INTRODUCTION

Obama Is a Muslim?

What Religion and Politics Research Has to Say

When Barack Obama stepped in front of the Illinois Statehouse to announce his candidacy for the Democratic presidential nomination in February 2007, he was generally known as the junior senator from the Land of Lincoln, an author, and the man who had delivered an inspiring keynote address at his party's 2004 convention. But Obama also drew attention from some because of his middle name, Hussein. In addition, much was made of the fact that Obama's African father was a Muslim.

Once the American people began to pay attention to this Barack Hussein Obama, opinion polls registered a consistent minority of respondents affiliating Barack Obama with Islam, and specifically, considering the Chicagoan—a registered member of the United Church of Christ—a Muslim. For instance, the Pew Forum found that a constant 12 percent held this belief from March 2008 to March 2009, then the figure jumped to 18 percent in October 2010 (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2010c).[1] Evangelical Protestants were at the forefront of this figure, which, incidentally, came less than a month before a hotly contested midterm election that saw Republicans take control of the U.S. House of Representatives. Fully 29 percent of evangelicals considered Obama a Muslim, a percentage bested by only conservative Republicans at 34 percent.

The lingering question as Obama completes his fifth year in office is *why*. As we discuss in Chapter 3, Obama has used some of the same rhetorical appeals that Ronald Reagan found successful in his meetings with evangelical Christians. Obama not only told evangelical leaders in 2008 that he, like Reagan, "endorsed" their work; he also provided an unambiguous accounting of his faith in interviews such as this one in the evangelical periodical *Christianity Today*: "I am

[1] The belief that Obama was Muslim was found to be more common in the 2008 American National Election Study (ANES), conducted before and after the campaign, which showed that about 20 percent of the population held the belief.

a devout Christian. I believe in the redemptive death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. . . . I have never practiced Islam. I am respectful of the religion, but it's not my own" (quoted in Pulliam and Olsen 2008).

Further evidence of Obama's Christianity came from a minor, though well-publicized, scandal that erupted at the height of the presidential primary in March 2008 over comments made by Obama's former pastor, Reverend Jeremiah Wright of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago (see, e.g., Kantor 2008). Video clips of Wright's criticisms of the treatment of African Americans in the United States were widely distributed, and a battery of polls gauged public reaction (see, e.g., Rasmussen Reports 2008). The specific controversy over Wright's comments aside, the national attention paid to the fact that Obama was a member of a Christian church would seem to be strong evidence against a Muslim affiliation. Still, the belief persists among some (see Hollander 2010).

Many of the opinions we tend to study (e.g., on school prayer, affirmative action, and immigration) have preoccupied the public and political scientists for a long time. The downside of these established issue conflicts is that opinions measured in surveys at any point in time may be the result of forces long since gone. That is, we are unable to assess what came first—the religion or the attitude—when measuring issues attitudes across decades. Not surprisingly, pitching causal explanations of these attitudes will fall far short of certainty.

By contrast, perceptions of Obama's religious affiliation are a new arrival to the political scene. Even more intriguing is that the perceptions pertain to a single person; they are not part of a larger movement or event. This likely means that shaping people's view of Obama's faith identity does not stem from the same processes that encourage attitudes on broader social and policy concerns. What is more, the distribution of beliefs about Obama's supposed Islamic identity is highly uneven: some kinds of people are more likely than others to maintain, against all factual counterclaims, that Obama is a Muslim. Taken together, these items provide some real advantages in studying how people come by their beliefs. More important for this book, studying beliefs about Obama's faith allow us to comment on the value of existing theoretical perspectives in the study of religion and politics.

The question now is *how* we should explain it. The media might be an obvious factor. In fact, most of those who believe that Obama is a Muslim did indeed blame the media in the Pew Forum poll in October 2010. Unfortunately, people were not asked to name the media outlet from which they heard the claim; nor would it be clear that recall of such information would be accurate. Yet even if we could obtain a valid response, media alone is an unsatisfying explanation, since many others surely heard the "Obama is a Muslim" claim from a media outlet but chose not to believe it. If it were a simple case of exposure, then the matter would be quickly resolved. Thus, we have come upon a two-pronged problem: we need to know (1) who was exposed to the claim that Obama is a Muslim, and (2) who adopted this belief.

As stated, exposure is a particularly thorny problem to resolve using observational methods, because a person's recall is likely not only to be flawed but to

be flawed in a particular way. People likely to remember hearing a claim that Obama is a Muslim are also those most interested in the subject matter and most motivated to agree. Hence, in using observational data gathered at one point in time, it is impossible to tell whether (1) people picked a communication outlet because they already agreed with the content it presents, or (2) exposure to the communication source persuaded listeners to agree. Obviously, addressing the exposure question is essential to determining whether influence actually runs from communicator to receiver.

For our purposes in this volume, the role of communicator takes on a variety of forms, including political candidates, media outlets, religious groups, and clergy. In a very general sense, each of these communication sources can be considered "elite." Since the communication of political information between elites and the public is the crucial dynamic in popular governance, researchers have had to grapple with the problem of exposure while studying adoption. They have confronted this problem in several ways, often in the same study, by trying to gain an independent measure of the information environment or by controlling the state of the information environment in experimental designs.

