

Bibles, Beliefs, Crosses, and Candidates:
The Effects of Religious Identity on Political Attitudes

A Thesis
by
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Abstract

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Religious identity is an understudied yet important component of religious behavior. Through this thesis, I consider two components: how does religion affect people's judgments on political attitudes and how a political candidate's religious identity impacts people's evaluations. For my first study, I argue that the Bible serves as a conservative affective cue that will make respondents more likely to support more conservative federal spending policies. Through the use of a novel survey experiment, I find no evidence that the Bible impacts Christians' stances on federal spending policy. For my second study, I analyze Mason's (2018b) conception of religion as a causal factor in negative affective evaluations. Through a survey experiment, I find that Christians tend to evaluate Christian candidates less harshly than non-Christian candidates across party lines, that increased religiosity actually increases the affective evaluation gap between partisans on hypothetical candidates, and that Christian and Evangelical Christian identity do not appear to play a role in affective evaluations of candidates. Overall, through the combinations of these

studies, I discover the limits of the impacts of religious identity in the political realm, ultimately resulting in a call for future research on the role of politics in religion.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my grandfather, Jackson Theodore Sharpe. Without you, my love for political science would never have emerged to fruition. The lessons and love you showed me have endured to this day. I love you and I miss you, granddaddy.

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Chapter 1: Thesis Introduction

American jurisprudence articulates the separation of church and state via the 1st Amendment. However, said separation is a challenging practice: separating the political and religious from an institutional standpoint is possible, but separating the political and the religious within an individual is significantly more complex. Some of the earliest foundational works in political science recognized religious identities' effect on political attitudes and beliefs (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Campbell et al. 1960). I explore two components of religious identity: one, how an individual's religious identity affects political beliefs on federal spending programs, and two, how politicians' religious identities influence people's perceptions of said politician. First, how does religious text attribution affect adherents' political beliefs on federal spending? Second, I examine how politicians' religious affiliation acts as a cue shaping their evaluations. The efficacy of this research tests the overall ability for religious factors to be influential in politics. These studies test the role of religious identity in shaping attitudes and political evaluations. Together, these analyses combine to tell a more comprehensive story on religion in politics.

Studies of the influence of religion on public opinion tend to focus on the effects of sermons given by pastors in a religious setting (Djupe and Calfano 2013; Djupe and Gilbert 2003; Wallsten and Nteta 2016). I examine how religious artifacts can influence believer's political attitudes on federal spending. I argue that the Biblical label primes conservative views by activating religious nodes in neural networks that are linked to ideologically conservative nodes. Using a survey experiment, I assess how exposure to a quotation attributed to the Bible compares to the same quotation attributed as a local saying on federal spending issues. I argue that the respondents who received the Bible passage are now more

likely to express conservative views on federal spending questions relative to respondents who received the local saying vignette. I expand the current political science literature to include the impact of Christian religious artifacts without the intervening variable of a faith leader. The current literature is unable to separate faith leader rhetorical skills from the impact of their spiritual text: removing the faith leader from the experiment enables a better understanding of the influence of religion on public opinion. In religious studies works, a variety of sources are expected to reinforce the majority of society's beliefs while political science's scope is much more limited (Althusser 1970). This chapter simultaneously refines and expands what is considered an influential factor in religion and public opinion.

Understanding the Bible is important due to the sheer readership and central role it plays in the Christian faith. Christians regularly encounter the Bible, as over 45% of Christians report reading the Bible at least once a month (Pew Research Center 2014b). Furthermore, the Bible is not a homogenous document that conforms to modern interpretations of the political spectrum: socially conservative messages on homosexuality can find themselves alongside messages of advocating for the abolition of private property (Leviticus 18:22; Acts 2:44). I test the effect of both the Bible label with varying message content in order to get a better range of politically relevant impacts of the Bible.

In tying back to the concept of religious identities, I analyze how a held identity impacts that individual's opinions on social policy. I work off the notion that the Christian identity and subsequent centrality of the Bible in Christianity enables the Bible to be a politically influential actor. This considers if the Bible itself can be politically influential in the modern day. Considering the impact of religious text and identities help us better understand how religious identities can influence political attitudes.

For my second study, I examine how the religious identity of a public official affects feelings towards the policymaker. Identifying with a religion is declining among the population of the United States (Brauer 2018; Butler, Wacker, and Balmer 2008; Hout 2016; Hout and Fischer 2014; Putnam and Campbell 2012). However, political elites are still highly likely to identify as religious practitioners: in the 116th Congress, over 95% of members identified with a religion (Pew Research Center 2019). As the scope of the non-religious expands in the population, it is important to consider how they view people who are religious, particularly political elites. Current research articulates how social identities, including religion, are increasingly associated on bifurcated party lines and strengthen partisan identity (Mason 2018b). I expect that the religious and non-religious differ in their responses to varying candidate religious identity. Specifically, I expect the religious to maintain more affectively positive associations in their neural networks with religious candidates than non-religious candidates. The religious will therefore be more inclined to approve of a religious candidate relative to the areligious. Similarly, literature establishes the importance of partisan identity in candidate assessments, as partisans tend to back people who share their identity - I also consider how partisanship plays a role in candidate evaluations (Campbell et al. 1960; Cassese and Holman 2018; Mason 2018b). Between Democrats and Republicans, I expect that a lawmakers' Christian identity does not contribute to affective evaluations. Respondents' neural networks do not associate the Christian identity with partisan elements of neural networks and thus does not contribute to affective polarization. On the other hand, when a candidate is described as an Evangelical Christian, I expect that the Evangelical construction is linked to political nodes in respondents' neural networks and will thus contribute to affective evaluation.

Focusing on the evaluation of political parties, I am able to assess the effects of religious cues on affective polarization. Mason (2018) argues that parties have become socially sorted, and as such, the homogeneity of parties across identities, including religious identity, creates a substantial amount of affective polarization. I provide a means of evaluating the impact of religious identity on affective polarization via direct comparison of different social identities of a hypothetical candidate tied to the Republican Party.

Overall, these studies provide a powerful look at the extent of religious influence in the political realm. Study 1 operates in the intra-personal realm: it examines how individuals' affective networks are influenced by religious objects. Meanwhile, Study 2 adds a different element: how individuals' neural networks are impacted by others' religious identities. Together, these works expand how we process and understand religion as a factor in the political realm, particularly in political psychology and political behavior. Religion matters; the extent to which it matters is unknown, and through these studies, I push the boundaries on the literature regarding religion and politics.

Chapter 2: God's Word to God's Government: Examining the impact of Biblical Priming on Federal Financial Policy Attitudes

Overview

The Bible serves as a unique authority within Christianity. Extant political science studies find that the Bible can be a part of an effective prime that augments views on political subjects (Wallsten and Nteta 2017). However, the Bible itself is not considered within these studies as a lone subject - it is possible that other factors, such as rhetorical ability of the speaker or the content of the message itself were influential factors. I argue that the Bible serves as an affective conservative prime that will color subconscious and conscious information processing. Through the use of a survey experiment, I test the impact of the Bible label on the impact of a political message. Across a spectrum of religiosity and denominations, I find that the Bible label on a prime does not evoke a statistically significant nor substantial impact on people's federal spending policy attitudes.

Study 1 Literature Review

Religion is an influential factor within political life (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Djupe and Calfano 2013; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Wallsten and Nteta 2017). At the group level, churches influence member's vote choice, civic engagement, and policy preferences (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Gilbert 1993; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Berelson, Lazarfeld, and McPhee (1954) find that as religion increases in importance in someone's life, religious affiliation is more likely to have an impact on vote choice. Simultaneously, as the importance of politics in an individual's life increases, there is a decreased impact of religious identity on vote choice.

Pastoral discourse can also shape their congregation's political views on subjects ranging from environmentalism to the Iraq War (Djupe and Calfano 2013). Pastors possess a unique ability to influence their congregation's political opinions through their position as a faith leader and interpreter for their congregation (Djupe and Calfano 2013). Wallsten and Nteta (2017) found that pastoral discourse containing a bible verse affected believer's opinions on immigration. However, the effects of the particular pastor's rhetorical ability and the effect of the message cannot be separated from one another in their analysis. In this study, I measure the influence of the Bible as a standalone prime to isolate the effect without potential intervening variables.

Religion can affect politics through the process of priming (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Djupe and Calfano 2013; Harrison and Michelson 2015). Priming is when a concept is made more accessible or brought to the top of the mind (Jackson 2007). Religious primes are used by political candidates in campaign advertising (Weber and Thornton 2012). Djupe and Calfano (2013) argue that Republican candidates will use Christian primes, referencing a religious text or hymn in order to gain further support within the Evangelical Christian community. Priming a religious identity can also increase support for gay marriage (Harrison and Michelson 2015). Religious primes are somewhat limited in the scope of their ability to shape public perceptions, as they are most effective in the absence of other information on political candidates (Weber and Thornton 2012). Extant scholarship does not consider the role of the Bible by itself in shaping political attitudes, but as a part of a larger communication discourse (Djupe and Calfano 2013; Wallsten and Nteta 2017). I argue that the Bible itself can serve as a religious prime with political implications. While there are

limits to the scope of influence of religious primes, current scholarship and real-world utilization of religious-political primes warrants further analysis on the subject.

The label “Christian” fails to recognize the broad spectrum of denominations and traditions that make up modern Christianity. Depending on the Christian community, the relative weight and influence of the Bible may vary. Younger generations are hesitant to identify with the Christian label, though Christianity is still prevalent in the general population (Moody and Reed 2017; Pew Research Center 2014c). In addition to Christian identity, Christian religious practices are also common in the United States. Approximately 45 percent of Americans report reading the Bible at least once a month (Pew Research Center 2014b). However, Bible-based information retention is extremely low in the aggregate, even on basic concepts such as naming the five Gospels (Prothero 2007). The lack of biblical literacy indicates a potential misinformation problem: practitioners in the aggregate do not possess the requisite knowledge needed to refute false claims (Prothero 2007). Therefore, the Bible’s potential impact lies with the accepted veracity of a biblical attribution and the importance practitioners place on the Bible, which varies based on denominational differences (Hoffman and Bartkowski 2008). For instance, conservative white Protestant and Black Protestant traditions are statistically more likely to believe in biblical literalism (Hoffman and Bartkowski 2008). However, the impact of religion on daily life is also affected by denomination, as conservative white Protestants, otherwise known as Evangelicals, are often compelled by their religion to actively express their religious identity in non-religious areas of their life (Kelly 2014). In considering the impact of the Bible on political attitudes, it is important to account for the various traditions of Christianity. My research accounts for denominational differences in assessing how different traditions take

and assess biblical passages in the aggregate to paint a more complete picture of bible-based priming.

Since the late 1970's, conservatism, the Republican Party, and evangelical Christianity have been linked to one another¹ (Silk 2010; Williams 2010). The Moral Majority movement strengthened the association between Evangelical Christians and Republicans, pushing for the Republican Party to become the party of "Judeo-Christian values" (Silk 2010, 34). Christianity and Evangelical Christianity in particular are still associated with the Republican Party today (Cassese 2020; Mason 2018b; Silk 2010). Republicans frequently use Christian symbols and messages in their rhetoric (Djupe and Calfano 2013). Overall, Evangelical Christians are also recognized as more politically active and connected to the Republican Party (Mason 2018b; Silk 2010; Williams 2010).

Taken together, the political science literature remains largely mute on the direct impact of religious texts on political attitudes. Religious affiliation is an important identity for people that actively cultivates action and expression of beliefs, particularly among evangelical Christians (Avishai 2008; Kelly 2014; Smith et al. 1998). Therefore, it is important to directly examine how religious texts in particular extend their influence into politics.

Study 1 Theory

How does the Bible influence individual's political attitudes? I argue that the Bible can serve as a conservative prime that brings conservative-oriented nodes to the top-of-mind when considering political stimuli. People rely upon past experiences for future actions, both

¹ Some argue that the relationship goes back as far as the Democratic Party's decision to nominate the Catholic Al Smith in 1928 (Williams 2010).

consciously and unconsciously (Lodge and Taber 2013). Individuals possess limited conscious information processing capacities that they can rely upon on at any given moment (Lodge and Taber 2013). In an individual's working memory (WM), people can generally consider between 5-9 concepts at a given time (Lodge and Taber 2013). Long-term memory (LTM) is capable of processing significantly more concepts unconsciously. Information in individuals' LTM is stored in neural node networks (Lodge and Taber 2013). These neural node networks create associations between ideas connected through affective similarity between the concepts and how close the ideas are conceptually to one another. Attitudes are then defined as "an evaluative tally attached to an object in long term memory" (Lodge and Taber 2013, 30).

Individual's working memory subconsciously draws upon long-term memory when needed. Information moves from the LTM to the WM via direct exposure or exposure to an associated node within a person's neural network (Lodge and Taber 2013). Unconscious information processing ultimately colors what is consciously expressed as a belief or attitude, as it shapes what is brought to the WM (Lodge and Taber 2013). Unconscious information processing is affected by the stimuli that a person receives, such as priming. Priming brings something not necessarily immediately considered with an issue at hand to the top of an individual's head via utilizing existing neural connections (Jackson 2007; Lodge and Taber 2013). Specifically, priming brings to mind associations established prior to the prime – the prime just changes which pre-established associations are brought to mind.

Affect plays a large role in determining what concepts go from the LTM to the WM. Affective reactions proceed conscious consideration of stimuli and shape what is consciously considered (Lodge and Taber 2013). Specifically, affectively charged stimuli are likely to

trigger similarly related and affectively charge concepts from the LTM to the WM (Lodge and Taber 2013). An attitude is generated via the placement and strength of a conception in relation to other conceptions within the neural node network. Neutrally evaluated objects can take on an affective charge via repeated association with strongly affectively charged concepts. Additionally, people have an almost immediate affective reaction to stimuli that colors the rest of their thought processes on any given subject (Lodge and Taber 2013).

The Bible, Christianity, and religion more generally are concepts within Christians' neural node networks. The extant literature expresses that there is a strong relationship between Christianity, conservatism, and the Republican Party (Djupe and Calfano 2013; Mason 2018b; Silk 2010). Within Christian neural networks, Christian conceptions are likely related to and affectively connected to multiple Republican and conservative nodes. Additionally, there are probable indirect epistemological connections between Christian nodes and Republican nodes: Christianity is likely connected to concepts such as tradition, which is also likely connected to the Republican and conservative nodes.

I argue that when a Christian receives a Bible message, it primes the religious element of their neural networks. As established in the literature review, Christians struggle to identify and recognize basic biblical information – a prime must utilize an explicit connection to the Bible for better recognition of the prime itself (Prothero 2007). When a Christian receives a Bible prime, affectively similar and connected neural nodes to the Bible node are more likely to be brought from the LTM to the WM than without the Bible prime. A Bible prime is likely to bring to top of mind the conservative and political nodes from the LTM to the WM than without their presence. This will affect what is actively expressed via conscious actions, such as responding to a survey question. In other words, a Bible prime

serves as a boost for conservative nodes within Christian neural networks, thus affecting which ideas are used in the WM. This Biblical exposure forms the basis of the theoretical connection of Hypothesis 1:

Hypothesis 1: The Biblical prime label will lead to attitudes on federal spending to become more conservative, regardless of the actual content of the passage.

This hypothesis tests the main political implications of the Christian religious text. Mason (2018b) posits that Christianity and especially evangelicalism has increasingly become associated with the Republican Party. Upon exposure to the prime stating the information they receive from the Bible, this should trigger a strong positive affective reaction among Christians that will color the rest of their thought process. After all, the Bible is the holy book of Christians, and by mentioning it, Christians will see it as a recognition of their identity. The Bible prime will then trigger similar affectively related and relevant primes such as Christianity, tradition, the Republican Party, and conservatism. Therefore, by activating the affectively positive Bible node in the LTM, individuals will be influenced by associated nodes within their own minds, thus triggering a more conservative political attitude than without the Biblical prime. Further, I expect the Bible label to make a conservative impact regardless of the message content. If the Bible cue serves as a natural conservative cue, it will evoke a conservative pull on the person regardless of the content of the message. This also tests the extent of the effects of the Bible prime.

