



ARTICLES

Religious Appeals and Implicit Attitudes

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This article explores the effects of religious appeals by politicians on attitudes and behavior. Although politicians frequently make religious appeals, the effectiveness of these appeals and the mechanisms of persuasion are unknown. This article explores the possibility that religious language can affect political attitudes through implicit processes. Because religious attachments are formed early in the lives of many Americans, religious language may influence citizens without their awareness. Implicit and explicit attitudes are related but distinct constructs, and implicit attitudes may have behavioral implications in the political realm. I test these hypotheses experimentally, relying on a widely used implicit measure, the Implicit Association Test. I find that a Christian religious appeal affects implicit attitudes and political behavior among people who currently or previously identify as Christian. Furthermore, an explicit preference for less religion in politics does not moderate implicit effects.

KEY WORDS: Implicit attitudes, Religion and politics, Implicit Association Test (IAT), Campaign effects

Politicians frequently use religious language in their appeals to the American public. In the 2000 presidential campaign, George Bush said that Jesus was his favorite political philosopher. This did not become a point of contention among the two major candidates; Al Gore said that he was a born again Christian and that he asked himself “what would Jesus do?” before making political decisions. Both candidates’ statements were well-documented in the media, and some writers cautioned that the candidates were going too far. While in general, survey data support the idea that religious language is persuasive in the United States, the data also suggest some limitations on religion’s persuasive appeal. In a 2008 Pew survey, 29% of Americans reported that there is too much religious expression by political leaders. Though Democrats are more likely to express the belief that there

is too much religious language in political discourse, some Republicans, and over a quarter of independents, share this belief. These self-reports suggest that politicians in both parties face constraints on the effectiveness of religious language.

Are people the best judges of what they find persuasive? Research on racial appeals in politics, most notably Mendelberg (2001), demonstrates that racial appeals are persuasive when the racial component is implicit. Americans might not want to be persuaded by racial appeals, but a cleverly crafted racial appeal can be effective. In this article, I examine the effect of religious appeals. The comparison between racial and religious appeals is loose. After all, racial appeals are confronted with a widely accepted norm of equality, while opinions regarding the appropriateness of religious language in politics are varied. However, given this variation, religious appeals are a particularly interesting topic for examining implicit attitudes. I argue that religious language is particularly capable of affecting Americans' attitudes through implicit, or uncontrolled, processes because religious attachments are often formed early in life and are subject to a lifetime of socialization. If religious appeals are affecting Americans at an implicit level, then self-reported attitudes about the desirable amount of religious language in politics offer an overly restrictive idea of religious language's persuasive appeal. I begin by exploring the distinction between implicit and explicit attitudes and argue that studying implicit attitudes is a valuable addition to the study of public opinion. Relying on recent literature on the malleability of implicit attitudes, I hypothesize that religious language from a politician can alter attitudes through implicit processes. I test this hypothesis experimentally, with a widely used implicit measure (the Implicit Association Test). Finally, I explain the implications of attitude change at the implicit level for mass public opinion and political behavior.

Implicit and Explicit Attitudes

Social psychologists have long recognized that there are both explicit and implicit routes to attitude formation and change, and these ideas are enjoying renewed attention in the field. Bargh and Chartrand (1999) argue that "most of a person's everyday life is determined not by their conscious intentions and deliberate choices but by mental processes that are put into motion by features of the environment that operate outside of conscious awareness and guidance" (p. 462). Greenwald and Banaji (1995) distinguish implicit from explicit phenomena through a person's level of awareness. An implicit attitude or process is "introspectively unidentified," and it reflects a "trace of past of experience."¹ These past experiences include associations that people pick up from their environment; they might be continually reinforced and ultimately affect choices and behavior.

¹ The full definition from Greenwald and Banaji (1995): "An implicit C is the introspectively unidentified (or inaccurately identified) trace of past experience which mediates R. In this template, C is the label for a construct (such as attitude), and R names the category of responses (such as object-evaluative judgments) assumed to be influenced by that construct" (p. 5).

Conversely, an explicit route to attitude formation or change is within a person's awareness.