For instance, John Zaller's (1992) famous observational study of public opinion coded the extent of pro– and anti–Vietnam War media coverage, which, when paired with public opinion at the time, demonstrated that public support for the war closely tracked media content. Zaller (1998) also paired positive and negative coverage of President Bill Clinton during the Monica Lewinsky scandal in 1998 to show that his own "media model" of public opinion may not be the dominant explanation, given that public opinion diverged from media content. In understanding this difference, scholars have examined both the impact of the intense campaigning waged in battleground states (McClurg and Holbrook 2009) and the markets where specific types of political advertisements air (Franz et al. 2007).

The second approach uses experimentation to control audiences' exposure to content, whereby randomly selected people hear or read content different from that experienced by others. This allows for assessment of what people are likely to do under different information scenarios that the researcher controls. Examples include presenting people with negative or positive political advertisements (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995), asking respondents to read the same political argument attributed to different political leaders (Kuklinski and Hurley 1994), and exposing participants to strong or weak arguments (Chong and Druckman 2008). The cumulative outcome of application of these designs is direct assessment of the causal influence of various presentation modes and content.

This brief elaboration highlights the focus of contemporary public opinion research in understanding communicator source and content influence in public decision making. From here, we can return to the question of Obama's religious identity and assess how the standards of public opinion research are addressed through dominant approaches in the study of religion and politics.

The religion and politics subfield has developed three basic theoretical approaches that might be brought to bear on the Obama identity question. For

simplicity, we focus on the apparent link between white evangelicals and the belief that Obama is a Muslim, which leads to our research question: Why are evangelicals more likely to believe Obama is a Muslim? Consider these stylized assessments:

- **Perspective 1:** White evangelicals exist in higher concentrations in the South and, as such, have fewer positive emotions toward blacks.[2] By dint of their strongly held religious affiliation, they also have more negative feelings toward other religious traditions, especially non-Christian ones. And last, because they tend to be conservative, white evangelicals are predisposed not to like Democrats. People are predisposed to like people who are members of their own group (the "ingroup") and tend to dislike people who are not. This is a protective dynamic that some speculate has evolved over time, motivating small human groups to compete better for resources. Thus, those who hear and adopt the belief that Obama is Muslim are moved to do so by a desire to maintain the psychological group boundary of their conservative, white, evangelical identity—they like their own ingroup and dislike the outgroup, which preserves the integrity and moral superiority of the ingroup.
- **Perspective 2:** White evangelicals are part of a religious tradition with historically tense relations with both blacks and other religious traditions. It was only in 1995 that the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) apologized to African Americans for its past defense of slavery, and, for instance, the Bob Jones Jr., the president of Bob Jones University, once referred to the Roman Catholic Church as a "satanic counterfeit" (Jenkins 2004). Of course, neither the SBC nor Bob Jones is representative of all evangelicals. Still, evangelicals are more likely to believe Obama is a Muslim because of their historical traditions, especially the more committed they are to those traditions.
- **Perspective 3:** Evangelicals are marginally more likely to believe Obama is a Muslim, and only a small minority of evangelicals believe it. Remember, the high-water mark of evangelicals' perception of Obama as Muslim during his first term reached only 29 percent (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2010c). Hence, it makes little sense to pitch an explanation that does not apply to 70 percent of people in the category. Thus, we should focus beneath designations of religious

[2] According to the 2000 ANES, there are marginal differences in affect toward blacks by race, region, and religion. White evangelicals have a lower average "feeling thermometer" score toward blacks; however, the difference holds only in the South. Outside the South, evangelicals differ from others by an insignificant .23 degrees out of 100 ($p = .90$), whereas evangelicals have significantly lower affect toward blacks in the South (64 versus 71 degrees; $p = .00$). Among whites in the South, evangelicals are only marginally less warm toward blacks (63 versus 66 degrees; $p = .16$, $N = 377$); white non-Southerners do not differ by their evangelical status ($p = .37$, $N = 778$).

> tradition to consider other factors that may be quite variable even within communities that conventionally are perceived as homogeneous. Indeed, those who hear the argument that Obama is a Muslim do not "receive, accept, and sample" (Zaller 1992) "evangelical" responses to the statement, as "evangelical" represents an artificial grouping that does not, itself, generate the social and institutional interactions on which political thinking is based. Instead, people belong to social networks where the notion that Obama is a Muslim flows from communication with discussion partners both within and outside of the church. Thus, through one's information sources and social contacts, a belief about Obama's religious identity is created and maintained. This has the benefit of allowing this explanation to be shared with those from other religious traditions (e.g., Mormons and Roman Catholics) who might also believe Obama to be Muslim.

These three perspectives offer very different understandings of religious effects, based on quite different conceptions of what constitutes politically salient religion. In Perspective 1, religion is a core identity of the individual—helping to make sense of the world; simplifying society as "us versus them"; and enabling simple, but effective, judgments to be made about the people and groups that deserve support. In Perspective 2, religion represents a set of traditions typified by beliefs and practices communicated over time to which people are more or less committed. These traditions provide guidelines about acceptable attitudes and behavior.