Christians do not behave uniformly regardless of traditional differences (Hoffman and Bartkowski 2008; Mason 2018b). I argue that denominational differences are the result of unconscious information processing differences (Lodge and Taber 2013). The affective connection and degree of relation between conservatism and someone's religious identity and

tradition may vary by tradition. Evangelical Christians are more strongly associated with conservatism (Cassese 2020; Mason 2018b; Silk 2010). Psychologically, there is likely to be a stronger, more affectively positive relationship between religious primes and conservative nodes for Evangelical Christians. Therefore, this stronger relationship increases the likelihood of activating conservative beliefs. This then forms the basis of Hypothesis 1a:

Hypothesis 1a: The Bible prime label will make political attitudes on federal spending of evangelical Christians more conservative relative to other branches of Christianity given the same treatment.

Hypothesis 1a addresses the diversity of people who identify themselves as Christian. Not all branches of Christianity have the same historical political connections (Mason 2018b; Silk 2010; Williams 2010). Evangelical Christians possess neural networks with stronger connections between the Bible and conservatism relative to other branches of Christianity. Therefore, when exposed to a Bible prime prior to considering political survey questions, Evangelicals are more likely to express conservative views, both relative to other branches of Christianity and to Evangelicals who did not receive a Bible prime. This hypothesis will also provide denominational comparisons between evangelical Christians and non-evangelical Christians, thus allowing a more comprehensive understanding of the Bible's effects on the various branches of Christianity.

Neural network models of information processing also consider the relative importance of concepts in moving from LTM to WM. If a node contains numerous and strong affective connections within the network, it is more likely to have an impact on conscious actions. Therefore, the relative importance people place on religious nodes within

their neural networks will impact the extent to which a religious prime successfully brings related concepts from the LTM into the WM. This recognition is the basis of Hypothesis 2:

Hypothesis 2: Christians with high amounts of religious commitment will display more conservative attitudes when exposed to the Bible passage prompts respectively relative to Christians with low amounts of religious commitment.

This hypothesis builds on Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee's (1954) argument regarding the importance of religion to a respondent and its relative political influence. Christians who demonstrate high religious commitments will place greater weight on connections associated with their religious expression. The religious Bible prime will carry over from the LTM to the WM strongest amongst the most religious, as the less religious will rely less upon their affective Bible-related network and more on their affective reactions to the policy question at hand.

Study 1 Research Design

This chapter utilizes a survey experiment design with four treatments. The survey experiment poses a somewhat unique recruitment challenge due to the target population. Study 1 only examines the responses of Christians to Bible prompts; non-Christians are beyond the scope of inquiry and are not the subject of interest. Therefore, this required a unique survey recruitment tool that exclusively focuses on Christians.

To recruit a survey population of exclusively Christians, I reached out to official Christian religious leaders in an effort to recruit Christians; pastors and faith leaders serve as an opportunity to access large numbers of Christians. I contacted pastors in the Research Triangle and Rocky Mount areas in North Carolina. These areas represent a range of geographic and cultural backgrounds encompassing rural, urban, and suburban areas of the

state. These areas were selected primarily out of my own familiarity with each area. Once I had selected the areas to survey, I utilized Google.com's search function for churches in each area. From there, I contacted pastors via listed church email addresses and telephone numbers. Additionally, I utilized a preexisting connection with a United Methodist Church North Carolina Conference official to recruit pastors in the Raleigh-Durham area. Once a pastor agreed to presenting the survey to their congregation, I sent the pastor the relevant information in the form of a survey link and a brief description of the survey to be posted online on their social media platforms and weekly newsletters. Pastors also posted the link on their own social media pages; some members of congregations also re-posted the link on their own social media platforms. This makes it extremely hard to assess survey response rates due to a lack of access to the data on who actually was exposed to the posts. This sample is a convenience sample. Experimental work does not have to utilize a nationally representative population, however, as long as treatments are randomly assigned and there are no expected heterogenic effects, cohort comparisons possess internal validity (Coppock, Leeper, and Mullinix 2018). The randomization of treatments was ensured by the Qualtrics platform.

Notably, some of the familiarity with the areas included a pre-existing relationship or connection with pastors. However, I am relatively unconcerned with elements of bias in survey results as a result of pre-existing relationships with members of the clergy. First, the clergy are not the sample population of my survey. The clergy serve primarily as gatekeepers to their congregation. I was not particularly interested in the clergy's survey participation, but their faith community's. The recruitment process is similar to professors asking students to

participate in a survey or experiment. The difference between the two recruitments is simply a difference in population rather than a difference in strategy.

For exact wording of the survey experiment, please reference Appendix 1. First, respondents answered a battery of questions related to their religious beliefs and practices. These questions formed the basis of the index that measures religious adherence. The index consists of five Pew questions on religious service attendance, discussing faith with non-adherents, discussing faith with adherents, how often they read scripture, and how often they pray. Next, respondents answered an attention check question via providing information on the favorite flavor of ice cream in the United States and asking a follow-up question.

The experimental portion of the survey manipulated two components: ideology of the message and the source of the message. The ideology of the message varied in two ways: it was either the text of James 2:14-17 and Luke 3:11 from the English Standard Version (ESV) of the Bible, a liberal message expressing the virtue of taking care of the poor, or the text of 2 Timothy 2:5-6 from the ESV, a conservative message expressing adherence to the law and how the hard-working are to be rewarded. The perceived ideology of the messages was established *prima facie*, but a later question evaluates the correctness of my claim. Second, the source of the message was also manipulated: the text of the above Bible passages was either described as coming from a local saying or from the Bible. The 2x2 setup ultimately enabled consideration of how the Bible label impacts respondents relative to the content of the actual message.

Respondents were exposed to one of the four vignettes: the liberal message labelled as a local saying, a conservative message labelled as a local saying, the liberal message labelled as from the Bible, or the conservative message labelled as from the Bible. The

message passages were identical to one another other than the described source of the saying within the same ideological grouping. Participants then evaluated the ideology of the message post-treatment and articulated the source of the message. This was done as both a manipulation check and to see if people identified the local saying passages as truly from the Bible. After receiving the treatment, participants then received a battery of questions related to federal spending policies – these questions form an index that was used to determine the aggregate level of ideological responses across issue areas. The federal spending policy questions were ANES questions that dealt with the minimum wage, government spending on health insurance, federal reduction of income inequality, federal spending on the poor, federal spending on welfare, and paid family leave. Finally, I asked a series of demographic questions.

Study 1 Analysis

Seven hundred and thirty-five respondents fully completed the survey. Of the sample, 92 percent were Christian, with 55 percent identifying as Protestant, 18 percent as Catholic, and 18 percent as non-denominational Christian. Thirty-seven percent of the sample considered themselves an Evangelical or born-again Christian. Over 81 percent of the sample identified as women. Seventy nine percent of the sample reported having at least a bachelor's degree, while 30 percent of the same reported having some form of professional degree beyond a bachelor's degree. This was not a representative sample of Christians in the United States; however, the Qualtrics randomized distribution of the four treatments guarantees the most important condition of experimental work is met (Coppock, Leeper, and Mullinix 2018).

Table 1. Ideological Assessments of Vignette by Party

Party	Passage	Mean (95% Confidence Interval)
Democrat	Liberal Local Saying	5.25 (4.96, 5.54)
Republican	Liberal Local Saying	3.66 (3.28, 4.05)
Democrat	Liberal Bible Passage	5.06 (4.70, 5.42)
Republican	Liberal Bible Passage	3.47 (3.12, 3.82)
Democrat	Conservative Local Saying	3.20 (2.82, 3.58)
Republican	Conservative Local Saying	2.95 (2.75, 3.15)
Democrat	Conservative Bible Passage	3.60 (3.23, 3.97)
Republican	Conservative Bible Passage	3.19 (2.90, 3.49)

Note: Measures are on a standard 1-7 ideological scale, with 1 being extremely conservative and 7 being extremely liberal.

The statistics collected on the intended survey measures represents a mixed bag. Ninety two percent of respondents passed the initial attention check, indicating that the respondents were largely paying attention to the survey. Respondents who did not pass the attention check were kept for analysis to generate greater external validity for treatments; it is unlikely that people are always fully receptive to every message in the polis. It is also possible that their subconscious received the message and colored further processing but was not expressed in the question. Further, seventy two percent of respondents were able to accurately identify the source of the vignette that they received, be it a Bible passage or a local saying. Of the people who received the local saying treatment, only twelve percent identified the local saying as from the Bible, thus further indicating the limitations of the population to recognize a biblical message without a biblical label prime (Prothero 2007). While I cannot be certain that guessing the source did not occur, the open-ended nature of the

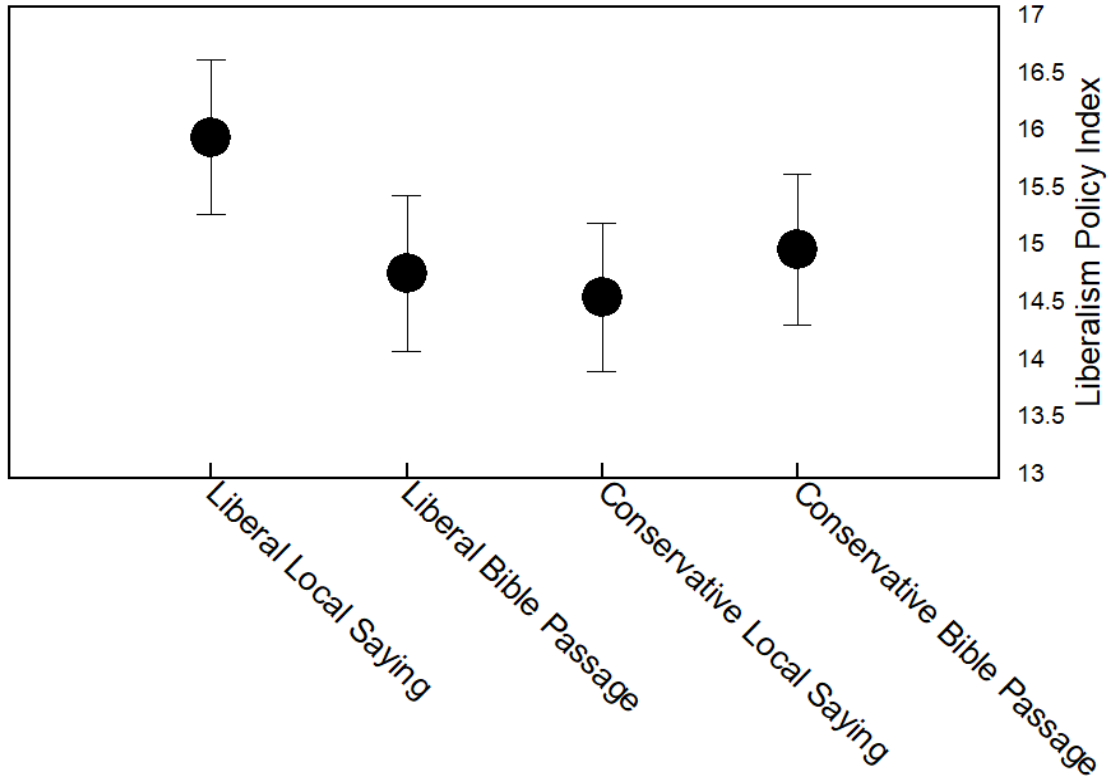
question made it tougher for the respondent to guess the result relative to a close-ended question. However, the ideological impact of the vignettes is questionable, as seen in Table 1. Democrats identified the liberal passages as approximately a five on a 1-7 standard ideological scale and the conservative passages as slightly higher than a three. Republicans, on the other hand, uniformly identified all messages as roughly a three on the 1-7 point scale. In terms of statistical significance, Democrats and Republicans interpreted their message in statistically different manners, as confirmed by t-tests in three of the four comparison categories at the $p=0.10$ level. Democrats and Republicans in the conservative local saying category were the only group to have statistically identical interpretations of the message. Further, there was no statistical difference between local saying and bible passage ideological interpretation across partisan identity; in other words, the vignettes did not convey statistically different ideological messages, which was the foundation of my theory. Clearly, there was both a partisan difference in the ideological interpretation of the messages and a lack of ideological impact via the Bible label.

My first hypothesis is that the biblical prime label will lead to attitudes on federal spending to become more conservative, regardless of the actual content of the passage. To test this, I first created a policy index for a more comprehensive view on respondent's federal policy spending by combining scores on questions on the minimum wage, government spending on health insurance, federal reduction of income inequality, federal spending on the poor, federal spending on welfare, and paid family leave. For specific question wording, please refer to Appendix 1. The policy index has a Cronbach's alpha score of 0.88, indicating it is appropriate to combine these questions into the index specified. Higher scores on the policy index indicate more liberal policy preferences. The policy index had an average score

of 15.26 out of 23 with a standard deviation of 5.39 points. Given that the range of outcomes for the policy index was between 0-23 and the median is 16, there is a slight skew left in the data. The 25th percentile score was an 11, indicating the lack of respondents who gave extremely low scores on the policy index.

Hypothesis 1 states that the Bible passage respondents should have statistically significant and lower scores on the federal spending policy liberalism index relative to the local saying vignettes with the identical message. To test the impact of the vignettes among Christians on the policy index, I ran an OLS regression between the policy index and the vignette received among Christian respondents. This OLS regression has the benefit of calculating and displaying multiple means at once, thus making a better initial measure of the problem than mean comparisons. Figure 1 displays a margins plot with mean estimates and 90% confidence intervals based off the OLS regression. For the OLS regression and margin results, please see Table 1 and Table 2 in Appendix 2.

Figure 1. Federal Spending Policy Liberalism Among Christians by Vignette



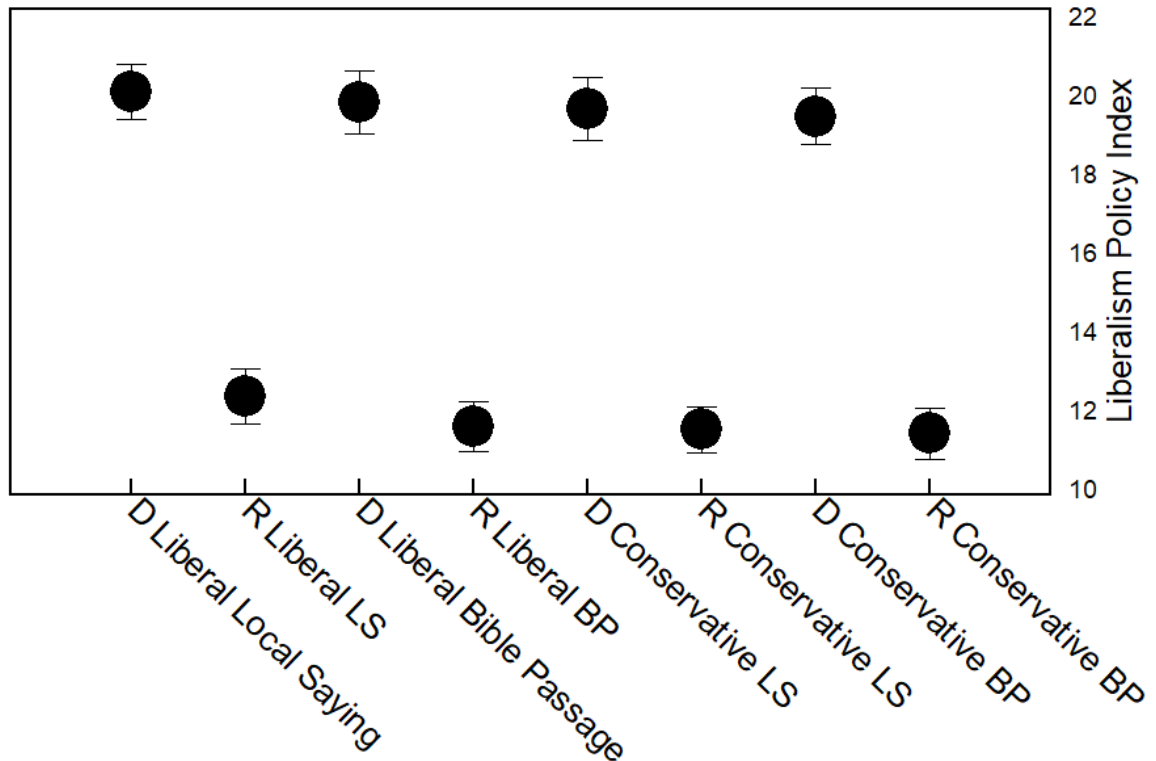
Note: Liberalism Policy Index indicates how the aggregate categories scored on average. Higher numbers indicate more liberal beliefs. The X axis refers to the four vignette options, respondents belong to only one of the four groups. The graph displays 90% CIs and means of each group. Overlap between bars signifies statistically identical groups.