One classic example of an implicit route to attitude formation is mere exposure, the idea that positive attitudes can form through repeated exposure to a novel attitude object (Zajonc, 1968). For example, Moreland and Beach (1992) conducted a field experiment in which four women were asked to drop in on a large lecture class with varying frequency. Students' evaluations of the women at the end of the term revealed that the women who attended most often were also rated as most attractive, even though their attendance had no effect on self-reported familiarity. The mere exposure effect is attributed to the fact that repeated exposure strengthens the representation of the novel attitude object (in this case, the women) in the students' minds, which made it easier for the students to process their images. The positive feeling that comes from heightened perceptual fluency is then associated with the novel attitude object. This is implicit because the students had no idea that the representations were built up in their memories, and in most cases did not recognize the women on a conscious level. Political campaigns might rely on the mere exposure hypothesis when they bombard constituents with advertisements. Miller (1976) found that frequent exposure to a political message enhanced attitudes, though the effect was curvilinear. Another well-studied implicit process is classical conditioning, in which a novel attitude object is paired with something else that is either positively or negatively evaluated. For example, a commercial's music can affect product choice without the customers' awareness (Gorn, 1982).

Research that explores the role of implicit attitudes in consumer psychology is particularly useful for thinking about electoral politics because politicians and businesses both engage in marketing targeted at affecting choices. Recent studies demonstrate that both implicit and explicit attitudes have predictive power in product choice (Maison, Greenwald, & Bruin et al., 2004; Brunel et al., 2004). These studies suggest that implicit processes, such as positive associations with a brand that are not available to us at a conscious level, affect consumer choice. Translating this work into politics, I expect that implicit attitudes, such as positive associations with a political party or a religious identity, can affect political choices.

While Bargh and Chartrand contend that most of our daily life is driven by automatic processes, we might wonder if politics is an exception. We assume that people are more attentive and deliberative when choosing a political leader than when choosing a bar of soap. Even public opinion research that acknowledges that politics is peripheral in the daily lives of many citizens still model decision making as a conscious process. Heuristics and core values help citizens who fall short of the highly deliberative model of politics but still assume awareness (e.g., Lupia & McCubbins, 1998; Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1991). Given the debate between highly deliberative politics on the one hand, and the argument for reliance on heuristics and core values on the other, we might wonder if there is any role for implicit processes to play in political decision making. However, several studies

point to a role for implicit processes in politics. Miller and Krosnick (1998) find significant ballot order effects on election outcomes. This implies an implicit process; it is unlikely people are self-consciously biasing their choices towards the beginning of the ballot options. In Lodge and Taber's work on hot cognition, they argue that concepts in our associative networks carry affective charges that can be activated through uncontrolled processes (2005). They find that primes of politicians, political groups, and issues speed up evaluation of affectively congruent concepts. This suggests that people have immediate, spontaneous affective responses to political information. Todorov, Mandisodza, Goren, and Hall (2005) also demonstrate the importance of immediate reactions. Their research shows that spontaneous trait inference, based solely on faces, correctly predicts vote choice better than chance. Subjects were shown the faces of political competitors that they did not recognize; their instant assessments of competence were related to the actual election outcome and were linearly related to the margin of victory. Finally, recent studies have shown that implicit preferences can be used to predict vote choice among undecided voters (Arcuri, Castelli, Galdi, Zogmaister, & Amadori, 2008; Galdi, Arcuri, & Gawronski, 2008). This work does not suggest that citizens are on autopilot; rather, it points to a role for implicit processes that do not overwhelm conscious or explicit processes, but are an important aspect of citizens' decision making.

The ability of any persuasive appeal to affect implicit attitudes is not at all clear. Implicit attitudes are commonly thought to be particularly stable (Bargh, 1999). For example, most Americans are exposed to negative stereotypes of African Americans as young children and continually reencounter these stereotypes throughout their lives (Blinder, 2007). Because these implicit associations have old roots, and are continually reinforced, they ought to be particularly difficult to change. These associations are somewhat insulated from outside pressures, which is one reason why they are particularly valuable for studies of sensitive topics. The uncontrolled nature of implicit measures insulates them from social desirability pressures.

