

God Values the Lives of My Out-Group More Than I Do: Evidence From Fiji and Israel

Social Psychological and Personality Science
2020, Vol. 11(7) 1032-1041
© The Author(s) 2020
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/1948550620904516
journals.sagepub.com/home/spp



Michael H. Pasek^{1,2} , Crystal Shackleford¹, Julia M. Smith³,
Allon Vishkin^{1,2}, Anne Lehner¹, and Jeremy Ginges^{1,2}

Abstract

Does God want people to favor coreligionists or to treat in-group and out-group members equally? To test people's beliefs about God's moral preferences, we conducted three preregistered studies. Study 1 was a field study with Christian and Muslim Fijians ($N = 188$). Study 2 was an online study with Jewish Israelis ($N = 384$). Study 3 was a field study with Christian and Hindu Fijians ($N = 539$). Across studies, participants indicated whether an in-group member should sacrifice his life to save five in-group members (in one dilemma) or out-group members (in a second dilemma). For each dilemma, they then indicated what God would prefer. Participants believed that, compared with themselves, God would more strongly approve of an in-group member saving out-group members. Results generalize results from previous studies with Muslim Palestinians, providing cross-cultural evidence that religious believers think God prefers more universal moral reasoning than they do themselves.

Keywords

religion, intergroup relations, cooperation, dehumanization

In *The God Delusion*, Dawkins (2006) describes God as "a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser" (p. 51). This perspective reflects a widely shared view that religion and belief in God promote intergroup conflict (Armstrong, 2014; Harris, 2006; Huntington, 1993; Kaplan, 2007). Understanding the nuanced relation between religious cognition and intergroup conflict is difficult because religion and religious belief are complex and multifaceted (Ng & Gervais, 2016). The present research focuses on one significant aspect of religious belief, God. We report three preregistered studies—two field studies conducted in Fiji and one online study conducted in Israel—that investigate whether people agree with Dawkins and other public intellectuals (e.g., Dawkins et al., 2007) who view God as a parochial moral agent that encourages people to value the lives of in-group members more than out-group members, or conversely, whether individuals believe God wants people to apply moral norms more universally.

Recent theoretical and empirical work argues that a suite of supernatural beliefs has become widespread because they encourage cooperative behavior between strangers bound by shared identities. Common to Karmic and Abrahamic faiths, these include belief in omnipresent, omniscient deities that police human behavior. We hereafter refer to this suite of beliefs as "Big God" beliefs (Gervais & Norenzayan, 2012; D. Johnson, 2005; D. Johnson & Bering, 2006; Laurin et al., 2012; Norenzayan, 2013; Norenzayan & Shariff, 2008;

Norenzayan et al., 2016; Purzycki et al., 2016; Shariff & Norenzayan, 2011; Shariff et al., 2010). Although there is considerable debate about the role these beliefs play in the formation of large-scale societies, they are widely thought to encourage prosociality, facilitating the ability of people to live in and sustain such societies. A key question is whether such a prosocial orientation is parochial in nature, or whether it generalizes toward members of other religious groups.

The present research aims to contribute to our understanding of how Big God beliefs influence intergroup relations. Because people perceive Big Gods as anthropomorphic (Heiphetz et al., 2016) and as policing human moral behavior (D. Johnson, 2005; D. Johnson & Bering, 2006; Norenzayan et al., 2016), a first step in elucidating how Big God beliefs influence intergroup relations is to investigate lay beliefs about the moral preferences of such a deity, as they apply in intergroup contexts. We ask whether individuals believe God prefers humans to

¹ The New School for Social Research, New York, NY, USA

² Artis International, Scottsdale, AZ, USA

³ University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

Corresponding Authors:

Michael H. Pasek, The New School for Social Research, New York, NY, USA;
Jeremy Ginges, The New School for Social Research, New York, NY, USA.
Emails: michael@michaelhpasek.com; gingesj@newschool.edu

make moral decisions in a more universal or parochial manner. We refer to universal reasoning as the application of moral norms regardless of the social identity of people involved in a given situation (Ginges et al., 2016; Obeid et al., 2017). By parochial reasoning, we mean the application of moral norms in a manner that favors the religious in-group over religious out-groups.

If Big God beliefs proliferated by cultural evolution due to the advantage they provide in intergroup conflict, such beliefs should be associated with parochial moral reasoning (Norenzayan, 2013; Norenzayan & Shariff, 2008; Norenzayan et al., 2016). However, an alternative hypothesis—also grounded in cultural evolutionary theory—seems equally viable. When incentives for aggression are low (e.g., in low-threat contexts), cultural institutions that encourage intergroup tolerance may carry distinct evolutionary advantages (Pisar & Surbeck, 2019). As ideas can be selected for reasons other than helping groups prosper in violent competition, Big God beliefs might have plausibly spread because groups for which such beliefs were normative might have prospered economically and culturally, thereby attracting converts (migration) or becoming absorbed by other groups (imitation; Boyd & Richerson, 2010). For example, prosocial behavior toward religious out-group members may encourage conversion (Norenzayan et al., 2016; Stark, 1996). In line with this account, Big God beliefs may have gained a cultural evolutionary advantage by encouraging people to apply these norms in between-group as well as within-group contexts.

At the outset, we acknowledge that religious beliefs are often vague and contradictory and that they are translated or interpreted into specific norms and behavior that change over time and space (Atran & Ginges, 2012). For example, the experience of intergroup conflict is associated with the image of a punishing God (Caluori et al., *in press*) and lay beliefs about God may reflect beliefs and norms of a population (Epley et al., 2009). Thus, the experience of more or less conflict may be associated with views of God that are more or less parochial, to some extent reproducing local attitudes. However, religious people also share beliefs about norms and values that derive from deities that are to some extent independent of the local context. Our question, then, is whether people believe that God encourages more or less universal moral reasoning than they themselves do.