Figure 1 offers extremely limited evidence in favor of Hypothesis 1. The liberal local saying relative to the liberal bible passage is more liberal, as predicted by Hypothesis 1. The liberal local saying respondents are statistically different from the liberal bible passage respondents, as revealed via one-way t-tests at the 95% level; however, the substantive difference between the two groups is relatively minimal, as it is only about one point on the policy index. Additionally, the conservative local saying and conservative bible passage

groups are practically identical to one another; the conservative bible passage group is also slightly more liberal than the conservative local saying group. This presents in the wrong direction relative to my hypothesis and is not statistically significant in the expected direction, as revealed via one-way t-tests at the 95% level.

While the results from Figure 1 are not promising, there is more room to analyze Hypothesis 1. Partisanship is a known, influential factor when it comes to personal evaluations (Campbell et al. 1960; Mason 2018b). Therefore, I reran the OLS model specified earlier with a partisan identification variable. The partisans included independents who leaned towards one of the parties. Figure 1a displays the results of the re-specified OLS model with marginal estimates and 90% confidence intervals of the liberalism policy index broken down by partisan identification and vignette received. For further detail on the OLS regression and subsequent margins generated, please refer to Table 3 and Table 4 in Appendix 2.

Figure 1a. Federal Spending Policy Liberalism Among Christians by Vignette and Party



Note: Liberalism Policy Index indicates how the aggregate categories scored on average. Higher numbers indicate more liberal beliefs. The X axis refers to the eight exclusive groups. The graph displays 90% CIs and means of each group. Overlap between CI bars signifies statistically identical groups. R or D at the beginning refers to partisan identity of respondents, while Liberal/Conservative refers to the ideology of the passage. LS = Local Saying, BP = Bible Passage.

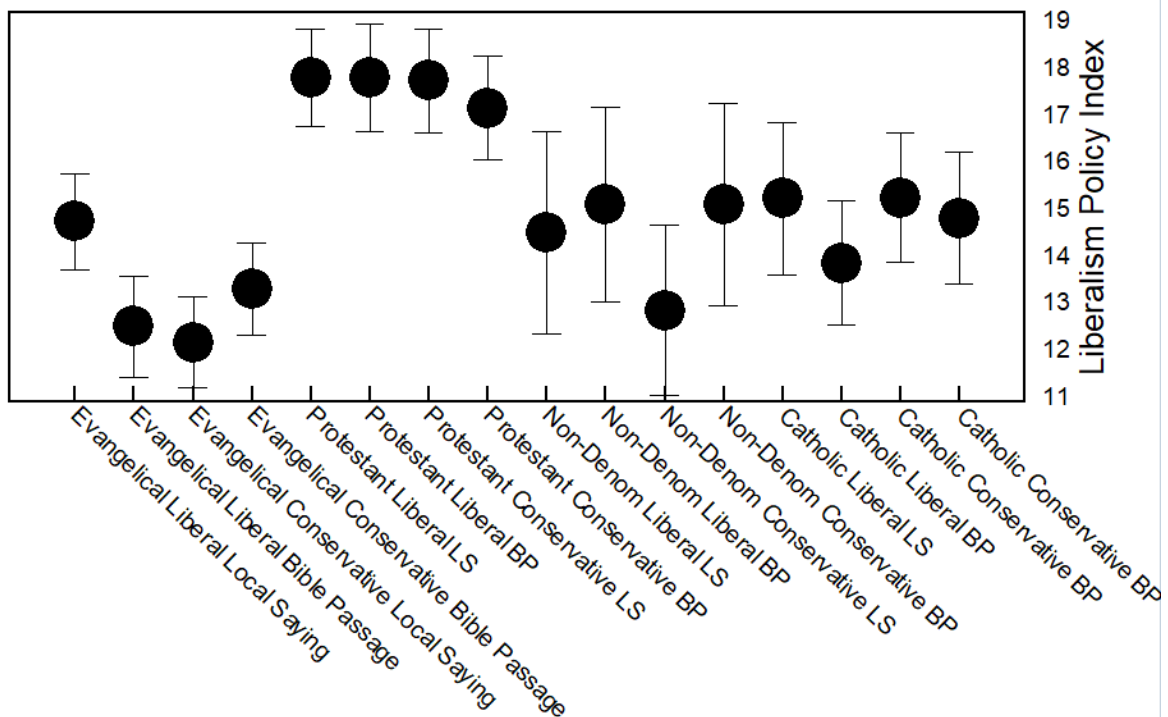
Figure 1a. displays the limitations of the vignettes utilized. When broken down by party, it appears that the vignettes had no statistical or substantial effect on the respondents, as each partisan response category is within the 90% confidence interval of the other based on the margins calculated from the OLS regression. However, Republicans given the liberal Bible passage are statistically significant at the $p=0.10$ level when compared to the liberal local saying in the expected direction via a one-way t-test; the gap between the groups is less

than a point, thus missing substantive significance. There is a noticeable partisan gap of about eight points on the federal spending policy scale; however, that is sustained across vignette received. In terms of takeaways from Hypothesis 1, it is clear that the group that received the Bible prime did not have statistically or substantially different results from the groups that did not receive the Bible prime. Further, Republicans and Democrats differ in the aggregate on preferred federal spending policy outcomes. Taken cumulatively, based on the evidence presented in Figure 1 and Figure 1a, I strongly reject Hypothesis 1, as there is no evidence that the Bible prime label evoked a strong, conservative effect on individual's responses.

Hypothesis 1a. deals with the differences between traditions in modern Christianity. Specifically, Hypothesis 1a. articulates that the Bible prime label will make political attitudes on federal spending of Evangelical Christians more conservative relative to other branches of Christianity given the same treatment. In essence, due to the association between evangelicals and conservatism, I expect that a Bible prime label will be more pronounced among evangelicals than other Christian traditions. To test this, I ran an OLS regression on the policy index with the vignette received and denominations as independent variables. I split the denominations into evangelical, non-evangelical Protestant, non-evangelical non-denominational, and Catholic. The results of the regression are displayed in the marginal estimates and accompanying 90% confidence interval of one another in Figure 2 displayed below. The importance of this chart is two-fold: one, to show denominational differences across vignettes, and two, to see if within denominations, the biblical passage recipients displayed more conservative responses relative to the local saying group. Figure 2 also gives preliminary insight into the effect size of the two treatments: the larger the gap between the

related local saying and bible passage vignettes displays the relative effect size for treatments. Therefore, for Hypothesis 1a to be correct, the gap for evangelicals between the local saying and bible passage vignettes must be larger than the gaps for the other denominations. For further detail on the OLS regression run and the margins generated, please refer to Table 5 and Table 6 in Appendix 2.

Figure 2. Federal Spending Policy Liberalism Among Christians by Vignette and Denomination



Note: Liberalism Policy Index indicates how the aggregate categories scored on average. Higher numbers indicate more liberal beliefs. The X axis refers to the sixteen exclusive options, respondents belong to only one of the groups. The graph displays 90% CIs and means of each group. Overlap between bars signifies statistically identical groups. First word indicates Denomination of Respondent. Liberal/Conservative refers to the ideology of the passage. LS = Local Saying, BP = Bible Passage.

Figure 2 displays a large amount of information in a relatively small amount of space. One of the most important things to note from Figure 2 is the large amount of overlap

regardless of vignette received for the non-evangelical Protestants, non-evangelical non-denominationals, and Catholics. This largely confirms what I found earlier when analyzing Hypothesis 1: the vignettes did not have a statistically identifiable impact on federal policy spending attitudes. In other words, denominations had similar responses regardless of vignette received. Denominational variance was not captured in Figure 2 due to wider confidence intervals caused by splitting groups by vignette, but when aggregated, there were differences. Two-way 95% confidence t-tests reveal that Evangelicals are statistically different from Non-Evangelical Protestants and Catholics but not Non-evangelical non-denominationals. Using the same method, non-evangelical Protestants are statistically different from both Catholics and non-evangelical non-denominationals, but Catholics and non-evangelical non-denominationals did not have statistically different responses on the federal policy spending index. In sum, the vignettes did not appear to have an effect, but there are denominational variations in responses. However, even among the evangelicals, only the liberal message displays the expected direction and a statistically significant relationship. Table 2 below quantifies the effect size and tests the statistical significance between the local saying and bible passage category of a given message:

Table 2. Vignette Effect Size by Denomination

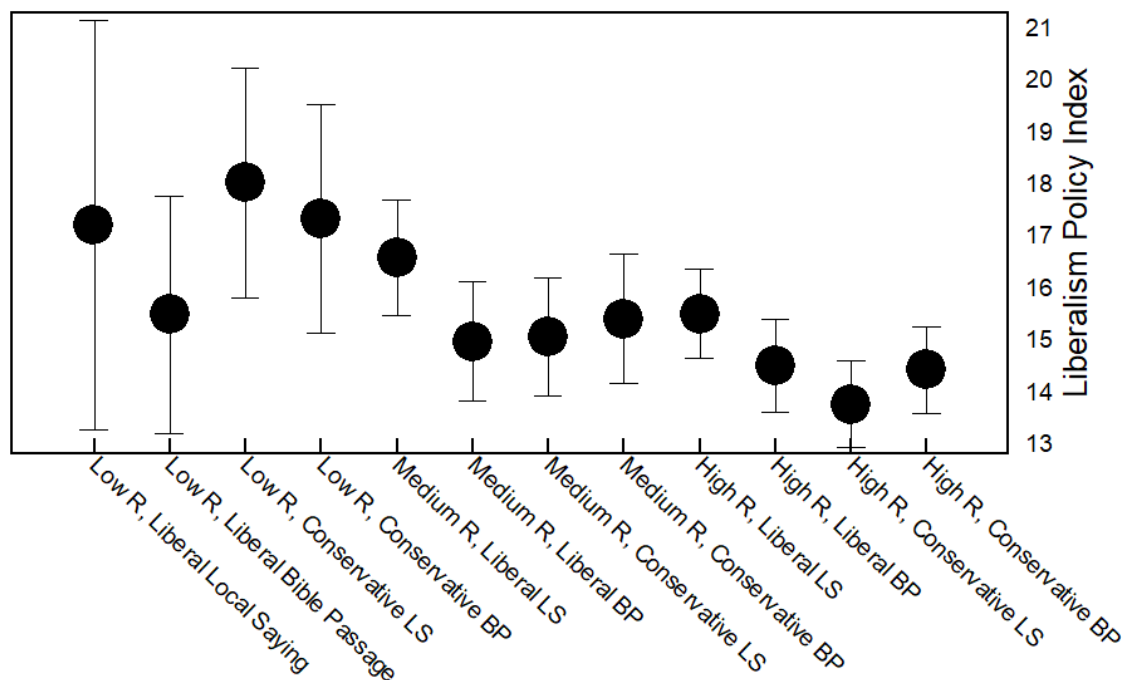
Denomination	Vignette Ideology	Difference (N of Local Saying – Bible)	Hypothesized Direction?	Statistically Significant ? (95% one way)
Evangelical	Liberal	2.23 (67-60)	Yes	Yes
Evangelical	Conservative	-1.13 (73-72)	No	No
Non-Evangelical Protestant	Liberal	-.01 (64-53)	No	No
Non-Evangelical Protestant	Conservative	0.58 (57-57)	Yes	No
Non-Evangelical non-denominational	Liberal	-0.60 (15-16)	No	No
Non-Evangelical non-denominational	Conservative	-2.26 (21-15)	No	No
Catholic	Liberal	1.37 (26-40)	Yes	No
Catholic	Conservative	0.44 (37-35)	Yes	No

As seen in Table 2, all but one of the eight categories fails to reach statistical significance and only half of the differences are the correct sign. For Evangelicals, the liberal passages hold the hypothesized relationship and achieves statistical significance, but the conservative passages have the wrong relationship, as the respondents who received the bible passage vignette are actually more liberal than those in the local saying passage. Therefore, outside of the difference for Evangelicals receiving the liberal local saying and liberal bible

passage vignettes, the data do not support Hypothesis 1a's conception of Evangelicals being more affected by the vignettes than other denominations of Christianity.

In Hypothesis 2, I argue that Christians with high amounts of religious commitment will display more conservative tendencies when exposed to the Bible passage prompts respectively relative to Christians with low amounts of religious commitments. To test this, I created a religiosity index that grouped people into low, medium, and high categories of religiosity. Questions on the religiosity index consisted of questions on religious service attendance, discussing faith with non-adherents, discussing faith with adherents, how often the respondent read scripture, and how often the respondent prays. The religiosity index has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87, indicating it is appropriate to create an index from the questions included. A simple bivariate regression model between the policy index and the religiosity index reveals a statistically significant but limited relationship – the religiosity of a person explains only approximately 5% of the variation in the policy index variable. When a partisan identification variable is included in the regression, the religiosity variable is no longer statistically significant. To provide a more complete test of Hypothesis 2, I ran an OLS regression on the policy index with the independent variables of the three-category religiosity index and vignette variables. I then calculated marginal estimates based on the regression and displayed their means by category with accompanying 90% confidence intervals in Figure 3 below. For more information on the OLS regression estimates and the subsequent margins generated, please review Table 7 and Table 8 in Appendix 2.

Figure 3. Federal Spending Policy Liberalism Among Christians by Vignette and Religiosity



Note: Liberalism Policy Index indicates how the aggregate categories scored on average. Higher numbers indicate more liberal beliefs. The X axis refers to the twelve exclusive options, respondents belong to only one of the groups. The graph displays 90% CIs and means of each group. Overlap between bars signifies statistically identical groups. Low/Medium/High refers to scores on the religiosity index. R or D at the beginning refers to partisan identity of respondents. Liberal/Conservative refers to the ideology of the passage. LS = Local Saying, BP = Bible Passage.

Figure 3 shows two things primarily: the relative overlap of the confidence intervals regardless of ideology and the limited sample of people who are in the low religiosity category. First, the general trend of the graph is in line with Hypothesis 2: as people become more religious, they are also more conservative on federal spending policy. However, the confidence intervals of the margins make it impossible to state with certainty that there is a statistical difference between the groups. In large part, this is a result of a limited sample size among people in the low religiosity category; however, there is also substantial overlap

between people in the medium religiosity group and the high religiosity group. Table 3 below quantifies the effect difference between the local saying and Bible passage groups across the spectrum of religiosity:

Table 3. Vignette Effect Size by Religiosity

Religiosity Level	Vignette Ideology	Difference (N of Local Saying – Bible)	Hypothesized Direction?	Statistically Significant? (95% one way)
Low Religiosity	Liberal	1.73 (5-15)	Yes	No
Low Religiosity	Conservative	0.69 (16-16)	Yes	No
Medium Religiosity	Liberal	1.62 (62-59)	Yes	Yes
Medium Religiosity	Conservative	-0.34 (60-51)	No	No
High Religiosity	Liberal	1.00 (105-95)	Yes	No
High Religiosity	Conservative	-0.66 (111-113)	No	No

Table 3 demonstrates that four out of six groups demonstrate the correct direction of the relationship with the bible vignette respondents yielding more conservative answers.

However, only one of the groups achieves statistical significance. While I have demonstrated limited levels of evidence of a relationship between religiosity and conservatism on federal spending, it does not appear to be as a result of the different vignettes; therefore, Hypothesis 2 is not supported by the data.

Study 1 Discussion and Conclusions

One of the biggest limitations in this study came in the form of the vignettes themselves, specifically in the lack of Republican recognition of their ideological intent. Given that the Bible passages were selected based on their supposed ideological message, it is unfortunate that some of the respondents did not see the texts the same way. In retrospect, the messages were a bit unbalanced: the liberal message was longer and self-reinforcing while the conservative message was shorter and simpler. Perhaps with a more balanced approach it would have been easier for respondents to pick up on the conservative message; however, that may not have inherently fixed the problem, as Republicans still interpreted the liberal message in a fairly non-ideological manner.

A second problem lies with the recruitment method. Hypothesis 2 largely bears the brunt of this concern, as there was a lack in the number of people who fit in the low religiosity category. Given my recruitment method utilized pastors and churches, that would favor the more religiously in-touch, as demonstrated via the confidence intervals in Hypothesis 2. Further, receiving the link through a religiously-linked organization could have also primed subjects in a religious manner. In an ideal world, this problem could be overcome with a nationally representative survey of Christians; this option would be incredibly expensive and beyond the resources of this inquiry, however. Overall, the recruitment method was an ingenious way to attract a large number of Christians with no budget, but it is not without tradeoffs.