In Perspective 3, religion consists of organizations that channel communication and social interaction that together shape political choice. Although this perspective trains our attention primarily on congregations, it invites the inclusion of other people and organizations that have access to individuals. This includes not only supra-congregational organizations, such as denominations and religious interest groups, but also intra-congregational groups (e.g., committees) and small purposive groups (e.g., weekly Bible studies). Although the specific influence mechanisms can be complex, this approach suggests that the balance of information that people are exposed to shapes their political choices.

These three perspectives take different approaches to questions about exposure and the adoption of messages. The *identity* approach (Perspective 1), which is rooted in psychology, focuses attention on the forces that help people distinguish which messages to adopt. It devotes less energy to understanding the balance of messages to which individuals are exposed. The *religious commitment* approach (Perspective 2) does not distinguish between these two problems, assuming that people in a religious tradition are exposed to certain messages over time, with adoption positively associated with religious commitment. Thus, predictions from this perspective are the result of an unspecified combination of exposure and adoption. The *social network* approach (Perspective 3) focuses attention on the particular messages individuals are exposed to, given their

participation in specific congregations with their individual clergy, small groups, and particular mix of congregants. In its early forms, adoption is a straightforward function of exposure: the more exposure, the more likely the person is to adopt the message.

This overview of the three approaches reminds us of the parable told in many religious traditions about the blind men who were asked to describe an elephant based on the part of the animal each was able to touch. Each provided a different description, and all were wrong. If political opinions are the result of exposure to information and variable adoption, then a focus on just one facet (as embodied in each approach) is clearly not enough to describe the entire political animal of interest. Instead, we need explicit theories about the entire exposure-adoption stream and explicit measurements of communicator and receiver to accompany them.

As becomes clear below, because the *religious commitment* approach is so bound by its inability to disentangle exposure from adoption, we see it as holding little promise to help address the effects of religious communication on public opinion. Instead, we argue that the study of religion and politics should adopt the *social network* approach because it draws attention to both exposure and adoption. At the same time, *identity* approaches can prove useful because of their insights into message adoption. All told, we argue for a pluralistic track to understanding religious influence—one that takes the organizational reality of religious experience seriously while recognizing that individuals have agency within this experience.

One of the primary hurdles of the pluralistic track is that the approaches dictate different ways to study religious influence. The identity approach, for example, entails measuring identities and related self-concepts in individual interviews. As the logic goes, salient identities will have a statistical effect on opinion (see, e.g., Brady and Sniderman 1985). Measuring religious commitment entails a large battery of items to capture the kind of religious group to which the individual belongs. These items are assumed to capture the content to which these individuals are exposed, as well as commitment measures that usually gauge the frequency of religious behavior and orthodoxy of belief (see, e.g., Kellstedt et al. 1996; Smidt, Kellstedt, and Guth 2009).

Assessing social networks typically entails individual or cluster sampling in which individuals are sampled randomly in small communities (in which case, it is likely that more than one person in the sample is affiliated with a particular religious organization), or organizations are sampled first (the clusters) before individuals are sampled randomly within them. This mixed-sampling strategy allows explicit measures of political communication within religious organizations to be constructed independently of individually based perceptions.

Unfortunately, while the social network approach is able to accommodate identity and commitment measures, the other two approaches (identity and religious commitment) are unable to accommodate political communication measures from within a religious organization. That is, as discussed above, the traditional individual sample survey intended to garner descriptive data is unable, by

itself, to disentangle exposure and adoption effects, at least in tightly knit social precincts. In the absence of explicitly measuring message exposure, we at least need to control for it to study public adoption of content. This mandates particular design choices—choices that recommend focus away from the religious commitment approach, at least until the theoretical underpinnings it relies on can accommodate the measurement needs associated with religion and political opinion puzzles.

To be sure, all three approaches have their problems in sorting out the causal nature of their explanations. If religious identities are constructed and made salient by political communication within the church, then religious identity effects may be masking political communication effects. But it is also difficult to disentangle identity effects from religious tradition effects. For example, is adoption spurred by a group identity itself or by adoption of the group's historical political commitments? This problem is not surprising because the first is a psychological theory, while the second is typically referred to as a social psychological theory, blending psychological commitment with the traditional attachments of a social organization.

The religious commitment approach typically finds that greater religious commitment is related to increased conservatism, but studies from the third (social) perspective have shown this relationship to be an artifact of underspecified causal modeling. That is, once we measure direct access to political communication within churches (exposure), religious commitment has no effect on the adoption of political attitudes.

Interestingly, though, the social network approach typically has shied away from including "religion" in its explanations (but see Wald, Owen, and Hill 1988). Although the church context channels politically salient communication, in the social network approach it is still essentially secular political communication that affects attitudes and behavior. This leads us to ask whether there is really anything important about the religious content contained in houses of worship that deserve particular attention from the religion and politics subfield. To address this question definitively, psychological processes will need to be specified to understand variations in how members process political communication in religious organizations, such as churches (see Djupe and Gilbert 2009). This logic recommends that we focus on the first and third approaches, which we do throughout this volume.