While the present research examines links between religious beliefs and intergroup relations, we do not intend to adjudicate whether religious cognition, more broadly, motivates conflict or tolerance. Rather, we ask whether individuals attribute to God a preference for humans to behave in a more parochial or universal manner. Thus, the aim of the present research diverges from a broader literature investigating direct links between religious cognition and intergroup attitudes. Although a full review of this literature is beyond the scope of this article, we briefly review key findings that inform hypotheses.

Theorists have long highlighted religion's paradoxical role in intergroup relations (Allport, 1954; Ng & Gervais, 2016).

A half century of research suggests that certain aspects of religion (e.g., fundamentalism, coalitional motives) promote intergroup intolerance, whereas others (e.g., intrinsic belief, value signaling) promote intergroup tolerance (e.g., Allport & Ross, 1967; Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2005; Everett et al., 2016; Ginges et al., 2009; Hall et al., 2015; Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005; M. K. Johnson et al., 2012; Neuberg et al., 2014).

Despite a rich literature linking belief in God to in-group prosociality (Shariff et al., 2016), few studies directly investigate how belief in God influences intergroup relations. Some evidence suggests that priming the notion that God sanctions violence increases aggression among believers (Bushman et al., 2007). While this links individual behavior to the moral values people attribute to God, it does not elucidate whether religious beliefs naturally increase violence, or whether individuals believe God sanctions violence. To the contrary, some evidence suggests priming belief in God increases prosocial intergroup behavior, whereas priming religion does the opposite (Preston & Ritter, 2013). An implication is that people associate God with universal motives, even when religion evokes parochialism.

One study directly examined the moral preferences attributed to God in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, an intractable conflict that falls on religious lines (Ginges et al., 2016). Palestinian youth were presented variants of a moral dilemma involving trading the life of one Muslim Palestinian man to save either five Muslim Palestinian or Jewish Israeli children. In all conditions, participants were asked to respond to a scenario in which a Palestinian man was sacrificed (either by someone else or in the form of altruistic suicide). Participants were more willing to approve of the sacrifice to save in-group children than out-group children, implying they valued Palestinian lives more than Jewish Israeli lives. However, when asked to consider Allah's perspective, in-group bias decreased. That is, participants believed God was more willing than they were to sacrifice the life of a Muslim Palestinian to save a Jewish Israeli. This provides early evidence that individuals believe God prefers humans to reason in a more universal, as opposed to parochial fashion.

Present Research

To further investigate the moral values individuals attribute to God in intergroup settings, we conducted three preregistered studies, conceptually replicating and extending Ginges et al. (2016). Study 1 was a field experiment conducted in Fiji with Christian iTaukei and Muslim Indo-Fijians, a novel political context with non-WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic) samples (Henrich et al., 2010; Rad et al., 2018). Study 2 sought to replicate our particular paradigm in an online study with religious Jewish Israelis—members of a descent religion (Cohen & Hill, 2007; Morris, 1996). Study 3 sought to replicate and extend results using a field study in Fiji with Christian iTaukei and Hindu Indo-Fijians. Preregistrations are filed on the Open Science Framework (OSF, see https://osf.io/b2xct/?view_only=9735f34dad0d42849605d91468cf4781).

Because the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is widely recognized as a prototypical religious conflict, and for this reason is a common site for research on religion and intergroup relations, for the sake of brevity, we do not review this context here (see Tessler, 2009, for one historical description). However, because knowledge about ethno-religious conflict in Fiji is less common, we briefly describe this context. The majority of Fijians are indigenous iTaukei who are almost exclusively Christian (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2019). A significant minority are descendants of Indian indentured servants forced to migrate during British rule to work sugarcane fields (Bedford, 1988). Since 1987, Fiji has experienced four violent military coups, each orchestrated to remove Indo-Fijian leaders from government to preserve indigenous control. These coups involved great suffering of Indo-Fijians who were subject to violence (Trnka, 2008). Today, Fiji oscillates between political conflict and peaceful day-to-day relations. While iTaukei and Indo-Fijians often have friendly and cooperative interactions, there is much prejudice and discrimination (Ramesh, 2008).

We test two competing hypotheses. The parochial hypotheses would be supported if people think that, compared to themselves, God would be *less* likely to want an in-group man to save out-group children, and/or if they believe God would show greater in-group favoritism. The universal hypothesis would be supported if people see God as having a greater desire, compared to themselves, to save out-group members. This could manifest as extended prosociality (i.e., God encourages people to save both in-group and out-group members) or as a reduction in bias (i.e., the difference between individuals' own preferences and those they attribute to God is greater when considering whether out-group, as opposed to in-group, members should be saved).

Study I

Method

Participants

Participants ($N = 188$, 57% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 44.20$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 16.11$) were 128 Christian iTaukei (55% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 43.61$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 15.53$) and 60 Muslim Indo-Fijians (63% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 40.98$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 16.39$). See OSF for power analysis.

Procedure and Materials

Approval was granted by Fiji's Ministries of iTaukei Affairs and Education. Between June and August of 2018, we recruited and trained local research assistants (RAs) who participated in focus groups, translated materials, and conducted interviews. We began with the Christian community and conducted additional workshops with Muslim RAs. Interviews were conducted house-to-house. For more information on field methods, see OSF.

In focus groups with Christian RAs, discussion of a trolley car problem led RAs to develop a functionally equivalent burning building dilemma, which is more relevant in Fiji, where trolleys/trains are rare. In this paradigm, participants hear a story about an in-group man, traveling somewhere else in Fiji, who approaches a burning house. A child tells him that five children are trapped inside. The actor can save them, but he will die. Participants responded to this dilemma four times in a two (in-group vs. out-group children) \times two (self vs. God's preference) within-person experiment. Questions were grouped by children's religion (counterbalanced). Participants indicated what the actor should do and then what God would prefer. Christians and Muslims were each other's target out-group. Response options were binary (save or do not save the children).