The scope of inquiry presents additional problems. It is possible that Christians outside the South would have reacted differently to a Biblical prime; however, given the notion of Christianity being stronger in the South, it is likely that including Christians from

other regions would have strengthened the null results (Pew Research Center 2014c). While I acknowledge that denominations are an important factor, my analysis of specific denominations is limited by the resources at my disposal and acquiring meaningful numbers of denominations under analysis. The plurality of different denominations of Christians makes it difficult to evaluate large numbers of specific groups with statistical methods. Further, I do not consider how other religious and non-religious groups might react to a biblical prime; in the electorate, it may cause a negative reaction, resulting in cancelling out any positive benefit gained amongst Christians.

Prior literature established the importance of religion on matters of public opinion (Campbell et al. 1960; Djupe and Calfano 2013; Mason 2018b). However, extant literature did not consider the Bible by itself as a potential political prime. Through this paper, I tested whether the Bible can act as a political prime that activates conservative nodes in individuals' neural networks, thus influencing their WM and conscious responses. Overall, my hypotheses were rejected: the Bible did not have a statistically significant, substantial conservative impact on people's attitudes toward federal spending policy, regardless of denomination or level of religiosity. In conclusion, people's stances on federal spending policy appear to be relatively unaffected by a biblical prime, as partisan identification seems to play a domineering role in determining people's federal spending policy attitudes.

While the lack of statistically significant results is somewhat disappointing, this paper does point to new ideas for explorations. Different Bible verses should be tried (and pre-tested) to see if there is some combination of verses and labels that primes political attitudes. In particular, it might be interesting to test an ideologically neutral bible verse with just the Bible label – this would serve as the biggest political test of the Bible prime itself. Describing

a short excerpt on a computer screen as from the Bible may be less compelling than seeing a Bible in the correct version; future versions could ensure that participants receive the verse using the vernacular from their denomination's chosen version of the Bible. Perhaps new research could consider a more specific policy area with a clear link to religion, such as abortion, gay marriage, or stem cell research. Overall, the realm of religion and public opinion is filled with possibility – future scholarship would benefit to learn from the lessons in this paper to build a better understanding of a world enveloped in religion and politics.

Chapter 3: Consider the Cross: Examining the Role of Religious Identity in Affective Political Evaluations

Overview

There is a paradox between the political science literature and mass studies on religion among the American population. Affective evaluation literature includes religious identity as a common category of social sorting, thus contributing to a burgeoning affective partisan gap (Mason 2018b). However, aggregate studies on the religious identity of Americans shows that a majority of both parties are still Christian, making Christian identity a confounding choice as a factor in affective polarization (Pew Research Center 2014a). Further, political science research establishes how candidate identities matter in terms of public evaluation (Cassese and Holman 2018). I argue that religious identity can actually unite people who share the identity via triggering affectively positive nodes in neural networks. Further, I argue that the highly religious should demonstrate the smallest affective gap in candidate evaluations due to the strength of the shared religious identity. Finally, I argue that Christian identity does not impact affective evaluations of candidates or parties, but Evangelical Christian identity does. I find that a shared religious identity actually does reduce an affective gap on candidate evaluation across party lines and that religiosity can actually increase the affective gap. Further, I find evidence that candidate information has a limited impact on evaluations of political parties. Overall, my most interesting finding is that Christian identity does not appear to contribute to an affective evaluation gap when evaluating Republican candidates. Further, I find no evidence that Evangelical Christian identity contributes to an affective feeling gap on candidate evaluation. This study makes a powerful statement in revising our understanding of the causes of affective evaluations.

Study 2 Literature Review

How does religion contribute to affective polarization and evaluations? Affective polarization is the disparate feelings that people hold for the political parties. Affective evaluations refer to the positive or negative feelings a person feels towards a given topic or political object. Partisans increasingly favor their own party and hold strong negative feelings towards the opposite party (Iyengar et al. 2019; Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012; Iyengar and Westwood 2015). Ideological polarization, the media, and social sorting play a role in generating affective polarization (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012; Lelkes, Sood, and Iyengar 2017; Mason 2018b; Rogowski and Sutherland 2016). Mason (2018b) posits that affective polarization is particularly strong in recent years and outpaces ideological, issue-based polarization amongst the American population. Through the course of this chapter, I explore the impact of religious and partisan identities and how they drive affective assessments on parties and political candidates via a novel survey experiment design with manipulation of a hypothetical candidate.

Mason (2018b) attributes a significant impact to the role of identities in driving affective polarization, arguing that identities such as race, income, and religion are increasingly sorted by parties. Partisan sorting occurs when political parties possess social characteristics that differ from the other party, effectively making a partisan bifurcation multi-faceted. Robison and Moskowitz (2019) also confirm that ideological, racial, and religious group affiliation can cause affective polarization.

The importance of social identity is two-fold: one, for the love that it generates between members of the same social group, and two, the hatred towards individuals who do not share the same social identities (Mason 2015; Mason 2018a; Mason 2018b). Social

identity does not automatically cause outgroup hatred, particularly in societies with multiple identities cross-cutting in the general population (Brewer 1999). However, Brewer (1999) also articulates that overt ingroup love relative to relatively neutral feelings on outgroups can be considered a form of prejudice. Prior scholarship notes that affective polarization of the past was muted via cross-cutting identities, which are identities that run across separated groups and give said groups a shared identity (Mason 2018b). However, when social identities come into alignment on a given identity, such as partisanship, there is an increased level of hatred towards outgroups, as prior cross-cutting identities are no longer serving in the cross-cutting function (Mason 2018b). When assessing the level of affective polarization and affective evaluation with regards to political actors, it is important to account for both potential instances of ingroup affinity and outgroup hate.

One of the areas of the greatest concentrations of social sorting is found in religious identity (Mason 2018a; 2018b; Robison and Moskowitz 2019). The Republican Party is increasingly Christian-identifying, and evangelical Christianity is particularly strong within the party (Mason 2018b; Pew Research Center 2014c). The Republican Party targeted appeals to the evangelical community goes back to the late 1970's (Silk 2010; Williams 2010). In the more contemporary era, Republicans frequently use religious messages to establish Christian support (Djupe and Calfano 2013). The Republican Party's efforts have been largely successful: evangelicals and the religiously orthodox are increasingly likely to identify with and vote for Republicans (Layman 1997).

Just because the Republican Party has become more Christian does not inherently mean it is the cause of a rise in affective polarization or a difference in affective evaluation of candidates. While 82% of Republicans identify as Christian, 63% of self-identified

Democrats also identify as Christian, meaning that a majority of partisans identify as some form of Christian (Pew Research Center 2014a; Pew Research Center 2014c). According to prior research on affective polarization, it would be expected that Democrats would hold a stronger dislike of Republicans due to their increased alignment with Evangelical Christianity, while Republicans would hold a stronger dislike of the Democrats and the Democratic Party for the increasing concentration of non-Christians among their ranks, thus making identities more socially sorted (Mason 2018b; Robison and Moskowitz 2019). However, Robison and Moskowitz (2019) test only the religious identity of Christian fundamentalists in relation to affective polarization; the diversity of modern Christian traditions is not captured by their study. Further, Mason (2018b) tests religion as simply one of many factors in affective polarization and does not isolate its effect. Affective polarization and affective evaluation gaps driven by partisan sorting on religious identity seems incompatible with aggregate statistics on religious affiliation by party (Pew Research Center 2014a). However, if religious social sorting is contributing to affective polarization and affective evaluation gaps, Democrats would ultimately harbor negative feelings towards the Republican Party and associated candidates for an identity they ultimately share (Pew Research Center 2014a). Rather than serving as a potential cross-cutting identity, Democrats would be actively using a common identity as a means of punishment in evaluation of the Republicans; the active use of a shared religious identity as a point of conflict has not been explored in the political science literature. Therefore, the affective polarization and social sorting literature would benefit from quantifying Christian and evangelical identity's impact on affective polarization. In essence, more research is required on the delineation of religion and how it impacts affective polarization and affective evaluation throughout the electorate.

Candidate identities are often used by the public to form an evaluation (Cassese and Holman 2018). Gender, partisanship, race, and religion all have an impact on candidate evaluations (Cassese and Holman 2018; Matland and Shepherd 2004; Rajan and Golebiowska 2005). However, there is not a clear understanding of how candidate characteristics affect evaluations of their respective political parties. Candidates are seen as representatives of their political parties with varying degrees of individual discretion (Aldrich 1995; Aldrich 1995). Therefore, it is important to understand how candidate characteristics reflect on their political parties. Mason (2018b) articulates how some identities are increasingly aligned with a political party, but it is unclear how individual candidates affect party evaluations when they confirm social identity alignment. This research measures how a prospective candidate's identities affect both evaluations of the candidate and the larger party's affective evaluations.

Study 2 Theory

There is a paradox regarding the religious influence on affective polarization and evaluations: if religion contributes to affective evaluations, then a significant portion of Democratic Christians at the aggregate level express their cross-pressured situation by using their partisan identity over their religious identity. Alternatively, religious identity is not a particularly powerful factor in affective polarization measures in the aggregate. Given the growing attention on affective evaluations, it is important to understand the mechanisms behind it: this chapter seeks to examine the role of religion in a variety of affective evaluations. Mason (2018b) emphasizes the combining of social identities as the driving force behind affective polarization: however, when aggregating the identities, it is possible that some identities drive the affective polarization more than others. The social sorting

hypothesis relies upon the increasing alignment of social identities along partisan lines to express itself via affective polarization: however, the social sorting hypothesis might overcount the actual number of contributing identities in affective polarization measures (Mason 2018b). That is, some social identities, despite coming into stronger partisan alignment, do not express significantly when measuring affective evaluations, but are masked as a potential factor by other stronger social identities. For instance, perhaps Republicans share a common socio-economic status, race, and affinity for horse-racing: the social sorting hypothesis would pose that the combination of those identities forms the basis for affective polarization. However, it is possible that the affinity for horse-racing does not contribute to affective polarization: in other words, if the affinity for horse-racing was removed from the equation, the affective polarization levels would be the same as the counterfactual inclusion of the horse-racing identity. Through utilizing a survey experiment design, I am able to compare how hypothetical elite identities contribute to affective polarization and evaluations, thus providing a rough estimate of how religion contributes to political polarization.

Another question related to Mason's (2018b) work is the integration of identities as a byproduct of social sorting with one another. In other words, a potential problem for this research is whether social identities have evolved to include multiple identities as a byproduct of social sorting. The social integration conundrum can be analyzed using the *John Q. Public* model of information processing (Lodge and Taber 2013). On the surface, if "Republican" inherently means "Christian," the levels of affective polarization and evaluation should be statistically indistinguishable from one another between evaluative prompts that describe a figure as "Republican" versus a "Christian Republican." People might associate social identities with one another, but the strength of that association is

equally important: for instance, when the word “Republican” is spoken, does it automatically evoke the identities of conservative, evangelical, and Christian, or are the unmentioned identities more latent to the other identity? These questions largely lie in coming to be a better understanding of subconscious information processing, as the importance of identity is largely evaluated at a subconscious level (Lodge and Taber 2013; Mason 2018b). By bringing an identity from the LTM to the WM with a prompt, it ensures a certain level of importance for that identity (Lodge and Taber 2013). If the identities are integrated with one another, mentioning both identities should have a reinforcing effect, as etymologically, the words reemphasize one another, thus contributing to greater affective polarization. There is not a consensus in political science on the reinforcing effect of shared identity, however. Klar (2018) finds that a shared gender identity can actually increase an affective polarization gap, thus hurting the cross-cutting argument, as it can increase distrust when the identity is shared with someone of the opposite party. If a shared religious identity is indeed contributing to affective polarization, the data should reveal itself easily enough via an experimental procedure, as Christian Democrats will rate the hypothetical candidate lower on the feeling thermometer scale. This chapter serves as a broader test of that reinforcing mechanism: if incorrect, this offers substantial evidence for Klar’s (2018) hypotheses.

Through this research, I argue that a shared religious identity across party lines does not contribute to affective evaluations, while non-shared religious identities do contribute to affective evaluations. I focus on social identity’s outgroup component, as it is more malleable than the ingroup component of social identity and easier to change for introspection. In other words, I cannot change a respondents’ identity, but I can change the identity of a figure under examination in the stimuli exposure phase. Further, due to identity information contributing

to subconscious information processing, this type of research design also enables the utilization of the *John Q. Public* model (Lodge and Taber 2013).

Affective reactions are a natural, automatic component of information processing (Lodge and Taber 2013). Additionally, unconscious affective reactions affect the entirety of information processing through determining which nodes are activated and brought from the LTM to the WM (Lodge and Taber 2013). As shown through prior research, identities matter in terms of how people evaluate others (Mason 2018b). Therefore, manipulating the identities of a hypothetical candidate will affect how people evaluate the said candidate.

Stimuli come into a neural network already filled with a variety of concepts, ideas, feelings, attitudes, and beliefs (Lodge and Taber 2013). That is, stimuli often act as a prime in reminding an individual of associated and affectively similar concepts upon exposure. First, learning of others' social identities can act as stimuli within an affective neural network. People like when others share an identity with themselves and dislike differences between themselves and others (Mason 2018b). This affective reaction to the shared identity prompts affective contagion when evaluating someone: upon discovering a shared identity, a person is more likely to more positively evaluate the person under evaluation. However, the same is true for when someone expresses an affectively negative identity – it shapes the evaluation of the entire person under consideration (Lodge and Taber 2013). In interacting with new information, people's affective reactions to the new concept are formed by the concept's relations to already held notions and beliefs unconsciously. Thus, information conveyed about someone forms the basis of an initial affective reaction (Lodge and Taber 2013). The neural node network is not a one-way street, either: the person eventually contributes affectively to evaluation of other connected nodes in the neural network.

Therefore, I expected a shared religious identity between a person and a subject under evaluation will ultimately increase the affectively positive feelings for the person under consideration. The affective implications for shared vs. unshared identity form the basis of Hypothesis 1:

Hypothesis 1: Christians will demonstrate lower levels of an affective evaluation gap than Non-Christians across party lines when evaluating a Christian candidate.

I expect non-Christians to have a wider affective feeling gap across party lines when compared to Christians. Specifically, when Democrats who are Christians process that the candidate is a Christian as well, this will trigger a more affectively positive feeling than if the candidate in question is not a Christian. Relatively speaking, I expect the Democratic Christians to rate the candidate higher than non-Christian Democrats, as the Christians possess a competing affective framework not held by the non-Christian Democrats.

Similarly, among Christian Republicans, the reinforcement of both the Christian and Republican identity should enable higher overall ratings on a feeling thermometer than a non-Christian Republican through the reinforcement of two identities over just one.

Meanwhile, non-Christian Democrats will largely be driven by an effectively negative reaction to a Christian candidate, as they will experience a negative affective reaction to a candidate that does not share their identity. Non-Christian Republicans will experience something similar, but the shared partisan identity will provide an affectively positive boost that the Non-Christian Republicans simply do not possess.

Strength of affect also matters when considering information processing (Lodge and Taber 2013). First, affect and identity are related but different concepts. Affective refers to the positive or negative feelings a person has in reaction to something, while identity refers to

a characteristic of an individual (Lodge and Taber 2013). Strength of affect can shape a person's evaluation of a new object via the strength of affective association with known characteristics. The stronger the feeling, the more affectively charged the reaction will be to the new object, as there will be affect contagion between the known object and the previously unknown object. This forms the basis of Hypothesis 2:

Hypothesis 2: Christians with high levels of religious commitment will demonstrate a smaller affective evaluation gap than Christians with lower levels of religious commitment across party lines when evaluating a Christian candidate.

Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee's (1954) work suggests the importance of religious commitment in explaining religion's influence over political attitudes; this hypothesis explicitly sets out to test the connection of religiosity to affective evaluations. The key operating group here will be the highly religious Christian Democrats: if hypothesis 1a is correct, they will demonstrate more support on average than their less religious peers. The greater support is a result of a more affectively positive association of the concept of "Christian" amongst the most religious. I expect little movement from Christian Republicans across the religiosity spectrum: this is primarily a result of Christian Republicans already being nearly maxed out in affect due to the Republican nature of the hypothetical candidate.