Several studies demonstrate that implicit attitudes are more malleable than previously thought (for a review, see Blair, 2002). These experiments rely on first presenting a treatment group with a stimulus designed to bring certain ideas to mind, followed by implicit measures. In the study of racial attitudes, Dasgupta and Greenwald (2001) have demonstrated that biases against African Americans are reduced by priming subjects with admired African American individuals and disliked white individuals. Implicit age attitudes also shifted in response to admired elderly people and disliked young people. Blair, Ma, and Lenton (2001) demonstrated that counterstereotypical imagery (strong woman) lessens implicit associations between the category "female" and words representing weakness. Carpenter and Banaji (2001) also expose subjects to either a strong female leader or a neutral prime, and then have them take two Implicit Association Tests (IATs): associating male and female with strong and weak, and with good and bad

(randomly ordered). They also demonstrate that the strong woman prime reduces the association between women and weakness, but on the good/bad IAT, they find the prime has no effect on positive and negative evaluations. This finding suggests that religious language used by a politician might strengthen the association between that politician and the trait “religious,” but not affect an overall positive evaluation. The malleability literature suggests that a subset of a larger category can shift implicit attitudes towards a group. One implication of this work is that if the primed aspect of the larger category were more frequently encountered, the overall attitude towards the category would shift. Consequently, encountering more strong women should strengthen associations between women and strength. Religious expression from a political leader or candidate might similarly bring to mind a positive image of him, making that aspect of the individual more salient. While previous research has demonstrated malleability of implicit attitudes towards groups, it is possible that implicit attitudes towards individuals are not as easily shifted.

Another prominent topic in the study of implicit attitudes is the relationship between implicit and explicit attitudes and measures (e.g., Greenwald, Poehlman, Uhlmann, & Banaji, 2009; Maison et al., 2004; Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2002; McConnell & Liebold, 2001). Implicit routes to attitude formation and change might work in ways that are complementing or contradicting explicit processes. For example, music in an advertisement might persuade via classical conditioning, along with information about the product that affects the consumer on a conscious level. In this example, the implicit and explicit processes are complementary. Other areas of research show a striking disconnect between implicit and explicit attitudes. Mendelberg (2001) argues that racial appeals work outside of conscious awareness; if the racial component to the appeal is made salient, people resist. As Fazio and Olson (2003) argue, the interesting question regarding the relationship between implicit and explicit measures is not if they are correlated, but when and for whom are they correlated. If religious appeals are affecting voters through implicit processes, these effects might bolster or be at odds with their explicit attitudes.

Measuring Implicit and Explicit Attitudes

Most public opinion research relies on explicit measures. With an explicit measure, the subject is aware of what is being measured. For example, in order to assess a person’s feelings about Bill Clinton, the researcher can simply ask, how do you feel about Bill Clinton? The question might be open-ended, allowing respondents to volunteer their own answer. More likely, the question is followed by response options. The approach is reasonable; however, it is worthwhile to examine the assumptions of explicit measures. An explicit measure assumes that the respondent has an attitude already constructed or is able to form an attitude

when asked. The explicit measure assumes the respondent has access to the relevant information. It also assumes that the respondent is willing to share his or her attitudes (Brunel et al., 2004). Finally, an explicit measure relies on a shared understanding of the question and response options.² Of course, not all explicit measures violate these assumptions equally, and even when an assumption is violated, researchers might gain valuable information. For example, knowing that Americans overreport voting behavior (Abelson, Loftus, & Greenwald, 1992) and that undergraduates underreport binge drinking (Rasinski, Visser, Zagatsky, & Rickett, 2005) reveals that voting is valued among Americans and that undergraduates recognize a norm against drunkenness. Another benefit of explicit measures, particularly those not hampered with social desirability concerns, is that often, we want to know what a respondent says that they think and feel, whether they have correctly or incorrectly assessed all of the relevant information in their conscious and unconscious. We might think that the attitude that they can share with a survey researcher is similar to the attitude that they can share with their friends or express on a ballot. A final strength of explicit measures is that they are relatively simple. Wording and correct response options might not be obvious, but they generally do not involve the elaborate set ups or technical devices of implicit measures.