Interviewers confirmed participants' religion before commencing.¹ RAs recorded participants' gender ($-0.5 = \text{female}$, $0.5 = \text{male}$). Participants indicated their age. Religiosity was measured with prayer frequency² ($0 = \text{do not pray}$, $1 = \text{almost never}$, $2 = \text{about once a year}$, $3 = \text{several times a year}$, $4 = \text{about once a month}$, $5 = \text{about once a week}$, $6 = \text{about every day}$, $7 = \text{several times each day}$; $M = 6.06$, $SD = 1.26$). For complete measures, see OSF.

Results

Analytic Plan and Missing Data

We planned to compute a binary score in which participants who preferred to save in-group but not out-group children would be coded 1 (others coded 0). Unfortunately, a randomization error led 38 and 37 Christians, respectively, to receive only the out-group or in-group conditions. This error did not occur in the Muslim sample. To maximize data usage, instead of regressing a bias score on perspective, we predicted decision to save (1) versus to not save (0) with perspective (self = 0, God = 1), intergroup condition (out-group = -0.5 , in-group = 0.5), and their interaction. All participants were included because missingness was random. Multilevel logistic models were conducted in R (R Core Team, 2018) using lme4 (Bates et al., 2015). Participant intercept was included as a random effect. The Perspective \times Intergroup Condition interaction tests for a difference in bias between individuals' own beliefs and beliefs attributed to God. This approach also allows for estimation of a main effect of perspective (whether God is more likely to want to save children, across target groups).

Nearly all Muslims (>96%) thought the children should be saved, regardless of identity, in the self and God conditions. Thus, for Muslims, we find no in-group bias in the self condition and no change in bias in the God condition (see Figure 1). Because of ceiling effects, we report results for the Christian sample only, having preregistered our intention to recruit enough Christians to analyze results among Christians alone. Despite a lack of variability among Muslims, combining the two populations (as preregistered) yields consistent results (see Supplemental Materials).

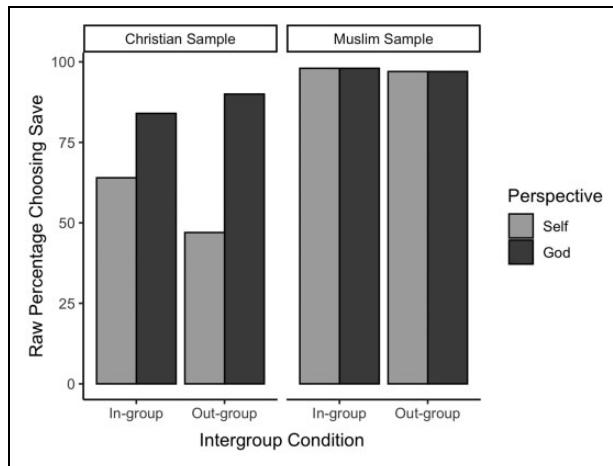


Figure 1. Raw data showing participants' own preferences and their beliefs about God's preferences from Study I. Figures were made using ggplot2 (Wickham, 2016).

Table 1. Results of Multilevel Logistic Regressions Predicting Decision to Save for Christian iTaukei Sample in Study I.

	Primary Model			Covariate Model		
	Estimate	SE	Z	Estimate	SE	Z
Level 1						
B_0 : Intercept	0.41	0.27	1.49	0.43	0.27	1.61
B_1 : Perspective	2.62	0.44	5.90***	2.64	0.45	5.90***
B_2 : Intergroup condition	1.17	0.45	2.60**	1.11	0.44	2.50*
B_3 : Perspective \times Intergroup Condition	-1.85	0.70	-2.64**	-1.84	0.71	-2.60**
Level 2						
γ_{01} : Age				0.01	0.02	0.36
γ_{02} : Religiosity				0.37	0.22	1.65
γ_{03} : Gender				0.24	0.47	0.51
Random intercept SD	1.86				1.74	
Observations	356				350	
Groups	128				126	

Note. Perspective is dummy coded (0 = self, 1 = God). Intergroup condition is contrast coded (-0.5 = out-group, 0.5 = in-group). Gender is contrast coded (-0.5 = female, +0.5 = male). Age and religiosity are mean centered. DV is decision to save (1 = save, 0 = don't save). Estimates are in log odds.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Because the response scale is binary, we first report raw, descriptive, results. These display the percentage of participants by condition who indicated save or do not save. We then report fixed-effect parameter estimates.

Raw Results

Christians wanted to save in-group and out-group children 64% and 47% of the time, respectively (mean across groups = 56%). However, they believed God would prefer in-group and out-group children be saved 84% and 90% of the time, respectively (mean across groups = 87%; see Figure 1).

Estimated Fixed Effects

Collapsed across intergroup conditions, Christians thought God—compared with themselves—would be more likely to want

their in-group member to save others (log odds increase $B_1 = 2.62$, $Z = 5.90$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [1.83, 3.60]). This held whether children were in-group ($B_{1 \text{ in-group}} = 1.69$, $Z = 3.42$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.78, 2.75]) or out-group members ($B_{1 \text{ out-group}} = 3.55$, $Z = 5.63$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [2.43, 4.93]). The Perspective \times Intergroup Condition interaction was significant ($B_3 = 1.85$, $Z = 2.64$, $p = .008$, 95% CI [0.52, 3.30]). Although Christians were biased in the self condition ($B_{2 \text{ self}} = 1.17$, $Z = 2.60$, $p = .009$, 95% CI [0.32, 2.10]), they saw God as being unbiased ($B_{2 \text{ God}} = -0.68$, $Z = -1.21$, $p = .228$, 95% CI [-1.84, 0.41]). Results were robust to the inclusion of preregistered covariates (see Table 1).

Secondary Analyses

In line with previous theorizing (e.g., Norenzayan & Shariff, 2008), we also investigated whether results only hold for individuals who perceive tolerant relations with Muslims and

believe Christians and Muslims share common beliefs and values. We find no support for these hypotheses (see Supplemental Materials).