Affective reactions to information matter in terms of later evaluations of objects under consideration (Lodge and Taber 2013). Specifically, people have automatic affective reactions to new stimuli based on known, already held information (Lodge and Taber 2013). Additionally, people incorporate affective feelings towards new object evaluation via assigning affective weight via perceived relevant nodes that they already possess. For instance, when a person is considering buying a new car, they are more likely to consider the

fiscal cost of the car than the number of birds at the dealership at the day. Similarly, some nodes are so powerful that they can dominate what goes into WM from LTM. This forms the basis of Hypothesis 3:

Hypothesis 3: Christian identity does not contribute to the partisan affective feelings and affective polarization gap on candidates and political parties, respectively.

Hypothesis 3 serves as a test of the association of Christian and Republican identities in relation to one another. In other words, I argue that the Christian identity is not contributing to affective evaluations. If the Christian identity was contributing to affective evaluations, Christian Republican candidates should be more affectively charged and result in greater affective feeling gaps, as the two identities would be reinforcing. As stated earlier, Christians still make up a majority of both parties – as such, I expect the majority of both parties to have generically positive views associated with the Christian identity, given it is one of their own identities (Pew Research Center 2014a; 2014b). Strength of attachment to the Christian religious identity may vary by party, but the importance is that in the aggregate, the Christian religious identity is viewed as affectively positive across party lines. Christians, regardless of party, will rate the candidate higher when they share a common religious identity.

However, in the Republican candidate condition, there will be no influence of religious identity. Potentially, those exposed to the Christian Republican frame should demonstrate less affective polarization than the control frame, as I expect the Democratic Christian approval to be higher than the control group while Republican Christian approval largely will be the same between treatments due to being close to maxed out already due to partisanship. However, statistically speaking, I expect near identical results between the two groups, as the affective reaction to the Republican label will dominate the affective reaction to the

hypothetical candidate. Additionally, this hypothesis is tested on the Republican Party evaluation to see if there is affect contagion between the new information and the Republican Party itself.

Recall that attitudes are “an evaluative tally attached to an object in long term memory” (Lodge and Taber 2013, 30). This implies that new information can strengthen or weaken the affective reaction to a given object. In particular, when considering an object that someone is evaluating for the first time, the tally generated will be based off the available information for unconscious processing. Affect, therefore, is not a simple positive or negative reaction, but a spectrum of reaction with varying strengths. When affective charges of the same type are found on the same new object, I expect an additive effect that strengthens the overall affective reaction towards the new object. This theoretical assumption provides the basis of Hypothesis 4:

Hypothesis 4: Evangelical identity contributes to and increases the partisan affective feelings and affective polarization gap on candidates and political parties, respectively.

Hypothesis 4 applies the same conceptual framework utilized in Hypothesis 3, but with a different subset of Christianity and a different projected outcome. Specifically, I expect that the term “Evangelical” will reinforce the affective reaction to the Republican politician.

Christian evangelicalism is more associated with the Republican Party beyond the general identity of Christianity (Campbell, Green, and Layman 2011; Cassese 2020; Djupe and Calfano 2013; Mason 2018b; Silk 2010; Williams 2010). Therefore, I expect both a positive reinforcing effect among Republicans and a negative reinforcing effect among Democrats, thus creating a large affective polarization gap relative to the affective polarization gap among people not in the evangelical treatment category. The Evangelical identity will

therefore contribute to the affective polarization gap despite a general Christian identity not contributing to the polarization gap. The same theoretical approach applies to candidate evaluation: evangelical candidates will be more likely to display a larger affective feeling gap.

Study 2 Research Design

To answer how religion influences affective polarization, I utilized a survey experiment design in order to have a combination of strong internal and external validity. For full survey wording, please see Appendix 3. I utilized the Qualtrics survey platform to create this survey and automate randomization procedures. I administered this survey experiment on college students enrolled at Appalachian State University in sixteen different political science, religious studies, and philosophy classes. Students were recruited via email and course announcements via using the survey as an extra credit opportunity. Survey response rates are relatively unclear due to lack of access to data and uncertainty in overlap information. Once they started the survey, respondents completed an attention check to ensure that they were paying attention.

Next, each respondent was exposed to one (1) vignette that described a local candidate in New Hampshire. Each vignette is a modified version of a real newspaper story on a candidate's declaration (Sylvia 2020). In the control condition, the candidate is described generically without a religious or partisan identity. In the first treatment condition, the candidate describes themselves as a Republican. In the third treatment, the candidate describes himself as a Christian and a Republican, while in the final treatment, the candidate also is described as evangelical. This closely resembles the survey experiment utilized by Campbell, Green, and Wayman (2011). Notably, the candidate was always described as a

Republican other than in the control condition. After a manipulation check, respondents answered feeling thermometer questions on the candidate, the Republican Party, and the Democratic Party. I focused on the candidate and the candidate's party rather than other social groups due to the inherent political grouping of respondents when assessing affective political polarization. Respondents then answered a series of religiosity questions that evaluate religious service attendance, discussing faith with non-adherents, discussing faith with adherents, how often they read scripture, and how often they pray. Next, respondents were asked basic demographic information. After the data collection period was complete, the affective polarization gap was calculated via comparing the responses of Democrats and Republicans within treatments on the feeling thermometer question, thus providing an aggregate measure of the gap between partisans within their treatment group. This allowed comparisons between the four groups. Taken together, this survey experiment is a powerful tool that quantifies the role of religious identity in affective polarization.

The measurement components of this study warrant further discussion. First, I define non-Christians as anyone who does not explicitly identify with any branch of Christianity. This is more of a grouping for analysis rather than a recognition of a shared identity, but analysis of different religious groups is beyond the scope of this study. Second, religiosity serves as a proxy for strength of religious identity in this study, as I assume those who express their actions more as a result of conscious decisions are more religious than those who do not. Third, the amount of affective polarization cannot be measured via knowing simply how Democrats feel regarding a person. A true measure of affective polarization requires aggregate knowledge of both Democrats' and Republicans' relative feelings towards the political parties. Affective polarization refers to the existence of the gap between the two

political parties. Further, this research considers affective feelings in a two-fold manner: how it affects evaluations of candidates and how it affects affective polarization of political parties. It is relatively unsurprising when an individual's characteristics affect how others evaluate them; when an identity impacts a related group that the individual belongs to makes the effect of the identity more intriguing. Specifically, Lodge and Taber (2013) articulate how associations between subjects can become affectively similar with association over time. This research tests how a new stimulus in candidate identity also affects evaluations of their political party; that is, do people generalize their feelings from the identity and relate them to another group in which the person is affiliated?

Study 2 Analysis

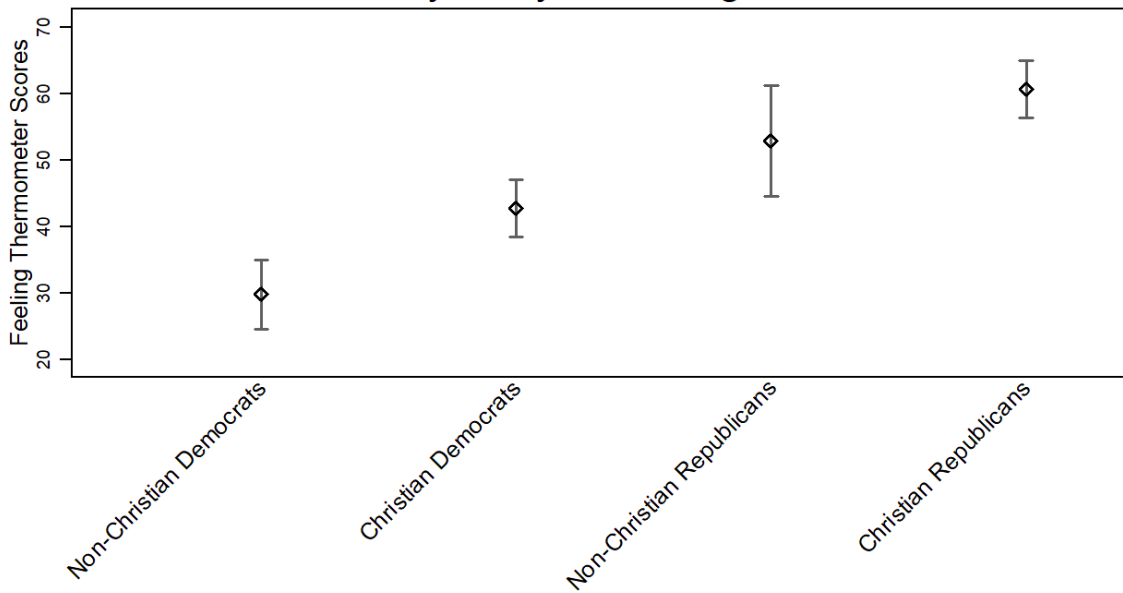
Three hundred and eight respondents fully completed the affective polarization. Approximately 27 percent of the sample identified as Republican and 32 percent as Democrats. Of the 41 percent of independents, forty five percent felt they were closer to the Democratic Party and 24 percent felt they were closer to the Republican Party. For the purpose of this analysis, I treat independent leaners as partisans. Fifty-eight percent of the sample classified themselves as some denomination of Christian. This was not a representative sample, given the nature of the collection process; again, I use the Qualtrics randomized distribution of the four treatments to guarantee that the most important condition of experimental work is met (Coppock, Leeper, and Mullinix 2018).

First, I tested whether the survey worked as intended. Eighty six percent of people passed the initial attention check, demonstrating that in the aggregate, people paid attention to the survey. Post-treatment, ninety five percent of respondents were able to correctly identify the state of the hypothetical candidate. Eighty eight percent of respondents chose the

correct partisan classification of their given candidate, thus serving as confirmation of part of the treatment check. However, in terms of the religious identity of the hypothetical candidate, only 80 percent correctly identified the specified religious tradition of their given treatment. The Evangelical Christian Republican (ECR) treatment was only correctly identified forty eight percent of the time – however, only 13 percent of the respondents given the ECR treatment were entirely wrong in identifying the religion of the hypothetical candidate. Thirty eight percent of the sample simply classified the ECR condition as Christian – this could be due to a lack of clarity in expected responses in the treatment check question. A full 86 percent of the ECR treatment recognized the hypothetical candidate as at least a Christian, however, thus implying that the treatment was successful but the instructions on the treatment check were unclear to respondents. People who failed the attention check were kept in the study due to the possibility of the prime subconsciously affecting things, but not quite expressing itself consciously. Further, people who failed the attention check were kept in the study to extend the external validity of the study; people rarely always pay attention to everything, and this study takes a conservative approach to estimating the effectiveness of the experiment to better model real-world conditions.

My first hypothesis articulated that Non-Christians will demonstrate higher levels of affective polarization towards a Christian candidate when compared to Christians across party lines. To calculate this, I generated means and 95% confidence intervals for Christians and non-Christians across party lines that received the CR or ECR treatment - the only treatments that received information on the candidate's religion. The main comparison in Figure 1 is between people of the same religion across party lines who received the same vignette. Figure 1 below shows a graphical display of the findings:

Figure 1. Feeling Thermometer on Hypothetical Candidate by Party and Religion



Does not include respondents who received the control or Republican only treatment. Graph displays 95% CI and mean for each group. Groups are exclusive. Feeling Thermometer refers to feelings of warmth felt by respondent. The higher the number, the more favorable the evaluation. Scores can range from 0-100.

Figure 1 displays a general trend that seems to support Hypothesis 1. Among the four groups, non-Christian Democrats display the lowest amount of support for the hypothetical candidate and Christian Republicans displayed the highest amount of support for the hypothetical candidate. To assess the partisan feeling gap, a rough estimate can compare the space between the end of the confidence intervals for Christians and non-Christians across party lines in Figure 1. In terms of quantifying the partisan gap, between the different religious traditions, the affective feeling gap between non-Christian partisans was 23 points on a 100-point scale, whereas the feeling gap between Christian partisans was 17.93 points. While the 5.07 gap between Christians and non-Christian evaluations is not tremendous, this does offer some preliminary evidence that Christian identity can actually mitigate the effects of partisan sorting contrary to Mason’s (2018b) assessments.

While Figure 1 exemplifies a general trend among partisans by religious identity, it does aggregate vignette information. Figure 2 examines how people with different religious identities processes the hypothetical candidate, but adds to Figure 1 by including vignette differentiation:

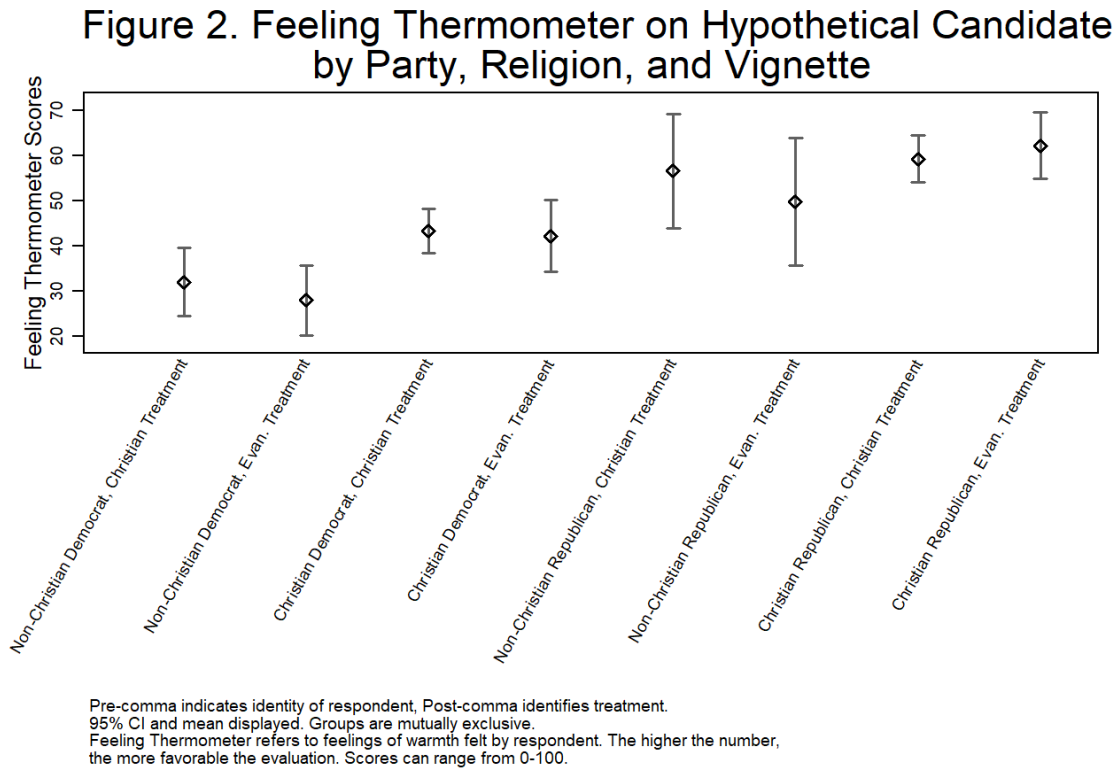


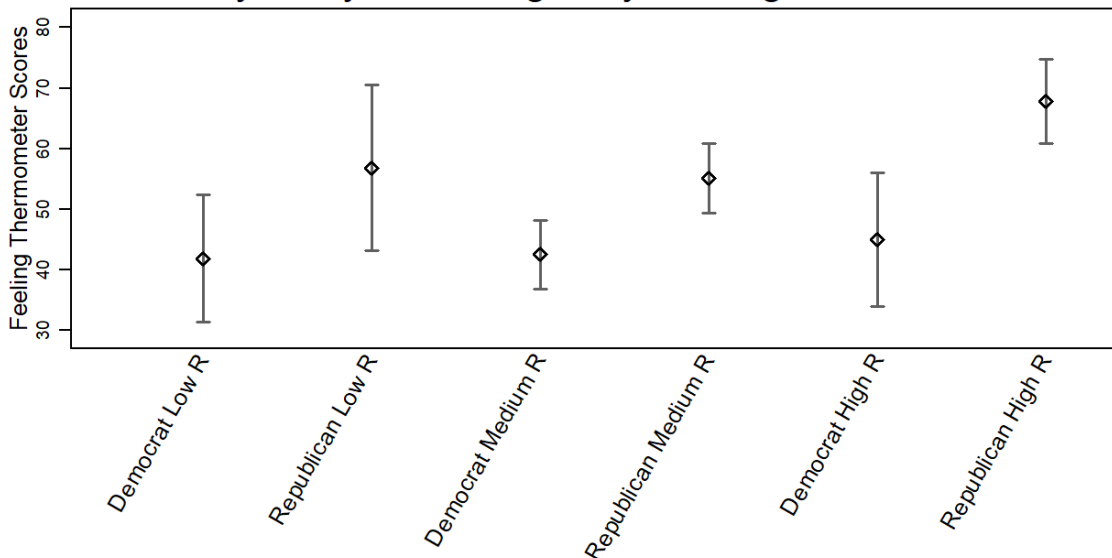
Figure 2 displays several interesting findings. First, within the same respondent identity category, the Christian Republican (CR) vignette and the ECR vignette are statistically identical, as confirmed by mean comparisons. This hints that the religious identities ascribed to the hypothetical candidate did not do much to impact affective assessments of the candidate, which runs contrary to Mason’s (2018b) theories of social sorting and affective polarization. However, for Hypothesis 1, the most important evaluation is again the gap between partisans given the same conditions and religious identity. The partisan gap here refers to the measurement of the partisan gap, a calculation onto itself, in

the same vignette across religious backgrounds, Christian and non-Christian. The partisan gap between Christians and non-Christians in the CR treatment category was 8.71 points, indicating a fairly substantial gap demonstrating that non-Christians evaluated the candidate much harsher than Christian candidates. However, in the ECR treatment, the partisan feeling gap was only 1.85 points. When conducting mean comparisons between non-Christians and Christians with the same partisan affiliation and treatment at the 95% level, Christians display statistically higher evaluations of the hypothetical candidate over Non-Christians three out of four times, with the Christian Republican treatment not being statistically different between Christian and Non-Christian Republicans. In terms of statistical significance, when combining the Christian and ECR vignettes, Christians and Non-Christians have a statistically different average in the expected direction as measured by a one-way t-test at the 95% confidence level. In other words, Christians evaluated a Christian candidate in a statistically more favorable manner than Non-Christians evaluating a Christian candidate. In considering the evidence introduced in Figure 2 and Figure 1, I can offer support for Hypothesis 1's assertion that Christians will affectively evaluate Christian candidates less harshly than non-Christian respondents.

