this tendency (G. L. Cohen et al., 2007; Wellen, Hogg, & Terry, 1998). Furthermore, social identities and the personal attributes associated with them are clustered together in memory (Reid & Deaux, 1996). Thus, social identity appears to be a key influence on beliefs, attitudes, and values.

Context of Political Discourse Shapes Conceptions of Consistency

In many life domains there exist socially shared views about which specific beliefs, attitudes, values, and identities appropriately “go together.” Social psychologists have long recognized that such conceptions of what constitutes consistency are often determined by the social context, rather than by logical or philosophical connections

among the various psychological elements (Converse, 1964; Festinger, 1957; Turner et al., 1994). When it comes to perceptions of consistency among political elements, or consistency between political elements and other psychological elements, pertinent information about what constitutes consistency is supplied by political discourse (Converse, 1964; Federico, Hunt, & Ergun, 2009; Jennings, 1992; Zaller, 1992). Since the 1970s, messages from political discourse have conveyed that traditional stances on cultural issues, such as opposition to abortion and homosexual rights, are “conservative” and that such conservative cultural stances are the most important political expressions of religious commitment (Adams, 1997; Hunter, 1991; Jelen, 2009; Layman, 2001; Wilcox & Fortelny, 2009; Wuthnow, 1988). Furthermore, since the 1970s, stances on religiously relevant cultural issues have become more strongly associated with self-identification as conservative versus liberal (Baldassari & Gelman, 2008). Thus, some religious individuals seeking integrated self systems are likely led to adopt conservative cultural preferences and, as a consequence of this, a general conservative self-identification (e.g., Guth et al., 2006; Layman, 2001; Layman & Green, 2005).

If a segment of contemporary religious Americans is encouraged to adopt a culturally based conservative identity, how might such an identity impact social welfare views? We argue that such an identity, combined with self-consistency motivation and the context of contemporary political discourse, promotes opposition to federal social welfare provision. A great volume of literature in political science indicates that people who are committed to political identities tend to follow the cues of those political elites who have matching identities in determining which political beliefs to adopt. For example, partisans tend to diverge on previously nonpoliticized issues after they learn of partisan elites diverging on these issues (Carmines & Stimson, 1989; Dunlap & McCright, 2008; Layman & Carsey, 2002; Zaller, 1992). Also, partisans tend to conform to experimentally manipulated cues regarding what attitude or value is associated with what political identity (G. L. Cohen, 2003; Goren et al., 2009; Malka & Lelkes, 2010; Rahn, 1993). Such evidence highlights the role of elite-diffused political discourse in the adoption of certain political beliefs (Converse, 1964; Sniderman & Bullock, 2004; Zaller, 1992). Since the 1930s, support of relatively generous social welfare benefits has been described as a “liberal” preference and opposition to social welfare provision has been described as a “conservative” preference.

We contend that such labeling causes Americans with culturally based conservative identities to “drag” their social welfare attitudes to the right of where they would otherwise be.

Thus, as displayed in the top half of Figure 1, we hypothesize that religiosity will predict cultural conservatism and, partly as a result of such cultural conservatism, conservative self-identification. Moreover, such a culturally based conservative identification is hypothesized to in turn predict opposition to federal social welfare provision.

Religiosity and Support of Federal Social Welfare Provision

We argue that the contemporary path involving culturally based conservative identity is not the only path through which religiosity predicts social welfare attitudes. Consistent with the contention of Allport (1954) and Rokeach (1968a) that religious sentiments are likely to promote competing influences on certain types of social judgments, we argue that religiosity also produces psychological pressure to support federal social welfare provision. Indeed, the doctrines of all of the major American religious traditions promote prosocial behavior, which many would regard as consistent with the aims of federal social welfare provision. Thus, we hypothesize that some religious Americans will be compelled to support federal social welfare provision via a pathway involving the valuing of prosocial contribution.

Prosocial value orientation has been extensively studied as an individual difference dimension under a variety of labels (e.g., Kasser & Ryan, 1993; Messick & McClintock, 1968; Van Lange, 1999, 2000). This orientation has been measured with both self-report instruments (e.g., Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996; Lee & Ashton, 2006; Sheldon & Nichols, 2009) and behavioral assessments (e.g., Dawes & Messick, 2000; Sheldon & Nichols, 2009, Study 4; Van Lange, 1999). Different theoretical conceptualizations emphasize different aspects of this orientation, but themes that run across many of these formulations are concern with the interests of others and the desire to cooperatively pursue widely beneficial outcomes (Bogaert, Boone, & Declerck, 2008; Messick & McClintock, 1968; Sheldon & Nichols, 2009).

Following others, we conceive of prosocial value orientation as a relatively stable individual difference that is measurable with self-report items assessing the desire to make the world a better place, the value of helping people in need, and concern about the well-being of others (e.g., Feldman & Steenbergen, 2001; Kasser &

Ryan, 1993, 1996; Lee & Ashton, 2006; Schwartz, 1992; Sheldon & Nichols, 2009). Sheldon and Nichols (2009, Study 4) found a non-significant association between a self-report measure of this sort and a behavioral measure of “social value orientation” involving a series of decomposed prisoner’s dilemmas. Sheldon and Nichols (2009) concluded that these two types of measures “tap different aspects of prosociality” (p. 615), with the self-report items measuring support of “helping needy others and creating a better world” and the behavioral measures assessing “cooperation in terms of preferring equal outcomes within dyadic interactions in which competition is ultimately counter-productive” (p. 616). Thus, it seems that the construct represented in self-report measures is more societally focused, and therefore more directly relevant to both religious teachings and social welfare.