The question of why some evangelicals believe that Obama is a Muslim and the multiple disjointed starting points used in addressing this query show religion and politics to be a field at a crossroads. A great deal of progress has been made over the last generation by pioneering scholars who both reintroduced religion to the discipline and updated the ways it measures religion as a political factor (see Leege and Kellstedt 1993b). Clearly, religion is back on the social science agenda after decades of neglect (but see Wald and Wilcox 2006).

Yet the subfield's lack of coherence in sorting the strengths and weaknesses of its dominant paradigms remains a problem. The issue is continually compounded

because, despite access to a diverse range of approaches, most researchers do not pit their preferred models against competing explanations—which is truly the basis for coming to some type of field-oriented synthesis. This leads us to wonder whether the selected approach in a given piece of research was cherry-picked and whether better explanations are possible. All told, the field is confronted with a snaggle of trails that may merely lead back to base camp.

While there are various places where one might start moving toward synthesis, the preceding discussion of religious communication effects on political opinion is an advantageous starting point. In their present states, the existing approaches do not inspire much confidence in addressing this question, given how they entangle or ignore questions of exposure and adoption. If one accepts that the exposure → adoption process is at the foundation of all questions that religion and politics scholars ask across their range of interests and methodologies, then the conclusion is not only that communication is a worthy area of focus but also that the subfield's theoretically entrenched status quo cannot be sustained. Making progress, however, can look a lot like the collective action problem that Olson (1965) described, as many have an incentive to let someone else do the heavy lifting. This may seem a bleak portrait of religion and politics work. In fact, we feel the opposite is true.

There are now nascent discussions across the three approaches, and new datasets are coming online that enable tests of diverse religious explanations of public opinion. Moreover, as we argue throughout this volume, long-existing research designs that have been roundly ignored by religion and politics scholars give us the ability to adjudicate between existing approaches en route to greater clarity about how religious influence works. In making this assessment, we break (almost) entirely with the standard, observational survey approach to religion and politics research. Reflecting the discipline's growing emphasis, we advocate that the subfield become a practitioner of experimental research.

Doing so will encourage several developments, all of which are critical for the field's long-term standing in the discipline. First, studies need to be much more explicit about the mechanisms involved in hypothesized relationships. Although more rhetorical attention to mechanisms is often called for, we advocate explicit testing of what is involved in observed relationships. This call mirrors larger developments within political science that make our investigations more scientific, reliable, and replicable.

Second, studies should adopt research designs and measures suitable to testing multiple approaches to religion's influence on politics to winnow the number of viable trails to follow. More studies, particularly from sociologists and select political scientists, fit this suggestion already, but still more should.

Third, while building general theories of religion and politics is desirable, the literature is not on suitably firm footing to do so at this time. Such an authoritative grounding takes years of accumulation of diverse research projects on common questions, and there is not enough work yet to do so. Thus, researchers should generally eschew making grand theoretical statements for now to push

existing perspectives to their breaking points, primarily by direct, rigorous testing. As long as common questions are addressed, this kind of progress, although uncomfortable at times, is entirely positive in the long term.

Our aim is for this volume to serve as the first broad-based assessment of how the field's dominant approaches may be evaluated. Our plan is threefold. First, it is important to give shape to the literature specifically on religion's role in shaping political opinions, and we highlight points of controversy and what we feel are the most pressing problems to resolve. Second, we advocate for experimental research designs that can help resolve some of the pressing problems described above, and we showcase a wide variety of experiments of our own in the following chapters. Third, we see a perspective on the study of religion and political behavior taking shape on which we comment throughout. Our concluding chapter, which is devoted to fostering this perspective more comprehensively, is previewed in the next section.

An Approach to Studying Religion and Public Opinion

The primary culprit in generating the literature's ambiguity is that religion and politics research has had scant concern for the lifeblood of politics—communication between elites and citizens. Without receiving new political information, citizens could not hold their representatives accountable, update their preferences as to whether policies achieve their stated aims, or learn about problems facing the country and other citizens. This is why political theorists vest so much in political discussion as the keystone of a healthy, representative democracy (Gutmann and Thompson 1996; Habermas 1989; Mansbridge 1980).

Not all would agree that discussion, per se, is the key, or even an important force, without an obvious means to connect preferences to government (see, e.g., Page 1996). Yet, information transmission and the forces that govern the adoption of information have been paramount concerns to democratic scholars. A good example has been whether citizens are exposed to arguments they disagree with and how people process disagreement (Mutz 2006).

Despite the centrality of communication to democracy, the religion and politics literature has had relatively little to say about its effects on citizens (although there are significant exceptions: see, e.g., Leege et al. 2002; Djupe and Gilbert 2009). Because the communication of information is central to ongoing popular participation in democratic governance, we propose that researchers organize their inquiries around three broad forms of interaction between elite communicators and citizen receivers. This will help theorize religion's role in information exposure and adoption. The approach separates the domain of communication (exposure), which helps to define the actor communicating, the nature of the relationship between the communicator and receiver, and how religion is used, as well as the dispositions that individuals are likely to bring to information processing (adoption). Figure I.1 is a schematic representation of the confluence of these two variables.