Hypothesis 2 builds on the foundation of Hypothesis 1 to consider another element of the respondent's identity. Hypothesis 2 asserts that Christians with high levels of religious commitment will demonstrate lower levels of affective polarization than Christians with lower levels of religious commitment across party lines on candidate evaluations. To assess my hypothesis, I first calculated a Cronbach's alpha on my religiosity index, which the indicated calculation of 0.835 indicated the reliability of interlacing the selected religiosity items. Then, I broke the religiosity index into three categories: low religiosity, medium

religiosity, and high religiosity. From there, I was able to use the three categories in the assessment of Hypothesis 2. For evidence in favor of Hypothesis 2, I would expect the largest gap between candidate evaluations to occur among the least religious, followed by the medium religious, and finally the most religious would maintain the smallest partisan gap. Figure 3 below demonstrates a graphical representation of feeling thermometer scores by partisan identity and religiosity of the respondents.

Figure 3. Feeling Thermometer on Hypothetical Candidate by Party and Religiosity Among Christians



Does not include respondents who received the control or Republican only treatment. Graph displays 95% CI and mean for each group. Groups are exclusive. Low/Medium/High R refers to religiosity of respondents. Feeling Thermometer refers to feelings of warmth felt by respondent. The higher the number, the more favorable the evaluation. Scores can range from 0-100.

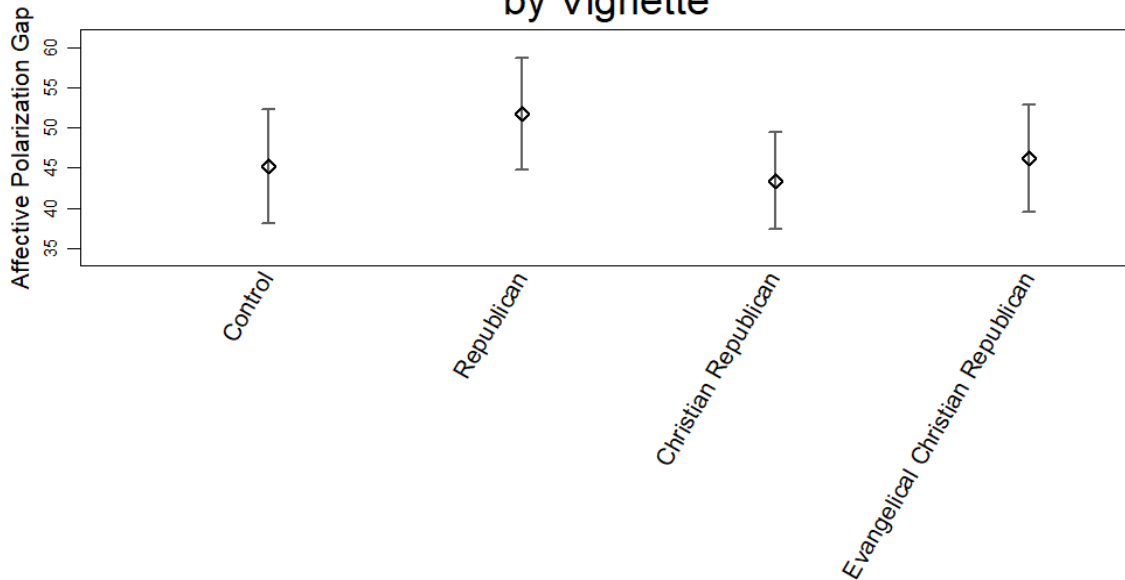
As seen in Figure 3, Hypothesis 2 appears drastically incorrect, as the results go in the opposite direction than expected. The Christians in the low religiosity category displayed the smallest gap across the religiosity spectrum, as Democrats and Republicans in this category were statistically indistinguishable from one another. In the medium religiosity category, Democrats and Republicans are close to being statistically indistinguishable from one

another. Using mean comparisons, when comparing across party at the same level of religiosity, differences are statistically significant at the 95% level using one-way t-tests; however, the gap between the groups is not in the expected direction, as the high religiosity category demonstrates the largest statistical gap across the religiosity spectrum. Taken together, this offers strong evidence against the theory advanced in Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3 and 4 can be considered together due to utilizing the same data. Hypothesis 3 states that Christian identity does not contribute to the partisan affective feelings and affective polarization gap on candidates and political parties. Hypothesis 4 articulates that Evangelical identity contributes to and increases the partisan affective feelings gap and affective polarization gap on candidates and political parties. In essence, when considering the vignettes given to respondents, I expect the Republican vignette responses and the Christian Republican vignette responses to be statistically identical while the Evangelical Christian Republican will be statistically different so that the partisan gap is wider in evaluations.

First, to assess Hypothesis 3 and 4, I look at the affective polarization gap by vignette. The affective polarization gap refers to the gap or difference between the feelings a respondent holds for their own party minus the feelings they hold for the opposing party. For Hypothesis 3 to be correct, I would expect the Republican and CR vignettes to have statistically identical outcomes. For Hypothesis 4 to be correct, the ECR vignette would be statistically larger than the CR and Republican vignette responses. Figure 4 below displays the mean and 95% confidence interval for respondents' affective polarization gap by vignette received:

Figure 4. Affective Polarization Party Assessment by Vignette



Displays mean and 95% CI.
 Affective Polarization is measured by taking feelings of partisan's party minus feelings towards the out-party. Scores can range from 100 to 0. The higher the number, the greater the affective feeling gap, indicating warmer feelings towards respondents' own party and colder feelings towards the out-party.

Figure 4 presents mixed results for my hypotheses. First, across the board, the vignette description did not appear to affect party evaluations, given the overlap between all vignettes and the control group. Mean comparisons confirm that the affective polarization gap by vignette received were not statistically different from the control at the 95% level, indicating the vignettes had little impact on the affective polarization gap. Therefore, it is hard to take away conclusive results from this figure. Figure 4 does offer some evidence for Hypothesis 3, however, as it appears that the affective polarization measure was statistically identical among the Republican and CR vignettes. Unfortunately for Hypothesis 4, the ECR vignette was also identical statistically to the Republican and CR vignette, thus offering competing evidence. However, it is possible that Figure 4 masks statistically significant partisan assessments of an affective polarization gap. Figure 5 addresses that concern by

performing the same calculations as Figure 4, but also breaking down responses by partisan identification:

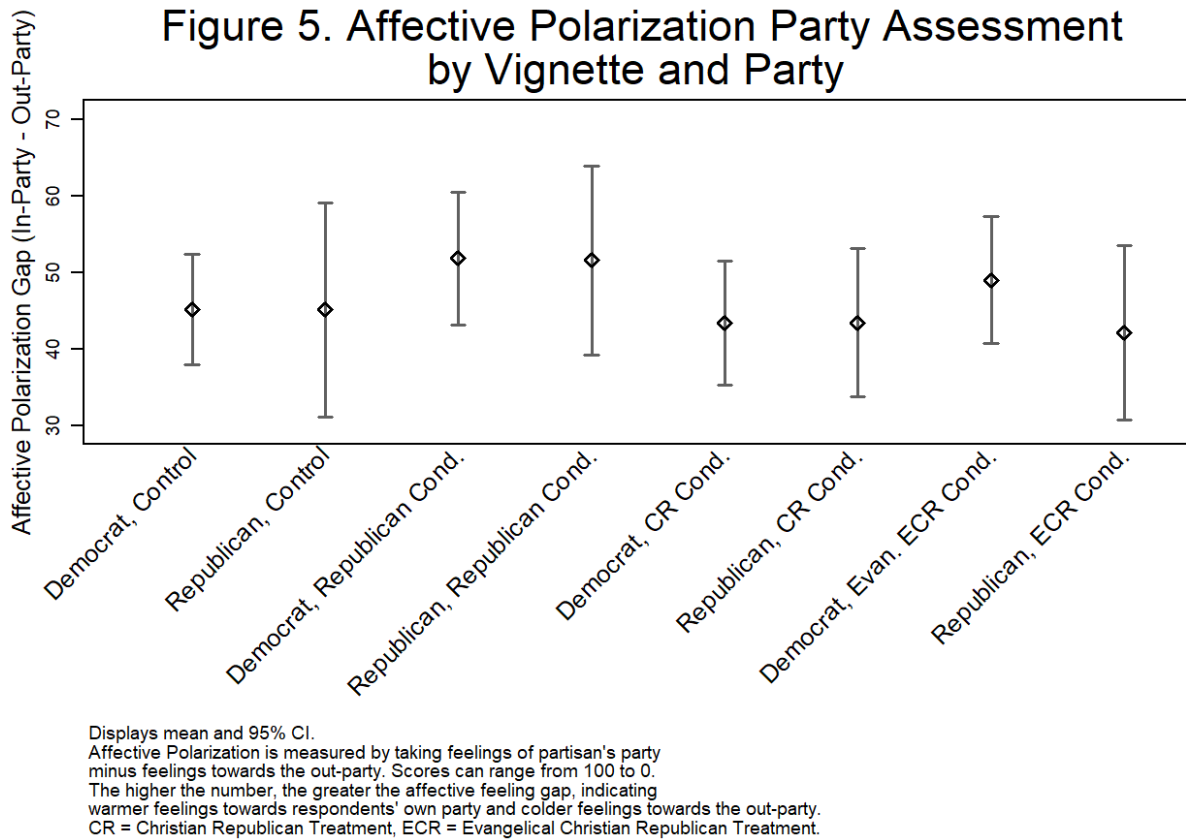
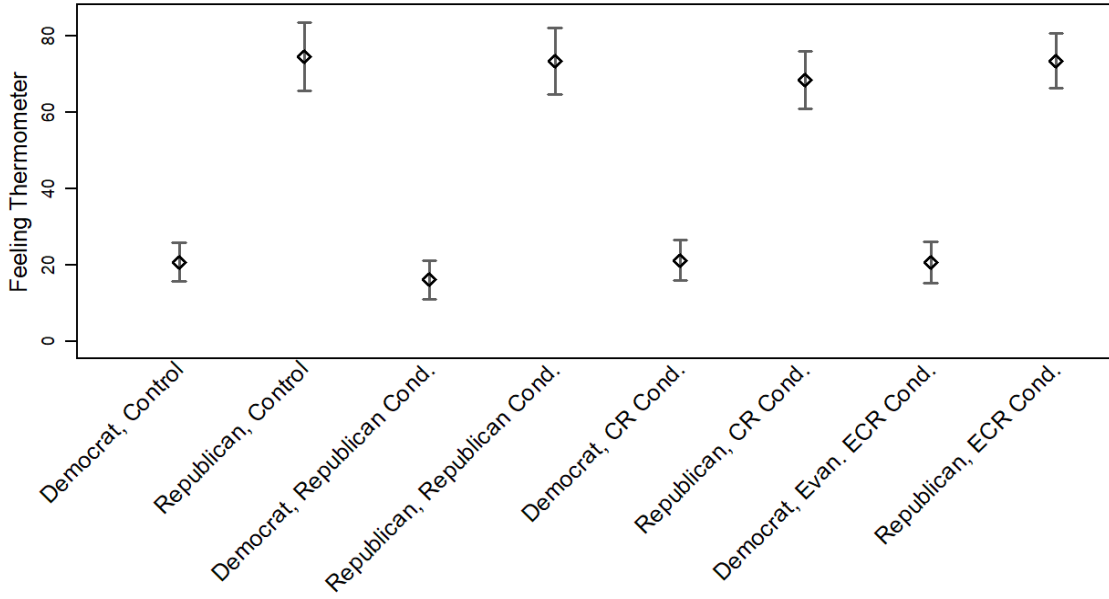


Figure 5 largely repeats the same story as Figure 4: it appears that the vignettes did not affect assessments of the political parties. Analysis of variance confirms non-significant results for the affective polarization gap between the partisan identification and the vignette variable. Interestingly, this suggests that partisans roughly do not favor each other at about the same rate as the other party dislikes them when assessing Republican candidates. Again, Figure 5 offers weak statistical evidence in favor of Hypothesis 3 and against Hypothesis 4, but the overlap with the control condition provides stronger evidence that the message conveyed in the vignettes did not carry over to assessments of the political party. As a final test of the assessment of whether the vignettes impacted party assessments, Figure 6

examines feeling thermometer scores for assessments of the Republican party by both vignette and partisan identification.

Figure 6. Affective Feelings on the Republican Party by Vignette and Party ID



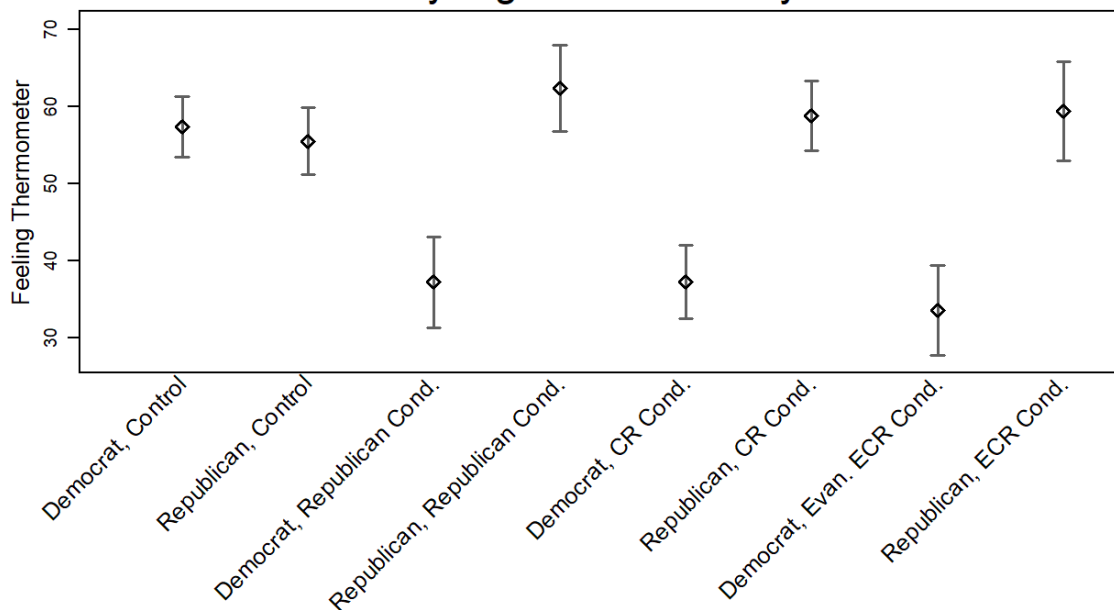
Graph displays 95% CI and mean for each group. Groups are exclusive. Feeling Thermometer refers to feelings of warmth felt by respondent. The higher the number, the more favorable the evaluation. Scores can range from 0-100.