How might religiosity relate to prosocial values? Some research suggests that religious individuals, in comparison to individuals low in religiosity, may be more inclined to hold prosocial values. Saroglou and colleagues found associations between religiosity and a variety of prosocial behaviors, as well as peer-assessed altruism and empathy (Saroglou, Pichon, Trompette, Verschueren, & Dernelle, 2005). Burroughs and Rindfleisch (2002) found a positive association between religiosity and procommunity values. La Barbera and Gurhan (1997) found a positive association between religiosity and generosity. Although Sheldon and Nichols (2009, Studies 1–3) did not find overall relations between possession of a nominal religious affiliation (vs. possessing no nominal religious affiliation) and prosocial values, they did find a relation between this crude indicator of religiosity and prosocial values among self-identified Republicans. The lack of an overall relation may reflect the fact that these researchers did not use a religiosity measure that captures the important variations in religious commitment among the vast majority of Americans who do identify with a religious affiliation (e.g., Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2005).¹ Research on values has shown positive relations between religiosity and benevolence values, which

1. In their fourth study, Sheldon and Nichols (2009) measured religiosity among a sample of third-year law students with a single item in which respondents indicated whether they had much, moderate, or little or no “spiritual or religious faith.” They found that religiosity only correlated with prosocial value orientation among Republicans. However, as the authors acknowledge, “religiosity was measured in a relatively unsophisticated way in all four studies” and therefore “care is warranted in drawing conclusions regarding this unpredicted effect” (p. 617).

include being helpful and forgiving (McCullough & Worthington, 1999; Rokeach, 1968b; Saroglou, Delpierre, & Dernelle, 2004; Schwartz & Huisman, 1995).² Also, religious primes have been shown to promote prosocial behavior (Shariff & Norenzayan, 2007). In sum, evidence suggests that religiosity is positively associated with various indicators of prosocial values. As displayed in Figure 1, we predict such an association in the present research.

If religiosity relates to a prosocial value orientation, how might such a value orientation in turn translate into social welfare policy preferences? Sheldon and Nichols (2009) found that self-identified Democrats (and supporters of Democratic candidates) placed higher value on helping others than did self-identified Republicans (and supporters of Republican candidates). Rokeach (1968b) found that self-identified liberals were more inclined to value being helpful than were self-identified conservatives. However, these findings do not address which particular policy preference domains are associated with prosocial aspirations. Feldman and Steenbergen (2001) did find associations between prosocial values (what they labeled a “humanitarian” orientation) and indicators of support of federal social welfare provision.

We hypothesize that placing high value on prosocial contribution will be associated with support of federal social welfare provision. Social welfare policy is geared toward helping people who are in need. Therefore, a lack of concern with helping others in need should, on average, promote opposition to social welfare provision and, conversely, a strong concern with helping others in need should, on average, promote support of social welfare provision. Thus, as displayed in the bottom half of Figure 1, we predict that religiosity will predict support of federal social welfare provision via a prosocial value orientation. Based on evidence of relations between prosocial values and liberal political alignment (Rokeach, 1968b; Sheldon & Nichols, 2009), we predict that prosocial value orientation will also have a direct effect on liberal self-identification.

2. Although negative relations have been found between religiosity and universalism (Schwartz & Huisman, 1995), it is important to note that indicators of universalism include content pertaining to unity with nature, broad-mindedness, and environmental concerns, in addition to content pertaining to prosocial behavior toward other people.

The Present Research

Using three samples, two of which are nationally representative, we examine the general hypothesis that religiosity promotes two competing psychological pathways to social welfare attitudes in the contemporary United States (see Figure 1). On the one hand, religiosity is predicted to have an indirect effect on opposition to federal social welfare provision via adoption of culturally conservative issue stances and conservative self-identification. On the other hand, religiosity is predicted to have an indirect effect on support of federal social welfare provision via a prosocial value orientation. We thus examine the potentially competing influences of a prominent cultural characteristic on the most important substantive political division of the last century.

METHOD

We used three samples to evaluate the general thesis that religiosity influences social welfare attitudes via two competing psychological pathways. We tested our hypotheses with three separate samples in order to examine the generalizability of the present findings across different samples and (in some cases) different measurement instruments. The first two samples were near-representative national samples interviewed as part of the American National Election Studies (ANES). One consisted of respondents to the ANES 1996 time-series cross-section (ANES, 1996) and the other consisted of respondents to the ANES 2004 time-series cross-section (ANES, 2004) who completed follow-up measures in 2006 (ANES, 2006). The third sample consisted of employees of large American corporations who were recruited to participate in a study of values and prosocial behavior. These three samples are hereafter referred to as the 1996 ANES sample, the 2004–2006 ANES sample, and the employee sample, respectively.