Discussion

Results of Study 1 reveal that Christian iTaukei believe that God is less biased than they are when considering whether in-group members should sacrifice their lives to save religious in-group or out-group children. This held even for participants who perceived higher levels of intergroup threat and lower levels of religious commonality with Muslims. Thus, results support the universal hypothesis.

Nearly all Muslims in our sample believed the children should be saved across all conditions. This may reflect a real difference in intergroup attitudes and values between Muslim Indo-Fijians, a disadvantaged group, and Christian iTaukei, an advantaged group. Consistent with this interpretation, prior work finds Christian iTaukei endorse stronger ethnic superiority beliefs than Indo-Fijians (De Vries, 2002). Alternative explanations could be that (1) our dilemma was developed by Christians and thus was not appropriately tailored or (2) our binary response scale masked underlying variance.

Study 2

Findings from Study 1 among Christian iTaukei dovetail with previous findings among Muslim Palestinians, showing that people perceive God as encouraging humans to value in-group and out-group lives more equally (Ginges et al., 2016). However, a perception that God equally favors all people may be unique to ascent religions, such as Christianity and Islam, which are more open to converts than descent religions, such as Judaism and Hinduism (Morris, 1996). Descent religions place more emphasis on their community (Cohen & Hill, 2007) and consequently members of these religions may perceive that their Gods have preferences that are particular rather than universal. The purpose of Study 2 was to examine whether members of a descent religion, such as Jews in Israel, also perceive God's preferences as more universal than their own. In addition, Study 2 tested whether findings using a moral dilemma developed in Fiji generalize to a WEIRDer context with violent interreligious conflict.

Method

Participants

The final sample consisted of 384 religious Jewish Israelis (47% female, $M_{age} = 30.80$, $SD_{age} = 9.54$).³ See OSF for power analysis.

Procedure and Materials

Participants were recruited for an online study through www.iPanel.co.il and completed (1) a general survey containing self-report measures and demographics and (2) the moral

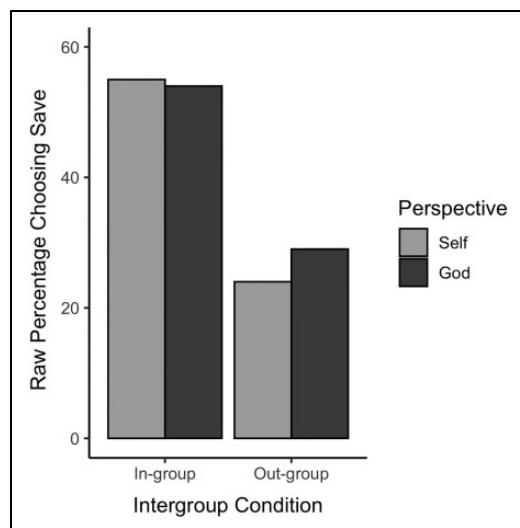


Figure 2. Raw data showing Jewish Israeli's own preferences and their beliefs about God's preferences from Study 2.

dilemma experiment. Most (80%) completed the general survey with another experiment and were recontacted 2 months later to participate in this study. Due to attrition, we recruited additional participants (20%) who completed the general survey after the moral dilemma. This experiment was conducted in March 2019.

The moral dilemma was identical to that used in Study 1, except that in-group members were Jewish Israelis and out-group members were Muslim Palestinians. Relevant measures include age, gender ($-0.5 = \text{female}$, $0.5 = \text{male}$), and religiosity (prayer frequency: $1 = \text{once a year or less}$; $2 = \text{several times a year}$, $3 = \text{about once a month}$, $4 = \text{about once a week}$, $5 = \text{several times a week}$, $6 = \text{about every day}$, $7 = \text{several times a day}$; $M = 6.14$, $SD = 1.39$). The experiment was administered in Hebrew. For additional measures, see OSF.

Results

Raw results were analyzed with the same multilevel model described in Study 1.

Raw results

Jewish Israelis wanted to save in-group and out-group children 55% and 24% of the time, respectively (mean across groups = 40%). They believed God would want in-group and out-group children to be saved 54% and 29% of the time, respectively (mean across groups = 42%; see Figure 2).

Estimated Fixed Effects

We find no main effect of perspective but a Perspective \times Intergroup Condition interaction ($B_3 = -0.76$, $Z = -2.12$, $p = .034$, 95% CI [-1.47, -0.06]). Participants saw God's preferences as aligned with their own when considering whether in-group members should be saved ($B_{1 \text{ in-group}} = -0.10$,

Table 2. Results of Multilevel Logistic Regressions Predicting Decision to Save for Jewish Israeli Sample in Study 2.

	Primary Model			Covariate Model		
	Estimate	SE	Z	Estimate	SE	Z
Level 1						
B_0 : Intercept	-1.34	0.28	-4.82***	-1.36	0.28	-4.87***
B_1 : Perspective	0.28	0.18	1.59	0.29	0.18	1.62
B_2 : Intergroup condition	3.67	0.34	10.70***	3.70	0.34	10.73***
B_3 : Perspective \times Intergroup Condition	-0.76	0.36	-2.12*	-0.77	0.36	-2.13*
Level 2						
γ_{01} : Age				-0.02	0.03	-0.75
γ_{02} : Religiosity				-0.94	0.21	-4.51
γ_{03} : Gender				1.06	0.54	1.97
Random intercept SD	4.00			3.96		
Observations	1,517			1,517		
Groups	384			384		

Note. Perspective is dummy coded (0 = self, 1 = God). Intergroup condition is contrast coded (-0.5 = out-group, 0.5 = in-group). Gender is contrast coded (-0.5 = female, +0.5 = male). Age and religiosity are mean centered. DV is decision to save (1 = save, 0 = don't save). Estimates are in log odds.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

$Z = -0.40, p = .688, 95\% \text{ CI} [-0.56, 0.37]$) but saw God as more likely than they were to approve of an in-group man sacrificing himself to save Palestinian Muslim children (B_1 out-group = 0.67, $Z = 2.48, p = .013, 95\% \text{ CI} [0.14, 1.20]$). Although participants saw God as being less biased than they themselves were, they still saw God as valuing the lives of in-group members more than out-group members (B_2 God = 2.91, $Z = 9.29, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} [2.32, 3.54]$). Results were robust after including preregistered covariates (see Table 2).