	Inside congregations	Outside congregations
Religious elites	**Domain 1**: Clergy communication (Chapters 8, 9)	**Domain 2**: Religious group effects (Chapters 4–7)
Non-religious (political) elites	Very rare	**Domain 3**: Political elites' use of religion (Chapters 2, 3)

FIGURE I.1 Domains of Inquiries into Religion and Public Opinion

Domain 1: Clergy Communication

Communication by clergy with congregants is the first domain. Clergy often communicate political information but do so in a different way—and, perhaps, with different intentions—from elected officials or candidates. For their part, congregants have different expectations of and relationships with clergy from those with elected officials or candidates.

From several generations of clergy studies, it is clear that most members of the clergy can be considered political actors. If clergy were considered quiescent in the 1960s (Stark et al. 1971; but see Hadden 1969; Quinley 1974), it seems that in recent years they have become more politically engaged than ever (Djupe and Gilbert 2003, 2008; Guth et al. 1997). They frequently talk about political issues (Brewer, Kersh, and Peterson 2003), engage in numerous public political activities, and often exhort their congregants to participate in politics (if not for a specific candidate).

However, it is probably a mistake to think about clergy as rational political actors, at least in the sense of pursuing an optimal strategy to achieve outcomes that coincide with their political preferences (but see Calfano 2009, 2010). Clergy often do not openly support particular candidates (Kohut et al. 2000), and their conversations tend to be fairly balanced (Djupe and Neiheisel 2008b; Djupe and Calfano 2012). There is also widespread misperception about when clergy actually address political issues (Djupe and Gilbert 2009). Finally, clergy are congregational leaders with a mission to sustain, and even grow, church memberships (Stark and Finke 2000) and not (primarily) to persuade the congregation of the "right" opinion to hold (Djupe and Calfano 2012).

That said, there are very few studies that have tested for clergy influence with some measure of information provided by clergy members themselves. Smith (2008) and Bjarnason and Welch (2004) used data from the Notre Dame Study of American Catholics, which includes measures of whether the priest talked about an issue but no measure of the content of that discussion. Bjarnason and

Welch (2004) found a statistically significant effect of priestly speech on attitudes toward the death penalty, whereas Smith (2008) found very little influence across a wider range of issues. Using their own survey of clergy and members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America and the Episcopal Church, Djupe and Gilbert (2009) included information about the clergy's views and public speech. But they also found little evidence of persuasion, although they did find that clergy speech stimulated conversation in the congregation and, hence, encouraged adoption of the majority message in the church (which was unlikely to coincide with the view of the individual clergy member).

As stated, clergy, and religious leaders more generally, are distinctive from political leaders in several ways that affect exposure to and adoption of political information. First, the information they expose members to does not often involve mobilization for a specific candidate. Clergy are concerned about the congregation's tax-exempt status and take care to avoid certain magic words, such as "vote for" and "vote against."[3] Thus, clergy primarily confine their remarks and actions to concern about public problems and policy. But even here, the intentions of clergy members may not be to persuade, and we can make no easy assumptions about the content of their communication (Djupe and Calfano 2012; Djupe and Neiheisel 2008b). Clergy may also cloak their political arguments in explicit religious language and religious stories, a tactic that appears to be used rather infrequently by political candidates (Domke and Coe 2008; for an extended discussion of candidates' appeals using religion, see Chapter 2).

Second, regarding adoption, congregants often have long histories with their clergy members. It is not clear precisely what such "history" entails, but two possibilities stand out. Given a longer relationship with congregants, clergy may become more trusted sources of information, and trust may be crucial to congregant willingness to adopt messages (Lupia and McCubbins 1998). However, experience with anyone, not just clergy members, would allow people to develop defenses against their attempts at persuasion. This is a common finding in psychology (Chaiken, Giner-Sorolla, and Chen 1996) and a force that could significantly stunt clergy influence on public opinion. Importantly, it is not clear what effect religiously framed political arguments have, given that only variations of political arguments have been studied.

We suggest that the influence of clergy is much more subtle and scattered than existing studies have allowed for and for which experiments are particularly well suited to isolate and capture. Thus, our first domain question is ***How does communication from congregation-based elites affect congregation members?***

Chapters 8 and 9 contain our investigations of clergy influence. There are essentially two models of influence that we explore here. The first takes as its starting place the fact that existing research has found little direct clergy influence

[3] One significant exception is a movement by the conservative Alliance Defense Fund, which sponsors "Pulpit Freedom Sunday," in which pastors are encouraged to explicitly endorse or oppose elected officials on the basis of biblical consistency of their agendas—a practice prohibited by the Internal Revenue Service since 1954. Another Pulpit Freedom Sunday was scheduled for October 7, 2012, a few weeks before the presidential election.

on congregants' attitudes, based on clergy members' political speech patterns (Djupe and Gilbert 2009; Smith 2008). Instead, we posit that clergy influence may take an indirect route by priming religious values that are salient to political decisions. Chapter 8 starts with data from the 2008 Cooperative Clergy Study to show the extent to which clergy members report priming two religious value sets, then reports results of an experiment that tests whether value priming affects attitudes on U.S. foreign interventionism. Chapter 9 explores the limits of value priming by clergy, including whether value priming itself will limit the kinds of arguments congregants find acceptable.