In all three samples, scores on each measure were computed for respondents who provided usable responses to at least 50% of the items composing the relevant measure. Composites were created by transforming items to range from 0 to 1 and then averaging the items. All political measures were coded so that high scores correspond with a conservative orientation or stance, and all composites range from a low score of 0 to a high score of 1.

1996 ANES Sample

Participants

The 1996 ANES time-series cross-section consisted of 1,714 respondents composing a near-representative sample of the noninstitutionalized

American adult population. All respondents were interviewed in person prior to the presidential election, between September 3 and November 4, and 1,534 of these respondents were reinterviewed following the election, between November 6 and December 31. The usable sample for the analyses consists of a subset of the respondents who completed both assessments ($N = 1,513$).

Measures

Respondents reported demographic information and completed measures of religiosity, cultural attitudes, conservative versus liberal identity, social welfare attitudes, and prosocial value orientation. The items assessing religiosity, conservative versus liberal identity, and social welfare attitudes, and most of the items assessing cultural attitudes, were administered in the preelection assessment. One item assessing cultural attitudes and both of the items assessing prosocial value orientation were administered in the postelection assessment. Within both the pre- and postelection assessments, the items assessing distinct constructs were widely separated.

Religiosity was measured as a composite ($\alpha = .80$) of religious attendance, prayer frequency, and subjective religious importance. To assess religious attendance, participants were first asked to indicate whether they attended religious services "Never," "A few times a year," "Once or twice a month," "Almost every week," or "Every week." Participants who attended weekly were then asked whether they attended only once per week or more often than once per week. From responses to these items a 6-point indicator was computed. Prayer frequency was measured with an item asking how frequently the respondent prays outside of religious services, with response options of "Never," "Once a week or less," "A few times a week," "Once a day," and "Several times a day." The subjective religious importance indicator was computed based on responses to two items. First, respondents were asked to indicate whether religion was an important part of their lives. Next, respondents who indicated that religion was an important part of their lives were asked to rate whether religion provides "Some," "Quite a bit," or "A great deal" of guidance in their day-to-day lives. A 4-point indicator of religious importance was formed ranging from 1 (*Not important*) to 4 (*A great deal*).

Cultural attitudes were measured as a composite ($\alpha = .64$) of abortion policy preference, women's role preference, preference regarding the protection of homosexuals against job discrimination, and preference regarding allowing homosexuals to serve in the armed forces. The abortion policy preference item asked respondents to indicate their preference regarding when abortion should be legal, with four response options

ranging from “By law, abortion should never be permitted” to “By law, a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice.” For women’s role preference, respondents rated where they stood on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*Equal roles*) to 7 (*A woman’s place is in the home*). Participants rated their preference regarding the protection of homosexuals against job discrimination by first indicating whether they supported or opposed such protection and then rating whether they did so “Strongly” or “Not strongly,” resulting in a 4-point indicator ranging from 1 (*Favor strongly*) to 4 (*Oppose strongly*). Participants rated their preference regarding allowing homosexuals to serve in the armed forces with a similar pair of items, resulting in a 4-point indicator ranging from 1 (*Feel strongly—should be allowed to serve*) to 4 (*Feel strongly—should not be allowed to serve*).

Conservative versus liberal identity was measured with a single item asking respondents to place themselves on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*Extremely liberal*) to 7 (*Extremely conservative*), with a midpoint of *Moderate; middle of the road*. Participants who indicated that they had not thought much about this were scored at the midpoint.

Social welfare attitudes were measured as a composite ($\alpha = .83$) of preference regarding government health insurance (rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 [*Government insurance plan*] to 7 [*Private insurance plan*]), preference regarding government domestic spending and services (rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 [*Government should provide many more services; increase spending a lot*] to 7 [*Government should provide many fewer services; reduce spending a lot*]), preference regarding government guarantee of employment (rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 [*Government should see to a job and good standard of living*] to 7 [*Government should let each person get ahead on their own*]), and ratings of whether federal spending should be increased, kept the same, or decreased for aid to the poor, child care, public schools, aid to the homeless, welfare, and Social Security.

Prosocial value orientation was measured as a composite ($\alpha = .74$) of these two items, developed by Feldman and Steenbergen (2001), rated on a 1 (*Disagree strongly*) to 5 (*Agree strongly*) scale: “One should always find ways to help others less fortunate than oneself” and “A person should always be concerned about the well-being of others.”

2004–2006 ANES Sample

Participants

The 2004 ANES time-series cross-section consisted of 1,212 respondents comprising a near-representative sample of the noninstitutionalized

American adult population. All respondents were interviewed in person prior to the presidential election, between September 7 and November 1, and 1,066 of these respondents were reinterviewed following the election, between November 3 and December 20. All participants were contacted for an additional interview in connection with the 2006 ANES pilot study, and 675 of these participants completed a reinterview in 2006. Of these participants, half were randomly assigned to rate the personal importance of single-item indicators of several values, primarily those composing the Schwartz (1992) taxonomy. One of these ratings served as the measure of prosocial value orientation. Thus, the usable sample consists of a subset of the respondents who completed the 2006 follow-up and were randomly assigned to rate the personal importance of various values ($N = 320$).