Secondary Analyses

We again tested whether intergroup threat and perceived religious commonality meaningfully moderate results. Although participants higher in threat, and lower in commonality, were more biased at baseline, these participants still saw God as expressing a greater preference, compared to themselves, for saving out-group members (see Supplemental Materials).

Discussion

As in Study 1, participants in Study 2 thought God, compared to themselves, would be more likely to prefer that an in-group member sacrifice his life to save five children belonging to their out-group. Interestingly, individual preferences and perceived preferences of God in the in-group condition were aligned. Perhaps the nature of our scenario was such that many respondents inferred that other options were available to the character in the story, which would make their self-sacrifice immoral and thus set a ceiling on the percentage of participants who would approve, or thought God would approve, of the sacrifice. Also consistent with Study 1, perceived threat and commonality did not moderate results. We note, however, that in this high-conflict setting, Jewish Israelis—like Muslim Palestinians in Ginges et al. (2016)—did not see God as being unbiased. Yet, even in a high-conflict setting, and with

members of a descent religion, we find that people believe God would prefer in-group members to value the lives of out-group members more than they do themselves.

Study 3

The purpose of Study 3 was to replicate and extend the previous studies by altering three features of the experimental paradigm: (1) to maximize variance, we used a continuous outcome measure; (2) to reduce potential ceiling effects, we changed the moral dilemma so that adults, as opposed to children, were in need of saving; and (3) we sampled Christians and Hindus, but not Muslims. Like Judaism, Hinduism is also a descent religion. We note that Hindus in Fiji believe Bhagwan to be a unifying supernatural deity. Thus, we used Bhagwan in place of God for Hindus.

Method

Participants

The sample ($N = 539$, 58% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 43.41, SD_{\text{age}} = 15.73$) included 328 Christians (52% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 40.80, SD_{\text{age}} = 15.72$) and 211 Hindus (67% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 47.53, SD_{\text{age}} = 14.88$).⁴ See OSF for power analysis.

Procedure and Materials

This study was administered in June and July 2019 using similar procedures to Study 1, except that (1) Christians' out-group members were Hindu, and Hindus' out-group members were Christians; (2) participants answered the moral dilemma on a scale from 1 (*definitely should not save*) to 10 (*definitely should save*); and (3) individuals trapped in the house were adults. Gender (-0.5 = female, 0.5 = male), religion (-0.5 = Hindu, 0.5 = Christian), age, and religiosity (prayer frequency) were measured as in Study 1. Average prayer frequency was almost

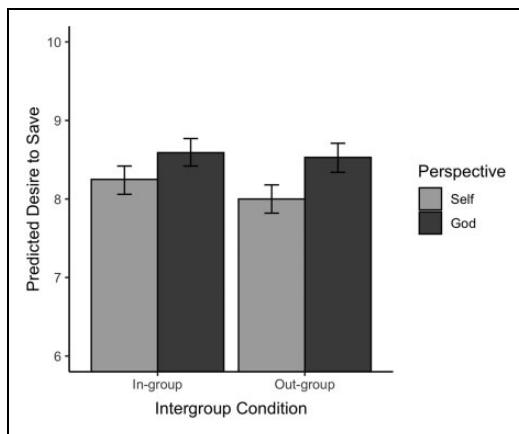


Figure 3. Model-estimated means by condition collapsed across Christians and Hindus from Study 3. Y-axis is truncated to show effect. Scale ranges from 1 (*definitely should not save*) to 10 (*definitely should save*). Error bars are 95% CI.

every day ($M = 5.88$, $SD = 0.99$). For information on field methods, and all materials, see OSF.

Results

We used the same model presented in Studies 1 and 2 with two modifications. Because responses were continuous, we used linear models. As preregistered, religion was included as a covariate. Significance was calculated using lmerTest (Kuznetsova et al., 2017). Most variance (68%) resided between-person. Estimated means by condition are provided based on fixed-effects models (see Figure 3).

Fixed effects tests reveal that, although participants showed a strong preference (collapsed across intergroup conditions) for their in-group member to save others ($M = 8.12$, $SE = 0.08$), they thought God would be even more likely to endorse this action ($M = 8.56$, $SE = 0.08$), $B_1 = 0.44$, $t(1574.94) = 8.75$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.34, 0.54]. Participants wanted to save in-group members ($M = 8.25$, $SE = 0.09$) more than out-group members ($M = 8.00$, $SE = 0.09$), B_2 self = 0.24, $t(1575.11) = 3.45$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.11, 0.38], but believed God would be unbiased, B_2 God = 0.07, $t(1575.24) = 0.97$, $p = .332$, 95% CI [-0.07, 0.21]. Despite this difference, the Perspective \times Intergroup Condition interaction was not significant, $B_3 = -0.18$, $t(1575.42) = -1.75$, $p = .080$, 95% CI[-0.37, 0.02], likely because baseline bias was minimal. Results were robust after adding preregistered covariates (see Table 3).

Secondary Analyses

Ancillary analyses indicate that Christians, but not Hindus, were biased at baseline and that baseline bias was driven by 31 outliers. Notably, the minority of participants who were biased saw God as being unbiased. Exploratory tests indicated that the discrepancy between participants' own preferences and those ascribed to God was greater among Christians than Hindus, although present among both samples. To examine

potential boundary effects, we also tested whether results held for participants who perceived higher levels of intergroup threat and/or perceived less commonality with Muslim Palestinians. We find no evidence for these boundary conditions. These analyses are presented in Supplemental Materials.