Domain 2: Religious Group Effects

The second and third domains are located primarily outside the walls of houses of worship and may overlap at the margins. These domains are composed via the tax code that imposes penalties on religious groups' involvement in electioneering. This appears mainly to affect how, not whether, religious elites talk about politics.

For instance, political speech by religious figures tends to focus on policies, not politicians. Thus, the political communication of religious actors in the United States is primarily concerned with public policy, while little is expressly geared toward influencing the selection of candidates. Many groups, however, have come close to crossing the line with the distribution of slanted voter guides (Wilcox and Larson 2006). Since 2008, there also have been members of the clergy who, with encouragement from the Alliance Defense Fund, annually endorse candidates in direct challenges to the tax code (Goodstein 2008). But these elites are most often associated with a particular faith or theological perspective and present policy arguments that are consonant with those views.

The question is What separates what are essentially religious interest groups from clergy? We suspect that two crucial elements differentiate them, with both producing divergent expectations. First, people expect religious interest groups to be involved in politics and elections, whereas this is less often an expectation of congregational clergy. Thus, people may be more likely to look for political arguments from religious interest groups (however, see Djupe and Conger 2012). Second, when leaders of religious interest groups speak, it is not immediately clear for whom they speak. If they are representatives, it is natural to ask who and what they represent, raising essential questions of credibility: Is there a shared identity? How big and strong a constituency do they represent? Do they have religious or political legitimacy? These are not, in our estimation, common questions that would emerge when a political candidate or clergyperson speaks. Our second question domain, therefore, is ***How are religious elites and groups and their public arguments evaluated?***

At the heart of this domain is the issue of elites' credibility under uncertainty. When the National Association of Evangelicals issued a statement promoting action on climate change, many evangelicals surely questioned whether this was something they should follow. If religious elites are going to be politi-

cally persuasive and change attitudes, they cannot use value congruence to establish their credibility and must instead use some other mechanism. In Chapter 4, we test if religious elites may be more influential on environmental protection when signaling that they have used an accepted decision-making process to reach a conclusion. For evangelicals, for instance, this decision-making process might be intense prayer. We continue investigating environmental protection opinions in Chapter 5, where we investigate whether cues in evangelical decision-making processes help establish trust in both the source and the credibility of the argument.

In Chapter 6, we focus on how evaluations of a group affect mobilization, taking a story ripped from the headlines in which the Christian right leader James Dobson threatened to bolt from the Republican Party in 2008 if Rudy Giuliani, former mayor of New York City, won the Republican nomination for president. We wondered how seriously people viewed Dobson's threat given estimates of his own sincerity (using decision-making process cues) and his influence on followers in the complex information environment of election campaigns.

In Chapter 7 (coauthored with Sam Webb), we focus on the predispositions that would lead evangelicals to accept the claims of a local pastor against a law professor's predictions regarding the spread of gay rights to Ohio. In this experiment, which was administered to donors to an evangelical, family-values political action committee, we study when participants use ingroup information regarding assessments of threat posed by a disliked group to shape their tolerance judgments.

Domain 3: Political Elites' Use of Religion

Finally, political elites use religion in a wide variety of ways. Some are heartfelt and some are not; some are covert and some are overt; some are used naturally, and some are used rather awkwardly. All aim to influence public policy and elections, especially their own. Political elites' use of religion has been explored to a degree, especially as it appears in speeches of elected officials (see, e.g., Domke and Coe 2008). How it has been used in elections has not been studied systematically, but there has been some research about the effect of a candidate's religion (Braman and Sinno 2009; McDermott 2009), and our work has explored the effect of covert religious arguments on electoral support as described by David Kuo (2006) (see Chapter 2).

We suspect that political elites differ from religious elites for at least two reasons. First, unless they are clergy themselves, which occasionally happens, candidates often devote some effort to establishing their religious bona fides by visiting churches in as public a manner as possible. Candidates will confess to some general religious identity, beliefs, and behavior, though not often with academic distinctions such as religious tradition labels. And officials are now expected to use religious imagery to power their policy arguments. Thus, it seems that the primary concern for the use of religious imagery by a candidate is the credibility in its use.

While we have expectations as to how people evaluate policy arguments grounded in religious imagery from clergy versus candidates, the outcome remains an open question. Second, elections involve a different set of institutions (including norms) from the legislative process. In part, the United States has developed a set of contested norms, rooted in the tax code, that prohibits tax-exempt organizations from advocating for the election or defeat of a political candidate. Moreover, elections primarily involve calls to select a particular person, not just to support or oppose a policy. That personal dimension may entail a shift in how some religious mechanisms affect support. Thus, we distinguish this third question domain: ***With what effect do political elites use religion?***

Our inquiry about the use of religion by political elites can be found in Chapters 2 and 3. In Chapter 2, we investigate the effect of "God Talk," which David Kuo discussed in *Tempting Faith* (2006). There, Kuo described how Republican Party candidates would often use covert cues taken from evangelical religious culture to convey their solidarity with evangelicals without having to reveal that affiliation to non-evangelicals who would not pick up on the cues. The chapter combines work published in *Political Research Quarterly* and *Politics and Religion* (coauthored with Angelia Wilson of the University of Manchester), and new unpublished work, which together demonstrate the efficacy of God Talk cues, tempered by the candidate's gender, a partisan environment, and the United Kingdom. In collaboration with an enterprising undergraduate at Denison University, Chelsea Back, we also administered an experiment assessing the effect of atheism on how a candidate is evaluated in terms of his or her trustworthiness, perceived ideology, and perceived antagonism to religion, which constitutes Chapter 3.