It is important to keep in mind that the control group was the only group that did not receive any information about the Republican Party. For Democrats, the difference between the control and Republican condition is statistically significant at the $p=0.10$ level in the expected direction in a one-way t-test; however, all other Democrat groups are not statistically different from the control. For Republicans, mean comparisons via t-tests confirms all groups are statistically indifferent from one another. Therefore, as shown in Figure 6, partisan evaluations of the Republican Party were statistically identical across party lines regardless of vignette received. Taken together, the lack of statistical difference between the control group and the other vignettes in Figures 4, 5, and 6 offer a compelling

case that the hypothetical candidate's biographical information did not impact assessments of the larger political parties.

While it appears that party assessments were unaffected by candidate biographical information, it is possible that the assessments of the candidate himself was impacted by the information. Figure 7 displays the hypothetical candidate's average feeling thermometer score and accompanying confidence interval by vignette received and partisan identification. For Hypothesis 3 to be supported, candidate evaluations in the Republican vignette and Christian Republican vignette should be statistically identical. For Hypothesis 4 to be correct, the ECR vignette Democratic respondents should be statistically lower than their peers in the CR and Republican categories, while Republican respondents in the ECR category should demonstrate statistically more favorable evaluations than Republicans in the CR or Republican vignette category.

Figure 7. Affective Feelings Candidate Assessment by Vignette and Party



Graph displays 95% CI and mean for each group. Groups are exclusive. Feeling Thermometer refers to feelings of warmth felt by respondent. The higher the number, the more favorable the evaluation. Scores can range from 0-100.

Figure 7 reports several remarkable findings. First, in the control category, Republicans and Democrats held similar perceptions of the hypothetical candidate. However, once the vignettes introduced partisan information, there was a drastic shift in the partisan gap. Republicans continued to have a fairly high evaluation of the candidate, though it was statistically similar to the control category; Republicans in the control category were statistically different from Republicans in the Republican treatment category, but the substantial difference was only seven points on a 100-point scale. However, Democrats immediately held lower evaluations of the candidate in a statistically meaningful way once the partisan information was introduced, as confirmed via one-way t-tests at the 95% confidence level. For Republicans and Democrats in the non-control categories, the responses were statistically identical regardless of the vignette received, as confirmed by

one-way mean comparison tests at the 95% confidence level. From a hypothesis perspective, this adds strong evidence in favor of Hypothesis 3 that Christian identity does not contribute to affective assessments of candidates. However, this finding fails to reject the null in the case of Hypothesis 4, as it appears the evangelical identity also did not contribute meaningfully to affective evaluations. Overall, this finding offers further questions on the current foundational work on affective polarization in political science, as it largely appears that candidate Christian religious identity does not contribute in the expected manner to affective assessments.

Study 2 Discussion and Conclusion

Some may argue that one of the limitations of this research is the utilization of a student sample. However, in randomly assigning the vignette treatments, I ensure randomization of groups that make aggregate analysis of said groups feasible and internally valid (Coppock, Leeper, and Mullinix 2018). While a larger, more representative sample would undoubtedly be appreciated, the results from this analysis cannot be dismissed out of hand.

One potential limitation of this research lies in the conclusion that I find regarding the lack of impact of religious identity on candidate evaluation. As addressed in the theory section, some scholars might believe that the religious identities are so integrated into the partisan identities explains the lack of differences between the different vignettes. However, this goes against the findings in Mason's (2018a; 2018b) work. Mason (2018b) finds that as social sorting increases, the affective polarization gap when assessing parties also grows. In essence, it is irrational to expect the affective feeling gap to increase when evaluating an abstract concept such as a party but not expect the same thing when evaluating a candidate

with certain identities. Therefore, it seems unlikely that identities do not reinforce one another when affectively considering a candidate but do reinforce one another when considering a party. This is particularly true in using a fake candidate; I am not drawing off someone that respondents maintain outside knowledge of that impacts the assessment. Overall, more research is needed on how religious identity impacts affective evaluations.

There is a conundrum in the political science literature: the dominant affective polarization thesis argues that religious identity is a contributing factor to an affective feeling gap driven by social sorting, while aggregate level surveys indicate that the majority of both parties share a religious identity (Mason 2018b; Pew Research Center 2014a). Through this research, I asked, how does religious identity contribute to affective polarization? I argued that Christian religious identity is ultimately not a source of affective polarization, that more religious Christians will display the smallest affective evaluation gap of candidates, and that Evangelical Christian identity ultimately does contribute to affective polarization. Ultimately, it appears that Christian religious identity does not contribute to affective evaluations of candidates, but the most religious are actually the most likely to maintain an affective polarization gap. This could be explained using Klar's (2018) expectation violation theory: the highly religious could be irritated that a fellow believer does not share their political views or elated that they do share their views. When it comes to affective polarization, it appears that a single candidate's characteristics do not contribute to affective assessments of the party. However, most strikingly, Christian religious identity does not appear to play a role in affective evaluations of candidates in light of a partisan angle, indicating limitations to the effects of the social sorting and affective polarization hypothesis. Additionally, in the case of

Hypothesis 4, I did not find evidence that Evangelical Christian identity does contribute to affective feeling gaps.

Overall, while beyond the scope of this study, this research does open several doors for future endeavors. First, I limited my non-control vignettes to a Republican candidate – future research should consider how a Democratic candidate’s religious identity might impact affective assessments. Specifically, it would be interesting to consider how a Democrat who identified as a self-professed evangelical was viewed, as that would arguably serve as a violation of identity expectations (Klar 2018; Mason 2018b). While my main point of inquiry here was on Christians, additional religious identities should be considered. Finally, a different vignette approach that describes the identities common to a political party rather than a candidate from within that political might be a better way to assess the impact of religious identities on affective polarization assessments of parties. This study shows that religion and politics can matter in expected and unexpected ways; as a result, future inquiry is required to uncover the nature of the social world around us.

Chapter 4: Thesis Conclusion

Religion penetrates all matters of life in the polis, and as such, it is a variable that must always be considered in studies of public opinion and political behavior. Through the course of this thesis, I have explored two elements of religious identity and its impact on politics: first, the internal mechanisms in which a person's identity affects individual's information processing, and second, how the religious identity of others impacts affective political assessments.

Study 1's findings conflicted with the basis of my hypotheses: overall, it appears that a Bible prime does not exert a conservative influence on individuals' attitudes toward federal spending policy. Further, the Bible did not become influential even when considering the message content, religiosity of the respondent, or different denominations. Extant research shows that religion does and can matter in the political world; this study does not conflict with those findings, but offers a nuanced approach to religion in politics (Djupe and Calfano 2013; Wallsten and Nteta 2017). The power of religion does not appear to lie in the religious artifacts themselves, but in the manners and communication styles in which they are used (Djupe and Calfano 2013; Wallsten and Nteta 2017). That is, the Bible itself is not an active force for altering political attitudes but is a means to an end for ambitious individuals to accomplish their goals. This viewpoint minimizes the centrality of the religious elements of the Bible in terms of their political impact but recognizes a smaller role of the Bible in contributing to a larger political discourse. In other words, it appears that what the Bible says matters little in translating into attitudes on policy, but can be used in other, more electorally-focused or issue-specific lights (Djupe and Calfano 2013; Wallsten and Nteta 2017). To

speak from a normative perspective, however, perhaps it is a good thing that a short line of text does not drastically change people's opinions on federal spending policy.

In Study 2, I confronted an apparent paradox of political science: how does mass polling data on religion relate to the affective evaluation literature (Mason 2018b; Pew Research Center 2014a). I did find evidence for two of my hypotheses. First, it appears that a shared religious identity with a candidate does reduce affective partisan evaluation gaps upon evaluating said candidate. In other words, it matters that a substantial portion of Democrats still identify as Christian. For Hypothesis 2, I failed to reject the null that greater religiosity reduces the affective feeling gap, as the trendlines are not statistically significant and go in the incorrect direction to my earlier hypothesis. The findings in hypotheses 3 and 4 of Chapter 2 offer a countering perspective to the prevailing logic within the political science field. Specifically, when it comes to candidate evaluation, it does not appear that Christian religious identity contributes to an affective polarization gap. Further, I failed to reject the null related to Hypothesis 4, as I found no evidence that Evangelical Christian identity contributes to affective polarization. I do not pretend that my findings are the end-all, be-all of the affective polarization findings, but a simple bit of dialogue in a continuing conversation. However, this finding does offer serious questions regarding the role of religion in the social sorting hypothesis of affective polarization. In other words, perhaps religion is still best understood in the aggregate as a cross-cutting identity that transcends current party division. This may be a bit optimistic, particularly on the evangelical Christian front, but the results of my study do indicate the need for further attention to religion and affective polarization studies.

Combined, Studies 1 and 2 tell a powerful story about religion. Study 1 and Study 2 both show the limits of religion within the political realm - a simple religious prime does not drastically shake the political realm, be it via a Bible verse or a candidate description. The combined results of my studies suggest that religion is not only important for how it affects your own neural network, but how it is utilized in judgements of others. This implies that the impact of religion does not lie only with the religious, but all those who live in a society with religion as an active element. Therefore, despite concern regarding the decline of religion in American society, it appears the effects of religion are here to stay (Moody and Reed 2017; Pew Research Center 2014c).

Taken together, my findings run counter to my opening to the conclusion: religion, or at least, Christian identity, does not appear to contribute to affective polarization, nor can it easily be manipulated via a Bible prime. However, to again take a bit of a normative perspective, perhaps it is a good thing that the houses of worship that divide us on Sunday do not fully align with the boxes we check in November. Overall, I will repeat that religion matters: scholarly evidence confirms it (Djupe and Calfano 2013; Layman 1997; Wallsten and Nteta 2017). The burden is on us as scholars to establish the extent of influence; through this thesis, I hope to have added a small bit of understanding in a truly massive world.

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Appendix 1: Survey 1

Block 1: Intro

You are invited to participate in a research study which deals with the impact of religion on elements of life. If you agree to this study, you will be asked to provide your opinion, thoughts, and religious habits (praying, reading scripture, etc.) on a variety of subjects. Please select the answers that best match your situation and opinion. All information is confidential and will only be analyzed in the aggregate.

This survey should take approximately eight (8) minutes to complete.

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You may choose to not answer a question for any reason. If you have questions about this research study, please contact Connor Hughes at hughesc11@appstate.edu or Dr. Adam Newmark at newmarkaj@appstate.edu.

The Appalachian State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has determined that this study is exempt from IRB oversight.

By continuing to the research procedures, I acknowledge that I am at least eighteen (18) years old, have read the above information, and agree to participate.

Block 2: Religious Identity

- Growing up, we are often raised as a different religious faith than what we practice or identify with today. What religion were you raised in?
 - Catholic
 - Protestant (ex. Methodist, Baptist, Lutheran, etc.)
 - Non-denominational Christian
 - Mormon
 - Jewish
 - No Religion
 - Other
- What Religion do you belong to today?
 - Roman Catholic
 - Protestant (ex. Methodist, Baptist, Lutheran, etc.)
 - Non-denominational Christian
 - Mormon
 - Jewish
 - Muslim
 - Agnostic
 - Atheist
 - Something else
 - None

- Do you consider yourself born-again or evangelical?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Not sure

Religiosity Block Intro

- The following questions deal with your religious beliefs. Please select the answer that best represents your actions or beliefs.

Religiosity Block pt. 1 (randomized order)

- Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services?
 - More than once a week
 - Once a week
 - Once or twice a month
 - A few times a year
 - Seldom
 - Never
- Which of these statements comes closest to describing your feelings about the Bible?
 - The Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word.
 - The Bible is the word of God but not everything in it should be taken literally.
 - The Bible is a book written by humans and is not the word of God.
 - Other (Please specify) – Open-ended
- How often do you discuss your religious faith/beliefs with non-believers or people from other religious backgrounds?
 - At least once a week
 - Once or twice a month
 - Several times a year
 - Seldom
 - Never

Religiosity Block pt. 2 (randomized order)

- How often do you read scripture outside of religious services?
 - At least once a week
 - Once or twice a month
 - Several times a year
 - Seldom
 - Never
- People practice their religion in different ways. Outside of attending religious services, how often do you pray?
 - Several times a day
 - Once a day
 - A few times a week
 - Once a week
 - A few times a month
 - Seldom
 - Never

- How often do you discuss your religious faith/beliefs with people who share your religious beliefs?
 - At least once a week
 - Once or twice a month
 - Several times a year
 - Seldom
 - Never

Attention Check

- Please read the following statement carefully: Chocolate ice cream is the most popular flavor of ice cream in the U.S. according to the latest survey research.

Attention Check Question

- What is the most popular flavor of ice cream in the U.S.?
 - Vanilla
 - Chocolate
 - Strawberry
 - Mint Chip

Vignette Intro

- Next, you will be presented with a short passage of text. The text's origin will be specified in the first sentence of the text displayed. Please read the passage carefully.

Vignettes (Only one given)

- The following passages are from the Bible.

James 2:14-17: "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."

Luke 3:11: "Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same."

- The following passages are local sayings.

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.

- The following passage is a local saying.

An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops.

- The following passage is from the Bible.

2 Timothy 2: 5-6: "An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops."

Manipulation Check

- Consider the message you just read. On a scale from 1-7, with 1 being extremely conservative and 7 being extremely liberal, where would you place the message you just read?
- Consider the message you just read. In the first line, it stated where the message was from. Where was the message from? (Open-ended)

Federal Spending Policy Intro

- Next are a few questions related to federal spending policies. Please select the answer choice that most accurately describes your beliefs.

Federal Spending Policy Part 1 (Randomized order)

- Should the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour be raised, kept the same, lowered, or eliminated?
 - Raised
 - Kept the same
 - Lowered
 - Eliminated
- Do you favor an increase, decrease, or no change in government spending to provide health insurance to those who do not have it?
 - Greatly increase
 - Slightly increase
 - No change
 - Slightly decrease
 - Greatly decrease
- Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose the government trying to reduce the difference in incomes between the richest and poorest households?
 - Strongly favor
 - Slightly favor
 - Neither favor nor oppose
 - Slightly oppose
 - Strongly oppose

Federal Spending Policy Part 2 (randomized order)

- Should federal spending on aid to the poor be increased, decreased, or kept the same?
 - Greatly increase federal spending on aid to the poor
 - Slightly increase federal spending on aid to the poor
 - Kept the same
 - Slightly decrease federal spending on aid to the poor

- Greatly decrease federal spending on aid to the poor
- Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose requiring employers to offer paid leave to parents of new children?
 - Strongly favor paid parental leave
 - Slightly favor paid parental leave
 - Neither favor nor oppose paid parental leave
 - Slightly oppose paid parental leave
 - Strongly oppose paid parental leave
- Should federal spending on welfare programs be increased, decreased, or kept the same?
 - Greatly increase federal spending on welfare programs
 - Slightly increase federal spending on welfare programs
 - Kept the same
 - Slightly decrease federal spending on welfare programs
 - Greatly decrease federal spending on welfare programs

Demographic section intro

- The final section of this survey deals with demographic questions. Please select the answer choice that most accurately describes yourself. Again, all answers are kept confidential.

Demographic Questions

- With which gender do you primarily identify with?
 - Man
 - Woman
 - Transgender
 - Not listed above (Please identify)
 - Prefer not to say
- Generally speaking, regardless of how you voted in the last election, do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, or an independent?
 - Republican
 - Democrat
 - Independent
- (If Democrat selected) Would you call yourself a strong or not very strong Democrat?
 - Strong Democrat
 - Not very strong Democrat
- (If Republican selected) Would you call yourself a strong or not very strong Republican?
 - Strong Republican
 - Not very strong Republican
- (If Independent Selected) Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican or Democratic Party?
 - Closer to the Republican Party
 - Neither
 - Closer to the Democratic Party
- How many years old are you? Please answer with digits only. (open response)

- What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?
 - Some high school or less
 - High School Diploma
 - Some College, No Degree
 - Associate's Degree
 - Bachelor's Degree
 - Professional or Doctorate Degree (ex. JD, DDS, PhD)
- Ideologically speaking, where would you place yourself ranging from from extremely liberal (left) to extremely conservative (right)?

Debrief

- Thank you for completing this survey. Your responses will be kept confidential. This project examines how the Bible influences Christian's stances on federal spending policies. Please contact Connor Hughes at hughesc11@appstate.edu or Dr. Adam Newmark at newmarkaj@appstate.edu for any questions or concerns.