Measures

Respondents reported demographic information and completed measures of religiosity, cultural attitudes, conservative versus liberal identity, social welfare attitudes, and prosocial value orientation. The items assessing religiosity, conservative versus liberal identity, and social welfare attitudes, and one of the items assessing cultural attitudes, were administered in the 2004 preelection assessment. The remaining items assessing cultural attitudes were administered in the 2004 postelection assessment. The single item assessing prosocial value orientation was administered in the 2006 assessment. Within the preelection assessment, the items assessing distinct constructs were widely separated.

Religiosity ($\alpha = .86$), conservative versus liberal identity, and social welfare attitudes ($\alpha = .86$) were measured with the same items used with the 1996 ANES sample.

Cultural attitudes were measured as a composite ($\alpha = .69$) of the four items used with the 1996 ANES sample as well as an item assessing preference regarding whether same-sex couples should be allowed to adopt children (with response options of yes and no).

Prosocial value orientation was measured with the following item rated on a 1 (*Not important at all*) to 5 (*Extremely important*) scale: "How important is it to you that you help other people?"

Employee Sample

Participants

Participants were recruited from among the employees of several large American corporations to participate in a multipurpose online study of values and prosocial behavior in exchange for a \$15 gift certificate to an online retailer. Participants completed the surveys in January and February

of 2006. A total of 710 individuals (448 women, 255 men, and 7 unreported) provided sufficient data for inclusion. Participants' mean age was 38.04 ($SD = 10.57$), and 58.6% of participants were White, 17.9% were Asian, 6.6% were Black, 6.2% were Latino, 2.1% were East Indian, 0.6% were Native American, 0.6% were Middle Eastern, and the rest did not indicate a racial-ethnic group or reported "other."

Measures

Respondents reported demographic information and completed measures of religiosity, cultural attitudes, conservative versus liberal identity, social welfare attitudes, and prosocial value orientation through the course of the larger online survey.

For the religiosity measure, respondents rated the importance of religion in their lives on a 1 (*Not at all*) to 7 (*Extremely*) scale.

For the cultural attitudes measure ($\alpha = .71$), participants rated their stances on abortion on a 1 (*Strongly pro-choice*) to 7 (*Strongly pro-life*) scale and their stances on same-sex marriage on a 1 (*Strongly opposed*) to 7 (*Strongly in favor*) scale (reverse scored).

Conservative versus liberal identity was measured in the same manner as it was with the two ANES samples.

For the social welfare attitudes measure ($\alpha = .59$), participants rated their stances on the following two issues on 1 (*Strongly opposed*) to 7 (*Strongly in favor*) scales: "Greater government spending on welfare and public education" (reverse scored) and "Raising taxes among the wealthiest Americans" (reverse scored).

For the prosocial value orientation measure ($\alpha = .83$), participants rated the personal importance of two aspirations adapted from Kasser and Ryan's (1993, 1996) Aspiration Index on a 1 (*Not at all*) to 9 (*Extremely*) scale. The items were "To work to make the world a better place" and "To help people in need."

RESULTS

Zero-Order Correlations

Zero-order correlations between religiosity, cultural attitudes, conservative identity, prosocial value orientation, and social welfare attitudes, in each of the three samples, are presented in Table 1. The pattern of correlations was remarkably similar across the samples. The zero-order correlation between religiosity and opposition to social welfare was not significant in any of the three samples (absolute $r_s \leq .07$, $p_s > .05$). In each sample, however, religiosity correlated

Table 1
Zero-Order Correlations Among the Primary Variables

	Sample	Conservative Cultural Attitudes	Conservative Identity	Prosocial Value Orientation	Opposition to Social Welfare
Religiosity	1996 ANES	.33***	.24***	.23***	-.02
	2004–2006 ANES	.46***	.36***	.25***	.09
	Employee	.51***	.29***	.27***	.07
Conservative cultural attitudes	1996 ANES		.43***	.03	.28***
	2004–2006 ANES		.49***	.09	.28***
	Employee		.60***	.08*	.29***
Conservative identity	1996 ANES			-.05	.45***
	2004–2006 ANES			.05	.53***
	Employee			-.04	.43***
Prosocial value orientation	1996 ANES				-.16***
	2004–2006 ANES				-.17***
	Employee				-.19***

Note. $N = 1,513$ for 1996 ANES sample, 320 for 2004–2006 ANES sample, and 710 for employee sample.

*** $p < .001$. * $p < .05$.

positively with conservative cultural attitudes ($rs \geq .33$, $ps < .001$), conservative identity ($rs \geq .24$, $ps < .001$), and prosocial value orientation ($rs \geq .23$, $ps < .001$). Each of these three variables, in turn, correlated significantly with social welfare attitudes (absolute $rs \geq .16$, $ps < .01$). Finally, conservative identity correlated positively with conservative cultural attitudes in each sample ($rs \geq .43$, $ps < .001$).