Discussion

The arguments presented in this book do not rise or fall based on these domain distinctions. This threefold scheme is a preliminary attempt to help focus our inquiries on the variable categories in play for certain types of elite–mass interactions. They are subject to revision or, in case these distinctions do not hold, can be jettisoned completely. But in that event, we will have found evidence that the constitutional order based on the tax code is easily violated, and technology has obviated the distinction between mediated elites and elites in local, physical communities. Thus, we feel that investigation across our three domains is itself an important task, bearing on significant questions about the constitution of the republic.

Experimental Methods

As we have mentioned throughout this chapter, our firm belief is that the use of experimental methodology holds great promise for the religion and politics subfield. To be clear, our aim is not to elevate experimental design for the sake of the method itself. It is, however, hard to ignore that the level of control and the

degree of simplification experiments provide will help the subfield make gains in confidence in what we know and what approaches are worth pursuing.

The strength of approaching the study of political phenomena from an experimental perspective is that researchers are able to move far beyond descriptive assessment (for a general discussion of the *Experimental Foundations of Political Science,* see Kinder and Palfrey 1993) to a position of confidence in causal claims (see Druckman and Kam 2011; Morton and Williams 2010; Mutz 2011). The power of the experimental approach is located squarely in its random assignment of treatment and control (those who do not get the treatment) groups, meaning the researcher has control over the independent variable(s). If random assignment is properly executed, then those two groups are nearly identical in their composition *except* that one will experience something different from the other. This "something" is the treatment or intervention that the researcher directly controls. Thus, any difference (usually assessed as the mean response by the treatment and control groups) can be ascribed directly to the treatment and not some other variable in these "between-groups" designs. Because of the level of control researchers can assert over the independent variable to assess its effect on the dependent variable, we gain a great deal of confidence about the causal claim—that the independent variable affects the dependent variable in a particular way.

Much more complex experimental designs are possible, of course, and the logic may differ slightly. For example, designs that include measurements before and after the treatment are referred to as "within-groups" designs because they assess change by each individual rather than just compare the results of two groups in "between-groups" designs. Thus, while studies in the field are primarily concerned with gathering a representative sample, the experimentalist is concerned with two steps—gathering a sample (which does not have to be "representative" to the extent often sought by pollsters) and then randomly assigning it to treatment and control conditions.

If experiments have high levels of internal validity, they are often challenged in their external validity—whether the results apply to the world outside the experimental sample. A number of criticisms are made on this front, but almost all of them derive from the argument that simplification of the treatments and the circumstances in which they are experienced undermines the credibility of the study. Thus, researchers often spend considerable time and expense trying to approximate a natural environment in which treatments are experienced. For instance, in their study of the effects of negative advertising, Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995) randomly situated their own negative ads using a real actor in a television news broadcast, with participants sitting in comfortable seating with reading material available—all in the interest of approximating the home environment in which people experience political advertising.

Composing experimental treatments in religion and politics research can be quite tricky, depending on the nature of the treatment. There are certainly some low-hanging fruit, some of which has already been picked. For instance, McDermott (2009) and Braman and Sinno (2009) variably included a religious

identification in a fictitious biography of a candidate to assess how people evaluate evangelical (McDermott 2009) and Muslim (Braman and Sinno 2009) candidates. We also report on results of using the label "atheist" for a candidate in Chapter 3. It is also relatively simple to imagine the treatments approximating campaign communication using religion in various ways (see Chapters 4–7).

But how would one approximate a sermon, the church experience, or a religious tradition (among other things)? There are certainly no easy answers to this question. However, approaches to these measurement challenges begin to present themselves once we take stands on what the potential mechanisms are that drive effects from a sermon, church, or religious tradition. If we consider the sermon for a moment, we can easily show just what we mean here. Although sermons can have a wide variety of purposes and take a variety of forms (or styles), at their base they include an argument to think and live a certain way. Some sermons are heavy-handed and tell people directly how to live, but some have messages couched in parables and other stories. Some sermons ask people to adopt a certain set of values, such as the golden rule, while others ask people to adopt a certain set of beliefs, such as a belief in the imminent return of Jesus to Earth. Of course, all of these descriptors are variables that can be manipulated. Furthermore, doses of further realism can be added as other variables, such as history. In part, the long-term relationship between a clergyperson and a congregant can be simulated by providing details about the clergyperson that only a long-term member of the congregation would know, such as his or her ideological leaning, which might help to trigger a defensive response (Djupe and Gilbert 2009; Hadden 1969; Quinley 1974). Thus, thinking about the goals and contexts of sermons allows us to make what we regard as reasonable simplifications that may approximate the effect of a particular communication from a clergyperson.