Discussion

Christian iTaukei and Hindu Indo-Fijians believed that, compared with themselves, God would more strongly approve of an ingroup member sacrificing his life to save both in-group and out-group members. Thus, results from Studies 1 and 2 replicate when using a continuous outcome measure, and when the individuals to be saved are adults, as opposed to children. As in Study 1 and Study 2, we find no evidence for the secondary hypotheses that effects would only hold for individuals who perceive more tolerant relations and greater commonality with religious out-group members. Holistically, results provide further evidence that Christian iTaukei and Hindu Indo-Fijians believe God prefers humans to act in a more universal, as opposed to parochial moral manner.

General Discussion

Three studies show that Christian iTaukei and Hindu Indo-Fijians in Fiji, as well as Jews from Israel, believe that God is less likely than they are to reason parochially in moral dilemmas. Results were not moderated by variability in how threatened participants felt by relevant out-groups nor by the perception of religious commonalities between groups.

These results replicate findings of Ginges et al. (2016) and carry two intriguing theoretical implications that require further investigation. First, people who believe in powerful Gods who define and police moral human behavior also believe that God prefers humans to act in a more universal, as opposed to more parochial, moral manner. If true, this has significant implications for the cultural evolution and proliferation of Big God beliefs, suggesting that these beliefs may plausibly have spread by promoting cooperation across group lines. Second, if people perceive God to be an entity that encourages more universal moral reasoning, such beliefs may influence their behavior, encouraging more, rather than less prosociality toward members of other groups. If true, it is possible that belief in such a God may sometimes mitigate intergroup conflict rather than, as many presume, cause or exacerbate such conflict (e.g., Dawkins, 2006; Dawkins et al., 2007; Huntington, 1993; Kaplan, 2007). Such a finding would, in turn, be relevant to our understanding of how people manage religious diversity and elucidate the extent to which such diversity necessarily begets conflict. In this light, the present research contributes to a small, but growing, body of research highlighting the potential for certain aspects of religion to facilitate more positive intergroup relations (e.g., Everett et al., 2016; Ginges et al., 2016; Hall et al., 2015; Preston & Ritter, 2013).

Notwithstanding these important theoretical implications, this work contains several limitations. First, it is limited by the use of moral hypotheticals. Behavioral studies could

Table 3. Results of Multilevel Regressions Predicting Desire to Save for Fijian Samples From Study 3.

	Primary Model			Covariate Model		
	Estimate	SE	t	Estimate	SE	t
Level 1						
B_0 : Intercept	8.12	0.08	97.14***	8.15	0.09	95.73***
B_1 : Perspective	0.44	0.05	8.75***	0.45	0.05	8.76***
B_2 : Intergroup condition	0.24	0.07	3.45***	0.25	0.07	3.49***
B_3 : Perspective \times Intergroup Condition	-0.18	0.10	-1.75	-0.18	0.10	-1.80
Level 2						
γ_{01} : Religion	0.69	0.16	4.30***	0.52	0.18	2.92**
γ_{02} : Age				0.00	0.00	0.68
γ_{03} : Religiosity				0.18	0.05	2.08*
γ_{04} : Gender				0.22	0.16	1.37
Random intercept SD		1.71			1.68	
Observations		2,113			2,078	
Groups		538			529	

Note. Perspective is dummy coded (0 = self, 1 = God). Intergroup condition is contrast coded (-0.5 = out-group, 0.5 = in-group). Gender is contrast coded (-0.5 = female, +0.5 = male). Religion is contrast coded (-0.5 = Hindu, 0.5 = Christian). Age and religiosity are mean centered. DV is desire to save (1 = definitely should not save, 10 = definitely should save).

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

provide greater insight regarding how beliefs about God's preferences influence moral decisions in intergroup contexts. Second, while a strength of this article is that the dilemma used was generated by iTaukei RAs, we are uncertain whether this dilemma had similar meanings for the other groups tested in Fiji or for Jewish Israelis. This contributes to difficulty in understanding variability between different cultures. For example, Jewish Israeli participants were the only group who did not believe that God's preferences differed from their own in within-group contexts, and we find no intergroup bias among Hindu and Muslim participants in Fiji. Such variation across samples may be due to religious belief, political context, or the meaning of the dilemma in each population.

Conclusion

Three preregistered cross-cultural conceptual replications of Ginges et al. (2016) support the hypothesis that, in comparison with their own moral preferences, individuals attribute more universal, as opposed to parochial, moral values to God. Whether in Fiji or Israel, with Christian, Muslim, Hindu, or Jewish participants, we present consistent evidence that (1) when individuals expressed in-group favoritism, they saw God as preferring them to value the lives of in-group and out-group members more equally and (2) when individuals did not uniformly believe that an in-group member should sacrifice his life to save out-group members, they thought God would more strongly support this action. Results challenge the widely held belief, endorsed by Dawkins and others (Dawkins, 2006; Dawkins et al., 2007), that portrays God as a parochial moral agent that antagonizes intergroup relations. Instead, consistent with a growing psychological literature, results suggest belief in God may help to facilitate religious tolerance and cooperation, even in religiously diverse societies with histories of ethno-religious conflict.

Authors' Note

Jeremy Ginges conceived of studies; all authors designed research; Michael H. Pasek, Crystal Shackleford, Julia M. Smith, Anne Lehner, and Allon Vishkin led data collection efforts; Pasek, Shackleford, and Vishkin cleaned data; Pasek led data analysis; Ginges, Pasek, and Shackleford wrote the first draft of the manuscript.

Acknowledgments

This research was made possible by a dedicated team of research assistants in Fiji who were our collaborators in this work: Adiama Israel, Meli Vuilabasa, Seru Ratu, Vennyanna Israel, Jone Biaunikoro, Charlotte Tau, Emosi Naqiolevu, Una Bolawaqtuba, Natasha Nisha, Sofia Nisha, Zoya Ali, Mezaan Ali, Rita Chand, Umesh Sharma, Renuka Naidu, Latchmaiya Naidu, and Ranjana Chand.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This work was supported by grants to Jeremy Ginges from the Templeton Religious Trust (TRT0189) and the National Science Foundation (SES-0962080).