Model Selection

In each sample, we fit two versions of the competing pathways model to the observed variance/covariance matrix; one of these models was identical to the theoretical model depicted in Figure 1, and the second model added a direct path from religiosity to opposition to social welfare. The model depicted in Figure 1 closely fit the data in the 2004–2006 ANES sample ($\chi^2(2) = 3.67$, $p > .05$; CFI = .995, RMSEA = .051, $p_{CLOSE} >$

.05) and the employee sample ($\chi^2(2) = 4.48, p > .05$; CFI = .997, RMSEA = .042, $p_{CLOSE} > .05$). Moreover, adding a direct path from religiosity to opposition to social welfare did not significantly improve model fit in either sample ($\chi^2s(1) \leq 3.24, ps > .05$). We therefore retained the model depicted in Figure 1 as the final model in these two samples.

In the 1996 ANES sample, the model depicted in Figure 1 did not fit the data as closely as in the two other samples ($\chi^2(2) = 34.93, p < .05$; CFI = .968, RMSEA = .104, $p_{CLOSE} < .05$). Moreover, in this sample, adding a direct path from religiosity to opposition to social welfare significantly improved model fit ($\chi^2(1) = 30.35, p < .05$) and resulted in a close-fitting model (CFI = .996, RMSEA = .049, $p_{CLOSE} > .05$). We therefore retained the model including this direct path as the final model in this sample.

Testing the Competing Pathways Model

1996 ANES Sample

Standardized path coefficients for the final model in the 1996 ANES sample (estimated using the bias-corrected bootstrap method, with

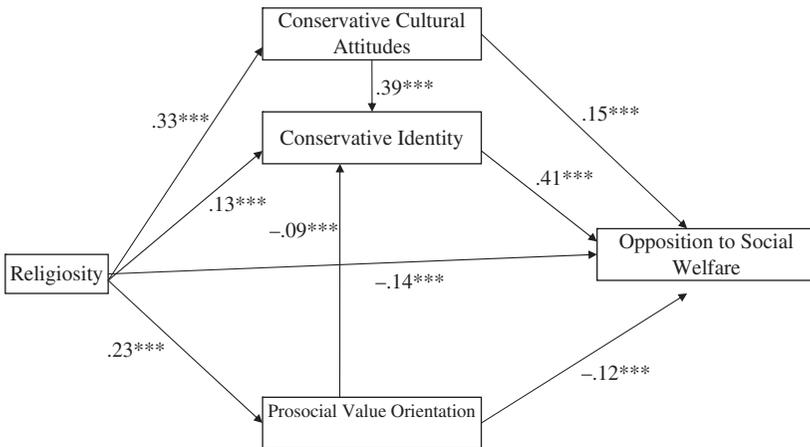


Figure 2

1996 ANES sample: Competing value-based influences of religiosity on social welfare attitudes.

Notes. Standardized path coefficients. Residual variances have been omitted. $N = 1,513$. *** $p < .001$. $\chi^2(1) = 4.58, p = .03$; CFI = .996, RMSEA = .049

$k = 10,000$ iterations) are presented in Figure 2. The top half of this figure shows that, as hypothesized, religiosity significantly predicted conservative cultural attitudes ($\beta = .33, p < .001$), which in turn predicted both conservative identity ($\beta = .39, p < .001$) and opposition to social welfare ($\beta = .15, p < .001$). In addition, conservative identity predicted opposition to social welfare ($\beta = .41, p < .001$). These paths yielded three positive indirect effects of religiosity on opposition to social welfare: one via conservative cultural attitudes ($\beta = .03, p < .001$), one via conservative identity ($\beta = .04, p < .001$), and one via both conservative cultural attitudes and conservative identity ($\beta = .04, p < .001$). These effects indicate that, for some Americans, religiosity relates with opposition to social welfare by way of a culturally based conservative identity.

The bottom half of Figure 2, however, shows that these positive pathways do not provide a complete picture of the relation between religiosity and opposition to social welfare. Specifically, as hypothesized, religiosity positively predicted prosocial value orientation ($\beta = .23, p < .001$), which in turn *negatively* predicted both conservative identity ($\beta = -.09, p < .001$) and opposition to social welfare ($\beta = -.12, p < .001$). These paths yielded two negative indirect effects of religiosity on opposition to social welfare: one via prosocial values ($\beta = -.03, p < .001$), and one via both prosocial values and conservative identity ($\beta = -.01, p < .001$). Moreover, once all indirect effects were controlled, religiosity had a negative direct effect on opposition to social welfare ($\beta = -.14, p < .001$). Thus, as predicted by the competing-pathways model, religiosity had two distinct sets of relations with social welfare attitudes: one set oriented toward opposition (by way of cultural conservatism and conservative identity) and one set oriented toward support (partly by way of prosocial values).