Experimental results also are often challenged because of their samples. Researchers often use convenience samples, such as the stereotypical college sophomore, that have been found to differ in systematic ways from the general population (Sears 1986). Sears criticized the use of student samples on the basis that students are more teachable than the average adult. That is, they have less stable identities and social networks and weaker attitudes; they are also more likely to comply with authority figures and have stronger cognitive skills. We would add that they tend to be less religious and less political, on average, than the average American adult. It is easy to see that these attributes pose potentially significant problems for experimental research, especially cognitively intensive work that looks for forces that induce attitudinal and identity flex.

However, this classic understanding is undergoing a substantial revision. First, it is important to note that Sears never contended that *all* outcome variables are subject to bias from the college student subject pool (Kam, Wilking, and Zechmeister 2007). Furthermore, he advocated additional research to assess how prevalent and strong such bias might be. It is clear that gaining accurate estimates of effect sizes in the general population should not come from student samples, but whether there are effects may be a suggestive, suitable outcome (see also Lucas 2003).

At the same time, there are many instances where college-age subjects react in the same ways one would find in age-varied subject pools. Druckman and Kam (2011) go one step further. They argue that student samples are generally not a problem for experimental research except in cases where they have no variance on a key theoretically generated factor. Moreover, they tend to resemble the population on many typical items of interest, including religious beliefs and behavior, partisanship, and political engagement. They go on to highlight the importance of other components of the study that may weigh more heavily on the outcome, including context, realism, and timing.

Thus, it is incumbent on the researcher using convenience samples to demonstrate just how these likely biases might affect the application of results to the general population. One way to boost the applicability of experimental results to the general population is to start with a random sample of the population. Then at least we know that a population of interest reacts to a treatment.

But, we do not necessarily think that national random samples will be the gold standard for experimental research in religion and politics. If we focus on our key concern—testing how religious influence works—then it seems clear that our sampling needs are particular. That is, we need to identify subject pools that allow us to test specific mechanisms and that are situated to help boost the realism of the experiment. Obviously, religious influence does not apply to the irreligious, and some mechanisms may not apply outside some religious groups. Moreover, many questions are properly situated within a religious group.

Take, for example, Chapter 7, in which we examine what affects evangelicals' threat perceptions of gay rights activists. Opposing gay rights is by no means limited to evangelicals, but one of the particular mechanisms we test is a grant of credibility to a fictitious clergyperson who is attempting to increase respondents' sense of threat. In this case, the test was composed specifically for evangelicals. Obviously, demonstrating effects across religious groups would be ideal, but we do not believe that this is necessary, especially when a particular group is closely identified with a policy area or a specific influence mechanism.

Especially if the question involves assessing the effect of clergy, then sampling participants within their houses of worship seems most efficacious. In this way, participants are surrounded by people and symbols that make up a good portion of their religious experience. We imagine that this acts as a counterweight to attempts to change participants' minds (see Chapter 8), but it is possible to suspect that such surroundings facilitate change if they grant communication greater credibility when it comes from within a comfortable space. (In fact, it is highly worthwhile to assess whether this is the case.) In either case, reaching participants in their house of worship certainly adds a high degree of realism to an experiment, though it is also likely to ratchet up the difficulty of locating a sample when compared with contacting individuals directly.

Last, convenience samples can be especially helpful in responding as events unfold, before citizens have conversations and solidify their reactions to a news story or other stimulus. For instance, in Chapter 6 we use student samples to evaluate how people respond to James Dobson's threat to leave the Republican

Party in 2008. Knowing how people responded before news became widespread and before Dobson actually carried out the threat (which he did not) proved valuable, and the sample contained a strong representation of appropriate partisan identifiers.

This suggests that the study by Sears (1986) should no longer be the obligatory mea culpa that researchers using student samples cite in their methods sections or the excuse for avoiding experimental designs entirely. While significant opposition to accepting research using student samples will remain within the discipline, such samples have the potential to help build a perspective on religion and public opinion, and one that is not hampered by a lack of resources.

Perhaps because religion and politics research has spent considerable time trying to gain credibility as a subfield within political science, experiments have been slow to develop as a methodological tool. We believe that this has actually prevented the subfield from having a more fruitful relationship with the discipline.

Skeptics of religion's importance in explaining human behavior often have been able to point to the more robust performance of other individual and collective attributes in causal modeling based on survey data. And most have been able to ignore research in religion and politics because it has not contributed to some of the core questions in public opinion research. While religion and politics research has gained credibility in recent decades, the experimental approach that we advocate for in this volume showcases how religion and politics research may benefit from developments in the discipline and bring lessons from the subfield to the discipline with greater confidence.

Our next task is to consider the specific state of the religion and politics literature pertaining to public opinion. In Chapter 1, we identify three major perspectives on which a religion-centered explanation of political behavior can be mounted. Our contention, introduced earlier in this Introduction, is that two of these approaches hold significant promise for advancing the state of subfield and using the causal insights gained from experimental methods.