ORCID iD

Michael H. Pasek  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1393-1149>

Supplemental Material

The supplemental material is available in the online version of the article.

Notes

1. We confirmed participants' religion in the survey. One participant with an inconsistent religious identification was removed and is not included in our final sample.
2. See Supplemental Materials for more information on religiosity measures.
3. We collected 457 observations. We excluded 44 duplicate IP addresses. Sixteen additional observations were excluded because participants did not meet inclusion criteria. Seven more participants were excluded because they were missing all burning building data.
4. As preregistered, we planned to exclude suspect interviews. This sample excludes all 69 interviews conducted by one Hindu RA who had a median completion time of under 15 min and an additional 61 interviews (55 Hindu and 6 Christian) that were completed in under 15 min. This cut-off time was based on an assessment that this is the shortest time it could take to complete an interview while reading each question fully. Results without these exclusions are substantively unchanged (see Supplemental Materials).

References

- Allport, G. W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Addison-Wesley.
- Allport, G. W., & Ross, J. M. (1967). Personal religious orientation and prejudice. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 5, 432–443.
- Altemeyer, B., & Hunsberger, B. (2005). Fundamentalism and authoritarianism. In R. F. Paloutzian & C. L. Park (Eds.), *Handbook of the psychology of religion and spirituality* (pp. 378–393). Guilford Press.
- Armstrong, K. (2014). *Fields of blood*. Knopf.
- Atran, S., & Ginges, J. (2012). Religious and sacred imperatives in human conflict. *Science*, 336, 855–857. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1216902>
- Bates, D., Mächler, M., Bolker, B., & Walker, S. (2015). Fitting linear mixed-effects models using lme4. *Journal of Statistical Software*, 67, 1–48. <https://doi.org/10.18637/jss.v067.i01>
- Bedford, R. D. (1988). Population movement in post-colonial Fiji: Review and speculation. *GeoJournal*, 16, 179–192.
- Boyd, R., & Richerson, P. J. (2010). Transmission coupling mechanisms: Cultural group selection. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 365, 3787–3795. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2010.0046>
- Bushman, B. J., Ridge, R. D., Das, E., Key, C. W., & Busath, G. L. (2007). When God sanctions killing: Effect of scriptural violence on aggression. *Psychological Science*, 18, 204–207. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2007.01873.x>
- Caluori, N., Jackson, C. J., Gray, K., & Gelfand, M. (2020). Conflict changes how people view God. *Psychological Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797619895286>
- Cohen, A. B., & Hill, P. C. (2007). Religion as culture: Religious individualism and collectivism among American Catholics, Jews, and Protestants. *Journal of Personality*, 75, 709–742. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2007.00454.x>
- Dawkins, R. (2006). *The God delusion*. Houghton Mifflin.
- Dawkins, R., Dennet, D., Harris, S., & Hitchens, C. (2007). *The Four Horseman—Hitchens, Dawkins, Dennet, Harris*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n7IHU28aR2E>
- De Vries, R. E. (2002). Ethnic tension in paradise: Explaining ethnic supremacy aspirations in Fiji. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 26, 311–327. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0147-1767\(02\)00006-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0147-1767(02)00006-8)
- Epley, N., Converse, B. A., Delbosc, A., Monteleone, G. A., & Cacioppo, J. T. (2009). Believers' estimates of God's beliefs are more egocentric than estimates of other people's beliefs. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 106, 21533–21538. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.0908374106>
- Everett, J. A. C., Haque, O. S., & Rand, D. G. (2016). How good is the Samaritan, and why? An experimental investigation of the extent and nature of religious prosociality using economic games. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 7, 248–255. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550616632577>
- Fiji Bureau of Statistics. (2019). Religion. Retrieved November 27, 2019, from <https://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/index.php/statistics/social-statistics/religion>
- Gervais, W., & Norenzayan, A. (2012). Like a camera in the sky? Thinking about God increases public self-awareness and socially desirable responding. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 48, 298–302. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2011.09.006>
- Ginges, J., Hansen, I., & Norenzayan, A. (2009). Religion and support for suicide attacks. *Psychological Science*, 20, 224–230. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2009.02270.x>
- Ginges, J., Sheikh, H., Atran, S., & Argo, N. (2016). Thinking from God's perspective decreases biased valuation of the life of a non-believer. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 113, 316–319. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1512120113>
- Hall, D. L., Cohen, A. B., Meyer, K. K., Varley, A. H., & Brewer, G. H. (2015). Costly signaling increases trust, even across religious affiliations. *Psychological Science*, 26, 1368–1376. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797615576473>
- Harris, S. (2006). *Letter to a Christian nation*. Knopf.
- Heiphetz, L., Lane, J. D., Waytz, A., & Young, L. L. (2016). How children and adults represent God's mind. *Cognitive Science*, 40, 121–144. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cogs.12232>
- Henrich, J., Heine, S. J., & Norenzayan, A. (2010). Most people are not WEIRD. *Nature*, 466, 29. <https://doi.org/10.1038/466029a>
- Hunsberger, B., & Jackson, L. M. (2005). Religion, meaning, and prejudice. *Journal of Social Issues*, 61, 807–826. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.2005.00433.x>
- Huntington, S. (1993). The clash of civilizations? *Foreign Affairs*, 72, 22–49.
- Johnson, D. (2005). God's punishment and public goods. *Human Nature*, 16, 410–446.
- Johnson, D., & Bering, J. (2006). Hand of God, mind of man: Punishment and cognition in the evolution of cooperation. *Evolutionary Psychology*, 4, 219–233. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14747049060400119>
- Johnson, M. K., Labouff, J., Rowatt, W. C., Patock-Peckham, J. A., & Carlisle, R. D. (2012). Facets of right-wing authoritarianism mediate the relationship between religious fundamentalism and attitudes toward Arabs and African Americans. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 51, 128–142. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5906.2011.01622.x>