2004–2006 ANES and Employee Samples

Standardized path coefficients for the final models in the 2004–2006 ANES and employee samples are presented in Figures 3 and 4, respectively. As these figures show, results in these two samples were quite consistent with those in the 1996 ANES sample. All direct paths had the same sign in both of these samples as in the 1996 ANES sample and, most importantly, religiosity had both positive and negative indirect effects on opposition to social welfare in both samples. Specifically, religiosity had a positive indirect effect via

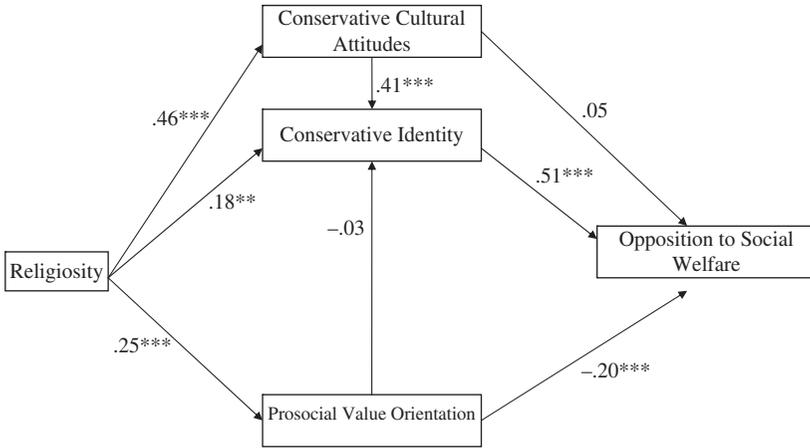


Figure 3
 2004–2006 ANES sample: Competing value-based influences of religiosity on social welfare attitudes.

Notes. Standardized path coefficients. Residual variances have been omitted. $N = 320$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. $\chi^2(2) = 3.67, p > .05$; CFI = .995, RMSEA = .051.

conservative cultural attitudes and conservative identity in both the 2004–2006 ANES ($\beta = .10, p < .001$) and employee ($\beta = .12, p < .001$) samples. It also had a positive indirect effect via conservative identity in the 2004–2006 ANES sample ($\beta = .09, p < .01$).

In contrast, religiosity had a negative indirect effect on opposition to social welfare via prosocial values in both the 2004–2006 ANES ($\beta = -.05, p < .01$) and employee ($\beta = -.05, p < .001$) samples. It also had a negative effect via prosocial values and conservative identity in the employee sample ($\beta = -.01, p < .01$). Thus, the competing-pathways model was supported in all three samples.³

3. We also fit versions of the models depicted in Figures 2, 3, and 4 that included eight demographic variables: age, gender, Black ethnicity, Hispanic ethnicity, Protestant religious affiliation, Catholic religious affiliation, level of education, and household income. Each of these demographic variables was allowed to correlate with religiosity and to have direct effects on conservative cultural attitudes, conservative identity, prosocial values, and opposition to social welfare. The effect estimates from these models were conceptually identical to those presented in Figures 2, 3, and 4. Specifically, all effects denoted as statistically significant in these figures remained statistically significant, in the same direction, when these demographic variables were included in the models.

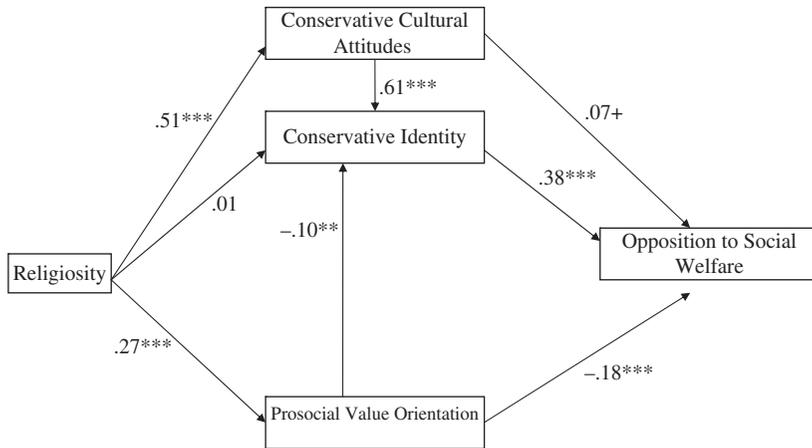


Figure 4

Employee sample: Competing value-based influences of religiosity on social welfare attitudes.

Notes. Standardized path coefficients. Residual variances have been omitted. $N = 710$. $+p < .10$. $**p < .01$. $***p < .001$. $\chi^2(2) = 4.48$, $p > .05$; CFI = .997, RMSEA = .042.

DISCUSSION

Religion has been central to American culture and social organization since the time of the earliest colonial settlers (Noll, 2009; Wald & Leege, 2009). Among contemporary Americans, individual differences in religiosity constitute a significant and politically consequential cultural cleavage (Hunter, 1991; Layman, 2001; Wuthnow, 1988). Religiosity is important to the political experience of Americans of various cultural and demographic groups (Guth et al., 2006; Layman & Green, 2005; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). The present research addressed the psychological pathways through which this cultural cleavage maps onto attitudes toward federal social welfare provision. Programs such as those involving assistance to the needy, the unemployed, and the elderly are prosocial in intention. At the same time, opposition to such programs has been labeled a conservative preference, a label that has also been applied to traditional stances on religiously relevant cultural issues.

We hypothesized that for some Americans, religiosity would promote a culturally based conservative identity leading to opposition to federal social welfare provision, whereas for others religiosity

would promote a prosocial value orientation leading to support of federal social welfare provision. We found consistent support for this model across a near-representative American adult sample assessed in 1996, a near-representative American adult sample assessed in 2004 and 2006, and a sample of business employees assessed in 2006.