Appendix 2: Study 1 Regression Results

For Study 1, I ran OLS regressions to generate margin plots for each of the figures utilized. Below is the OLS split-effects regression results and the margins calculations for each table that allowed for the creation of the margins plots.

Table 1. OLS Regression Results for Study 1 Figure 1.

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error
Liberal Bible Passage	-1.19**	0.58
Conservative Local Saying	-1.40**	0.57
Conservative Bible Passage	-0.98*	0.57
Constant	15.92***	0.41

*p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

Table 2. OLS Regression Margins Results for Study 1 Figure 1.

Variable	Margin (90% CI)	Standard Error
Liberal Local Saying	15.92*** (15.25, 16.6)	0.41
Liberal Bible Passage	14.73*** (14.05, 15.41)	0.41
Conservative Local Saying	14.53*** (13.88, 15.18)	0.39
Conservative Bible Passage	14.94*** (14.28, 15.60)	0.40

*p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

Table 3. OLS Regression Results for Study 1 Figure 1a.

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error
Republican Liberal Local Saying	-7.74***	0.60
Democrat Liberal Bible Passage	-0.25	0.65
Republican Liberal Bible Passage	-8.51***	0.58
Democrat Conservative Local Saying	-0.44	0.65
Republican Conservative Local Saying	-8.60***	0.56
Democrat Conservative Bible Passage	-0.62	0.61
Republican Conservative Bible Passage	-8.70***	0.58
Constant	20.08***	0.43

*p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

Table 4 OLS Regression Margins Results for Study 1 Figure 1a.

Variable	Margin (90% CI)	Standard Error
Democrat Liberal Local Saying	20.8*** (19.37, 20.79)	0.43
Republican Liberal Local Saying	12.34*** (11.65, 13.04)	0.42
Democrat Liberal Bible Passage	19.83*** (19.03, 20.62)	0.48
Republican Liberal Bible Saying	11.57*** (10.94, 12.21)	0.39
Democrat Conservative Local Saying	19.64*** (18.83, 20.45)	0.49
Republican Conservative Local Saying	11.49*** (10.91, 12.07)	0.35
Democratic Conservative Bible Passage	19.46*** (18.74, 20.17)	0.43
Republican Conservative Bible Passage	11.39*** (10.75, 12.03)	0.39

*p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

Table 5. OLS Regression Results for Study 1 Figure 2.

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error
Evangelical Liberal Bible Passage	-2.23**	0.90
Evangelical Conservative Local Saying	-2.56***	0.85
Evangelical Conservative Bible Passage	-1.44*	0.86
Protestant Liberal Local Saying	3.06***	0.88
Protestant Liberal Bible Passage	3.07***	0.93
Protestant Conservative Local Saying	3.00***	0.91
Protestant Conservative Bible Passage	2.42***	0.91
Non-Denominational Liberal Local Saying	-0.23	1.44
Non-Denominational Liberal Bible Passage	0.36	1.40
Non-Denominational Conservative Local Saying	-1.89	1.26
Non-Denominational Conservative Bible Passage	0.37	1.44
Catholic Liberal Local Saying	0.49	1.17
Catholic Liberal Bible Passage	-0.88	1.01
Catholic Conservative Local Saying	0.51	1.03
Catholic Conservative Bible Passage	0.07*	1.05

Constant	14.70***	0.62
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*p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

Table 6 OLS Regression Margins Results for Study 1 Figure 2.

Variable	Margin (90% CI)	Standard Error
Evangelical Liberal Local Saying	14.70 (13.69, 15.72)	0.62
Evangelical Liberal Bible Passage	12.47 (11.39, 13.54)	0.65
Evangelical Conservative Local Saying	12.14 (11.16, 13.11)	0.59
Evangelical Conservative Bible Passage	13.26 (12.28, 14.24)	0.59
Protestant Liberal Local Saying	17.77 (16.73, 18.80)	0.63
Protestant Liberal Bible Passage	17.77 (16.63, 18.91)	0.69
Protestant Conservative Local Saying	17.70 (16.60, 18.80)	0.67
Protestant Conservative Bible Passage	17.12 (16.02, 18.22)	0.67
Non-Denominational Liberal Local Saying	14.46 (12.32, 16.61)	1.30
Non-Denominational Liberal Bible Passage	15.06 (12.99, 17.14)	1.26
Non-Denominational Conservative Local Saying	12.81 (11.00, 14.62)	1.10
Non-Denominational Conservative Bible Passage	15.07 (12.92, 17.21)	1.30
Catholic Liberal Local Saying	15.19 (13.56, 16.82)	0.99

Catholic Liberal Bible Passage	13.83 (12.51, 15.14)	0.80
Catholic Conservative Local Saying	15.22 (13.85, 16.58)	0.83
Catholic Conservative Bible Passage	14.77 (13.37, 16.18)	0.85

*p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

Table 7. OLS Regression Results for Study 1 Figure 3.

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error
Low Religiosity Liberal Bible Passage	-1.73	2.76
Low Religiosity Conservative Local Saying	0.8	2.74
Low Religiosity Conservative Bible Passage	0.11	2.74
Medium Religiosity Liberal Local Saying	-0.64	2.48
Medium Religiosity Liberal Bible Passage	-2.25	2.49
Medium Religiosity Conservative Local Saying	-2.15	2.49
Medium Religiosity Conservative Bible Passage	-1.81	2.50
High Religiosity Liberal Local Saying	-1.71	2.44
High Religiosity Liberal Bible Passage	-2.72	2.45
High Religiosity Conservative Local Saying	-3.45	2.44
High Religiosity Conservative Bible Passage	-2.79	2.44

Constant	17.2	2.39
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*p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

Table 8. OLS Regression Margins Results for Study 1 Figure 3.

Variable	Margin (90% CI)	Standard Error
Low Religiosity Liberal Local Saying	17.2 (13.27, 21.13)	2.39
Low Religiosity Liberal Bible Passage	15.47 (13.20, 17.74)	1.38
Low Religiosity Conservative Local Saying	18.00 (15.80, 20.20)	1.34
Low Religiosity Conservative Bible Passage	17.31 (15.11, 19.51)	1.34
Medium Religiosity Liberal Local Saying	16.56 (15.45, 17.68)	0.68
Medium Religiosity Liberal Bible Passage	14.95 (13.80, 16.09)	0.70
Medium Religiosity Conservative Local Saying	15.05 (13.91, 16.19)	0.70
Medium Religiosity Conservative Bible Passage	15.39 (14.16, 16.62)	0.75
High Religiosity Liberal Local Saying	15.49 (14.63, 16.34)	0.52
High Religiosity Liberal Bible Passage	14.48 (13.58, 15.39)	0.55
High Religiosity Conservative Local Saying	13.75 (12.91, 14.58)	0.51
High Religiosity Conservative Bible Passage	14.41 (13.58, 15.23)	0.50

*p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

Appendix 3: Survey 2

Intro

- You are invited to participate in a research study which deals with evaluating how people view political candidates. If you agree to this study, you will be asked to provide your opinion, thoughts, and religious habits (praying, reading scripture, etc.) on a variety of subjects. Please select the answers that best match your situation and opinion. All information is confidential and will only be analyzed in the aggregate.

This survey should take approximately eight (8) minutes to complete.

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You may choose to not answer a question for any reason. If you have questions about this research study, please contact Connor Hughes at hughesc11@appstate.edu or Dr. Adam Newmark at newmarkaj@appstate.edu.

The Appalachian State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has determined that this study is exempt from IRB oversight.

By continuing to the research procedures, I acknowledge that I am at least eighteen (18) years old, have read the above information, and agree to participate.

At the end of the survey, there is a link provided to enter information to receive extra credit for your class if offered by the recommending professor - these data are kept separately from the main survey data to ensure confidentiality. Please answer the questions in the manner that best describes you. Thank you for helping provide valuable data!

Attention Check

- Please read the following statement carefully: Chocolate ice cream is the most popular flavor of ice cream in the U.S. according to the latest survey research.

Attention Check Question

- What is the most popular flavor of ice cream in the U.S.?
 - Vanilla
 - Chocolate
 - Strawberry
 - Mint Chip

Vignette Intro

- The following is a short excerpt from a New Hampshire newspaper on a local state house candidate. Please **read the excerpt in its entirety** before proceeding.

Vignettes (1 randomly given per respondent)

- **Joshua Gibbs Declares House Candidacy**

By Catherine Smith

On Monday, Joshua Gibbs, a Manchester native, launched his campaign for the now-vacant seat in the Hillsborough District 43 House District, representing Manchester Wards 4,5,6 and 7 in the New Hampshire House of Representatives.

Gibbs spent a term representing Ward 4 on the Manchester Board of School Committee. He has also coached youth girls' basketball, volunteered for various political campaigns such as Safer America Today and served in the Manchester PTO.

- **Republican Joshua Gibbs Declares House Candidacy**

By Catherine Smith

On Monday, Joshua Gibbs, a Manchester native, launched his campaign for the now-vacant seat in the Hillsborough District 43 House District, representing Manchester Wards 4,5,6 and 7 in the New Hampshire House of Representatives. "I am a proud lifelong Republican, and I look forward to winning at the ballot box come November 3rd," Gibbs stated.

Gibbs spent a term representing Ward 4 on the Manchester Board of School Committee. He has also coached youth girls' basketball, volunteered for various political campaigns such as Safer America Today and served in the Manchester PTO.

- **Christian Republican Joshua Gibbs Declares House Candidacy**

By Catherine Smith

On Monday, Joshua Gibbs, a Manchester native, launched his campaign for the now-vacant seat in the Hillsborough District 43 House District, representing Manchester Wards 4,5,6 and 7 in the New Hampshire House of Representatives. "I am a proud Christian and lifelong Republican, and I look forward to winning at the ballot box come November 3rd," Gibbs stated.

Gibbs spent a term representing Ward 4 on the Manchester Board of School Committee. He has also coached youth girls' basketball, volunteered for various political campaigns such as Safer America Today and served in the Manchester PTO.

- **Evangelical Christian Republican Joshua Gibbs Declares House Candidacy**

By Catherine Smith

On Monday, Joshua Gibbs, a Manchester native, launched his campaign for the now-vacant seat in the Hillsborough District 43 House District, representing Manchester Wards 4,5,6 and 7 in the New Hampshire House of Representatives. "I am a proud evangelical Christian and lifelong Republican, and I look forward to winning at the ballot box come November 3rd," Gibbs stated.

Gibbs spent a term representing Ward 4 on the Manchester Board of School Committee. He has also coached youth girls' basketball, volunteered for various political campaigns such as Safer America Today and served in the Manchester PTO.

Manipulation Check

- What State is Gibbs running for political office in?
 - New Hampshire
 - Colorado
 - Arizona
 - California
- Based off what was stated in the text, what is Gibbs' partisan affiliation?
 - Democrat
 - Republican
 - Not stated
- Based off what was stated in the text, what is Gibbs' religious affiliation? If it was not stated, please say, "not stated."

Feeling Thermometers Intro

- Up next is a set of questions known as feeling thermometers. The higher the number, the warmer or more favorable you feel toward that person, the lower the number, the colder or less favorable. You would rate this person at the 50-degree mark if you feel neither warm nor cold toward them. Please select the temperature that best represents your feelings towards the following people and organizations.

Feeling Thermometers

- How do you feel regarding Joshua Gibbs, the candidate running for the New Hampshire House of Representatives? The higher the number, the warmer or more favorable you feel toward that person, the lower the number, the colder or less favorable. You would rate this person at the 50-degree mark if you feel neither warm nor cold toward them. (0-100 scale)
- How do you feel regarding the Republican Party? The higher the number, the warmer or more favorable you feel toward that person, the lower the number, the colder or less favorable. You would rate this organization at the 50-degree mark if you feel neither warm nor cold toward them. (0-100 scale)
- How do you feel regarding the Democratic Party? The higher the number, the warmer or more favorable you feel toward that person, the lower the number, the colder or less favorable. You would rate this organization at the 50-degree mark if you feel neither warm nor cold toward them. (0-100 scale)

Demographic Block Intro

- The following questions asks basic demographic questions. Please select the answer that best describes yourself.

Demographic Block

- With which of the following racial/ethnic categories do you primarily identify with? (Check all that apply)
 - White
 - Black or African American
 - American Indian or Alaska Native
 - Asian
 - Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
 - Other (open ended)
- How many years old are you? Please answer with digits only. (open ended)
- Ideologically speaking, where would you place yourself ranging from from extremely liberal (left) to extremely conservative (right)? (1-7 slider scale)
- Generally speaking, regardless of how you voted in the last election, do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, or an independent?
 - Republican
 - Democrat
 - Independent

Demographic Block Part 2

- (If Democrat selected) Would you call yourself a strong or not very strong Democrat?
 - Strong Democrat
 - Not very strong Democrat
- (If Republican selected) Would you call yourself a strong or not very strong Republican?
 - Strong Republican
 - Not very strong Republican
- (If Independent Selected) Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican or Democratic Party?
 - Closer to the Republican Party
 - Neither
 - Closer to the Democratic Party
- Growing up, we are often raised as a different religious faith than what we practice or identify with today. What religion were you raised in?
 - Catholic
 - Protestant (ex. Methodist, Baptist, Lutheran, etc.)
 - Non-denominational Christian
 - Mormon
 - Jewish
 - No Religion
 - Other
- What Religion do you belong to today?
 - Roman Catholic
 - Protestant (ex. Methodist, Baptist, Lutheran, etc.)
 - Non-denominational Christian
 - Mormon
 - Jewish
 - Muslim

- Agnostic
- Atheist
- Something else
- None
- Do you consider yourself born-again or evangelical?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Not sure

Religiosity block intro

- The following questions deal with your religious beliefs. Please select the answer that best represents your actions or beliefs.

Religiosity Block pt. 1 (randomized order)

- Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services?
 - More than once a week
 - Once a week
 - Once or twice a month
 - A few times a year
 - Seldom
 - Never
- Which of these statements comes closest to describing your feelings about the Bible?
 - The Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word.
 - The Bible is the word of God but not everything in it should be taken literally.
 - The Bible is a book written by humans and is not the word of God.
 - Other (Please specify) – Open-ended
- How often do you discuss your religious faith/beliefs with non-believers or people from other religious backgrounds?
 - At least once a week
 - Once or twice a month
 - Several times a year
 - Seldom
 - Never

Religiosity Block pt. 2 (randomized order)

- How often do you read scripture outside of religious services?
 - At least once a week
 - Once or twice a month
 - Several times a year
 - Seldom
 - Never
- People practice their religion in different ways. Outside of attending religious services, how often do you pray?
 - Several times a day
 - Once a day
 - A few times a week

- Once a week
 - A few times a month
 - Seldom
 - Never
- How often do you discuss your religious faith/beliefs with people who share your religious beliefs?
 - At least once a week
 - Once or twice a month
 - Several times a year
 - Seldom
 - Never

Debrief

- Thank you for completing this survey. The survey data will be utilized in the aggregate to analyze how religious affiliations of candidates affect public judgement on said candidates. All responses are strictly confidential. If you have any questions regarding the survey, please contact Connor Hughes at hughesc11@appstate.edu or Dr. Adam Newmark at newmarkaj@appstate.edu for further questions.

Please click ">>" below to be directed to the extra credit form. Thank you for your participation.

Vita

Connor Lloyd Hughes was born in Durham, North Carolina to Pamela and Geoff Hughes. He graduated from the Wake Young Men's Leadership Academy in Raleigh, North Carolina in May 2017. The following fall, he entered Appalachian State University to study Political Science, and in May 2020 he was awarded the Bachelor of Sciences degree with summa cum laude distinction. In the spring of 2019, he accepted an offer to join the accelerated admissions program for a Master of Arts degree in Political Science with a concentration in American Government at Appalachian State University. He accepted a teaching assistant position for the PS/CJ 3115 Research Methods course in the Fall of 2020. The M.A. was awarded in May 2021. Mr. Hughes entered the workforce with the potential to apply for Ph.D. programs in the upcoming application cycle.

Mr. Hughes was a member and president of Pi Sigma Alpha. In his time at Appalachian State, Mr. Hughes most fondly remembers the opportunities taken advantage of through the Honors College. Mr. Hughes is incredibly grateful for the opportunities and lessons learned at Appalachian State University. Mr. Hughes can be seen frequently engaging at the Cobo establishment on Howard Street. He resides in Boone, North Carolina. He is excited about the possibilities of the future and is excited to see where the stream of life takes him.