- Kaplan, B. (2007). *Divided by faith: Religious conflict and the practice of toleration in early modern Europe*. Harvard University Press.
- Kuznetsova, A., Brockhoff, P. B., & Christensen, R. H. B. (2017). LmerTest package: Tests in linear mixed effects models. *Journal of Statistical Software*, 82. <https://doi.org/10.18637/jss.v082.i13>
- Laurin, K., Shariff, A. F., Henrich, J., & Kay, A. C. (2012). Outsourcing punishment to God: Beliefs in divine control reduce earthly punishment. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 279, 3272–3281. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2012.0615>
- Morris, P. (1996). *Detraditionalization: Critical reflections on authority and identity*. Blackwell.
- Neuberg, S. L., Warner, C. M., Mistler, S. A., Berlin, A., Hill, E. D., Johnson, D. J., Filip-Crawford, G., Millsap, R. E., Thomas, G., Winkelmann, M., Broome, B. J., Taylor, T. J., & Schober, J. (2014). Religion and intergroup conflict: Findings from the global group relations project. *Psychological Science*, 25, 198–206. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797613504303>
- Ng, B., & Gervais, W. M. (2016). Religion and prejudice. In C. G. Sibley & F. K. Barlow (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of the psychology of prejudice* (pp. 344–370). Cambridge University Press.
- Norenzayan, A. (2013). *Big Gods: How religion transformed cooperation and conflict*. Princeton University Press.
- Norenzayan, A., & Shariff, A. F. (2008). The origin and evolution of religious prosociality. *Science*, 322, 58–62. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1158757>
- Norenzayan, A., Shariff, A. F., Gervais, W. M., Willard, A. K., McNamara, R. A., Slingerland, E., & Henrich, J. (2016). The cultural evolution of prosocial religions. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 39, 1–65. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X14001356>
- Obeid, N., Argo, N., & Ginges, J. (2017). How moral perceptions influence intergroup tolerance: Evidence from Lebanon, Morocco, and the United States. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 43, 381–391. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167216686560>
- Pisar, A. C., & Surbeck, M. (2019). The evolution of intergroup tolerance in nonhuman primates and humans. *Evolutionary Anthropology: Issues, News, and Reviews*, 28, 210–223. <https://doi.org/10.1002/evan.21793>
- Preston, J. L., & Ritter, R. S. (2013). Different effects of religion and God on prosociality with the ingroup and outgroup. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 39, 1471–1483. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167213499937>
- Purzycki, B. G., Apicella, C., Atkinson, Q., Cohen, E., McNamara, R. A., Willard, A. K., Xygalatas, D., Norenzayan, A., & Henrich, J. (2016). Moralistic Gods, supernatural punishment and the expansion of human sociality. *Nature*, 530, 327–330. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nature16980>
- R Core Team. (2018). *R: A language and environment for statistical computing*. R Foundation for Statistical Computing. <https://www.R-project.org/>
- Rad, M. S., Martingano, A. J., & Ginges, J. (2018). Toward a psychology of Homo sapiens: Making psychological science more representative of the human population. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 115, 11401–11405. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1721165115>
- Ramesh, S. (2008). Fiji: Inter-group competitions and in-group fragmentation. *Peace and Conflict Review*, 2, 1–14.
- Shariff, A. F., & Norenzayan, A. (2011). Mean Gods make good people: Different views of God predict cheating behavior. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 21, 85–96. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10508619.2011.556990>
- Shariff, A. F., Norenzayan, A., & Henrich, J. (2010). The birth of high Gods: How the cultural evolution of supernatural policing influenced the emergence of complex, cooperative human societies. In M. Schaller, A. Norenzayan, S. J. Heine, T. Yamagishi, & T. Kameda (Eds.), *Evolution, culture, and the human mind* (pp. 119–136). Psychology Press.
- Shariff, A. F., Willard, A. K., Andersen, T., & Norenzayan, A. (2016). Religious priming: A meta-analysis with a focus on prosociality. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 20, 27–48. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868314568811>
- Stark, R. (1996). *The rise of Christianity: How one obscure, marginal, Jesus movement became the dominant religious force*. Princeton University Press.
- Tessler, M. (2009). *A history of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict*. Indiana University Press.
- Trnka, S. (2008). *State of suffering: Political violence and community survival in Fiji*. Cornell University Press.
- Wickham, H. (2016). *ggplot2: Elegant graphics for data analysis*. Springer-Verlag. <http://ggplot2.org>

Author Biographies

Michael H. Pasek, PhD, is a postdoctoral research fellow at Artis International and a visiting research fellow at the Department of Psychology, The New School for Social Research. He studies intergroup relations with a focus on the ways in which religion, religious beliefs, and psychological threat affect the ability for people from diverse backgrounds to peacefully coexist.

Crystal Shackleford, MS, is a doctoral student in the Department of Psychology, The New School for Social Research. She studies the causes and consequences of intergroup conflict and cooperation.

Julia M. Smith, MS, is a doctoral student at the Department of Psychology, The University of Michigan. She studies intergroup relations and reactions to both political and personal negative events.

Allon Vishkin, PhD, is a postdoctoral research fellow at Artis International and a visiting research fellow in the Department of Psychology, The New School for Social Research. His work focuses on cross-cultural differences in emotion, motivation, and cognition.

Anne Lehner, MS, is a doctoral student in the Department of Psychology, The New School for Social Research. She studies intergroup conflict and social-identity-based privileges.

Jeremy Ginges, PhD, is an associate professor of psychology in The New School for Social Research and a senior fellow at Artis International. His work focuses on understanding cooperation and conflict between groups.