In each of these samples, religiosity predicted opposition to social welfare via a pathway involving cultural conservatism and conservative self-identification. However, in each of these samples, religiosity also predicted support of social welfare via a pathway involving prosocial values. In fact, each of the eight direct paths and seven indirect paths specified by the competing pathways model (see Figure 1) was in the same direction (positive or negative) in each of the three samples. Moreover, most of these paths were statistically significant in all three samples.

Despite this high degree of consistency in the findings, there were minor differences in the pattern of results across the samples. For example, after controlling for all indirect effects, religiosity continued to have a direct negative effect on opposition to social welfare in the 1996 sample, but not in the other two samples. However, the variations across the samples all concerned paths that were statistically significant in the largest sample (1996 ANES) but not in one or both of the smaller samples. This suggests that these minor variations primarily reflect differences in statistical power across samples.

The fact that this research only examined theorized causal relations with cross-sectional nonexperimental data is a limitation that should be remedied in future research. For one thing, it would be useful to test the causal influences proposed herein using longitudinal data. Also, experimental studies in which either religious belief salience (e.g., Preston & Epley, 2005) or political identity salience (e.g., G. L. Cohen et al., 2007) are manipulated would help clarify the precise causal relations among the constructs of present interest.

Between-Persons Pathways and Within-Person Processes

By examining relations between individual differences in religiosity, identity, values, and attitudes, the present research demonstrates two sets of competing pathways that connect religiosity and social welfare attitudes at a between-persons level: some religious Americans

appear to be influenced more by a pathway involving conservatism, whereas others appear to be influenced more by a pathway involving prosocial values. Importantly, however, this research does not address what factors determine which of the two pathways wins out for a particular individual. One possibility is that the relative accessibility of cultural conservatism, on the one hand, and prosocial values, on the other, determines whether a religious individual supports or opposes social welfare provision. Such accessibility at any point in time may be driven in part by what is chronically accessible and in part by what has been made situationally accessible for the person (Higgins, 1996). The chronic accessibility of cultural conservatism and prosocial values may be influenced, for example, by the messages received in one's place of worship (e.g., Guth, Green, Smidt, Kellstedt, & Poloma, 1997) or by one's general political knowledge (e.g., Zaller, 1992). Situational accessibility may be influenced, for example, by whether one's political identity has been made salient (G. L. Cohen et al., 2007). Future research should test the impact of manipulated salience of prosocial versus culturally conservative values on the social welfare views of religious Americans.

Another key goal for future research will be to examine whether religiosity, political characteristics, and prosocial values also produce within-person conflicts. For example, if a highly religious person both identifies as conservative and has strong prosocial values, will this person feel conflicted about his or her social welfare attitudes, or will this person simply feel indifferent toward this issue? And if such a person does experience an internal conflict, what factors determine whether and how it will be resolved? Answering these questions will require research in which within-person conflict is assessed, either by asking about such conflict directly or by measuring within-person attitude fluctuations over time.

Implications of the Present Results for Distinguishing Two "Bottom-Up" Influences on Political Attitudes

A great deal of research has examined the influences of psychological characteristics, such as values and traits, on political attitudes (e.g., Caprara, Schwartz, Capanna, Vecchione, & Barbaranelli, 2006; Carney, Jost, Gosling, & Potter, 2008; Feldman, 1988; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003; Mitchell, Tetlock, Mellers, &

Ordonez, 1993; Peffley & Hurwitz, 1985; Stenner, 2005). Jost, Federico, and Napier (2009) argued that a thorough understanding of the nature and intrapsychic organization of political attitudes requires simultaneous attention to both these “bottom-up” psychological influences on political attitudes and the top-down “discursive superstructural” influences on political attitudes historically emphasized by political scientists (e.g., Zaller, 1992). Building on this framework, the present findings highlight the utility of distinguishing two ways in which nonpolitical individual differences may exert bottom-up influence on political preferences. One might be labeled “organic influence,” whereby nonpolitical characteristics translate naturally into particular political preferences. The other type of influence might be labeled “discursively driven influence,” whereby a psychological characteristic influences a political attitude indirectly via a conceptually distinct set of political characteristics that happens to be packaged in discourse with the target attitude.

Clearly the boundary between organic and discursively driven influences is somewhat fuzzy. Since people acquire the concepts and terminology for discussing politics via receipt of political communication, all influences of psychological characteristics on political characteristics are somewhat driven by exposure to discourse. Nonetheless, conceptualizing the various types of bottom-up influences on political attitudes along a continuum ranging from organic to discursively driven may help advance understanding of the interactive influence of political discourse and basic psychological characteristics on political attitudes (Jost et al., 2009). In particular, doing so can help clarify which bottom-up influences are relatively insensitive to the peculiar discourse of a time period and which bottom-up influences are contingent on the particular packaging of political constructs in the discourse of a time and place.

For example, although religiosity may produce cultural conservatism via organic value-based influences (e.g., Schwartz, 1992) or for reasons pertaining to elite influence (e.g., Layman, 2001), the translation of cultural conservatism and conservative self-identification into conservative social welfare attitudes appears to be contingent on the packaging of political elements in contemporary discourse. For example, as the context of information has increasingly emphasized a linkage between cultural traditionalism and political conservatism since the 1970s, the relation between culturally traditional political stances and conservative identity has increased

(Baldassari & Gelman, 2008). Furthermore, political identifications appear to lead individuals to adopt stances on issues that are described in discourse as consistent with their identities (Carmines & Stimson, 1989; G. L. Cohen, 2003; Gerber & Jackson, 1993; Layman & Carsey, 2002; Malka & Lelkes, 2010; Rahn, 1993; Zaller, 1992). Thus, the influence of religiosity on opposition to social welfare appears to involve a pathway that exists only because of elite discourse that packages together culturally traditional attitudes, opposition to social welfare, and the label “conservatism” (Miller, 1994). Religiosity may lead to a culturally based conservative identity for somewhat natural reasons, but its influence on opposition to social welfare appears to be channeled through a pathway of political elements that only cohere because of messages from discourse. This raises the interesting possibility that within different contexts of information, religiosity’s relation with social welfare attitudes would be different.

The contrasting pathway involving prosocial values may to some extent represent organic influence and to some extent represent discursively driven influence. Regarding the former, people who are attracted to religiosity may be naturally inclined to value helping others. Alternatively, this value may be instilled because it is packaged with certain messages from religious scripture and sermons. For example, people of different denominations, who receive different religious messages (e.g., Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009, Study 4), tend to differ in certain attitudes (e.g., Guth et al., 2006). Moreover, prosocial values may either naturally produce prosocial welfare sentiment, or this link may result from messages that these views go together.

Scholars have theorized and empirically tested noncompeting influences of psychological characteristics on political preferences. In line with the discussion above, we recommend two modifications to this research program. First, we contend that specific predispositions and characteristics are best viewed as organic causes of narrow ranges of attitudes within particular political domains (e.g., cultural, social welfare) rather than as organic causes of global conservative versus liberal political orientation (e.g., Duckitt & Sibley, 2009; Joseph, Graham, & Haidt, 2009; Stenner, 2005, 2009; Verhulst, Hatemi, & Martin, 2010). Second, we argue that the influences of specific nonpolitical characteristics on specific political attitudes are sometimes best viewed as the net outcomes of multiple influences,

including both organic and discursively driven influences. For example, it may be that authoritarians are organically predisposed to cultural conservatism, but that any tendency they might have toward social welfare conservatism is driven by discourse and self-consistency motivation, leading them to derive opposition to social welfare from their cultural conservatism. Furthermore, a pathway linking authoritarianism to liberal social welfare attitudes may counteract such a discursively driven influence. The present research highlights the value of distinguishing organic and discursively driven influences on political preferences.

Implications for Support of Federal Social Welfare Provision

Attitudes toward federal social welfare provision have constituted the most enduring substantive political division among Americans in the last century. Although conservative political commentators are quick to argue that the United States is a “center-right” nation, Americans, on average, lean to the liberal side on issues of federal social welfare provision (Free & Cantril, 1967; Stimson, 2004). This is true despite the fact that far more Americans identify as conservative than as liberal (see Ellis & Stimson, 2007). Ellis and Stimson (2007) argue that this mismatch between ideological identification and social welfare attitudes stems from a tendency of Americans to associate the term *liberal* with excessive moral leniency and opposition to American values and to associate the term *conservatism* with moral uprightness and support of American values. Thus, there exists a “conservative symbolic majority” (Ellis & Stimson, 2007, p. 34) within a society that generally supports federal social welfare provision.

For those who favor social welfare provision, the association of the term *liberal* with both support of social welfare provision and cultural progressivism is unfortunate. Specifically, because religion is an important aspect of life for many Americans, and because religiosity is associated with cultural traditionalism and the label *conservatism*, the inclusion of anti-social welfare attitudes under the label of conservatism may produce more opposition to social welfare than would otherwise exist. Liberal commentators have long bemoaned the tendency of segments of the Republican base to vote against their material self-interest by supporting the anti-social welfare party (e.g., Frank, 2004; but see Bartels, 2005, and Hillygus & Shields, 2005). Although low-income individuals tend to vote for the

Democratic Party (McCarty, Poole, & Rosenthal, 2006), and most Americans lean toward support of federal social welfare provision (Stimson, 2004), the present analyses suggest that support of federal social welfare provision is lower than it might be were it not for the packaging of opposition to social welfare and religiously based cultural traditionalism under the label of conservatism. It is possible that weakening the discursive linkages between culturally traditional stances and the conservative label, and those between the conservative label and opposition to social welfare, would reduce the proportion of religious Americans who oppose federal social welfare provision.

CONCLUSION

Rokeach (1968a) and Allport (1954) both observed that religious instruction may potentially promote competing values. Prior research, however, has not addressed the potentially competing pathways through which religious adherence might relate with policy preferences. We chose to consider this issue within the context of attitudes about social welfare policy because of its long-standing social and political importance. Our findings suggest that religiosity propels some Americans toward support of federal social welfare provision while propelling others toward opposition. Thus, religion in the contemporary United States does appear to promote two beliefs that have conflicting political implications: the belief that one should help others and the belief that one should be a good conservative. This conclusion provides an important initial step toward addressing the potentially complex and contradictory effects that a single nonpolitical individual difference might exert on a political preference.

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