An implicit measure is designed to bypass the respondent's own assessment. Implicit measures do not rely on self-reports; the individual knows he or she is involved in a study, but the measure does not rely on the subject realizing that, for instance, length of response time is being used to gauge qualities such as ease of information processing. Nosek, Greenwald, and Banaji (2007) explain the distinction with the analogy of math skills. One way to gauge a person's math skills is to ask them, how good are you at math? Another way is to give them a math test. The first measure relies on a self-report, and the second bypasses the individual's own assessment of his or her skills. Of course, we might expect that people are better judges of their own attitudes than their own math skills. However, social pressures could influence the answers to both questions. Also, both attitudes and math skills might be influenced by information that the respondent has forgotten or misremembered. Math skills and attitudes can have long histories, and it is entirely possible that relevant information that we have picked up along the way has not remained accessible when it is time to answer a survey question. Information may be stored and not accessible or we may have an inaccurate memory of what is stored at the moment of the self-report.

Implicit measures are used to measure implicit attitudes, but Fazio and Olson (2003) point out that implicit measures do not always capture implicit attitudes. An implicit measure might capture implicit or "introspectively unidentified" attitudes, but it can also measure an attitude a person is fully aware of and willing to share.

² This problem occurred in the study presented in this paper. When asked about their religious preference, several subjects bypassed the response options "Protestant" and "Catholic," and opted for "Other," filling in either Christian or a specific Protestant denomination. Without their willingness to volunteer information after selecting other, the study would have lost valuable information.

Lodge and Taber (2005) argue that their studies of hot cognition clearly demonstrate automatic activation because the time lapse between stimulus and response does not allow for conscious processing (p. 462). Most implicit measures do not benefit from such a clear litmus test. Many studies, including the current project, build a case that implicit measures are capturing implicit processes based on theorizing, low correlations between implicit and explicit measures, other measures that demonstrate the subjects' lack of awareness, and independent explanatory power for a relevant behavior (Brunel et al., 2004; Dovidio et al., 2002; Maison et al., 2004).

Implicit and explicit measures regarding the same attitude object are generally positively correlated but have considerable independent variance. Based on a demonstration web site, Nosek et al. (2002) compare the relationship between the IAT and explicit measures on a variety of attitudes and stereotypes. They find that these measures are almost always positively correlated, but that the strength of the relationship varies. For example, Greenwald, Nosek, and Banaji (2003) find that explicit and implicit measures of preference for the young were loosely correlated ($r = .23$), while implicit and explicit candidate preferences in the 2000 election were highly correlated ($r = .86$). Neither type of measure necessarily captures the "true" attitude; rather, it is useful to think about implicit and explicit measures as capturing difference aspects of an attitude. An explicit measure can only tap those aspects of the attitude that a person has access to and is willing to share. Implicit measures are constrained as well; they might capture attitude accessibility through response latencies³ or the strength of associations via matching tasks. Similar to the math test that can only assess one's math ability on a certain set of questions, implicit measures can capture only some aspects of attitudes.

Implicit measures are a useful addition to our resources for studying political attitudes. First, explicit measures are inadequate for capturing implicit processes (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). Implicit measures can capture aspects of the attitude that elude self-reports, either due to social desirability concerns or a simple lack of awareness. For example, it is unlikely that a person could accurately report on the accessibility of his or her own attitudes. Huckfeldt, Levine, Morgan, and Sprague (1999) use response latencies to measure the accessibility of self-reported partisanship and ideology and find that the accessibility of partisanship and ideology moderates their relationship to political attitudes. In this case both the explicit and implicit measures help predict political attitudes. Implicit measures might also help political scientists to take a step back in the study of public opinion and focus on the associations that are a product of socialization. Implicit measures can help us understand the roots of attitudes concerning such diverse topics as race, gender, and religion in politics.

³ A response latency is the amount of time that passes from the end of the question to the beginning of the respondent's answer. Latencies have been used to assess attitude accessibility (Bassili, 1995; Huckfeldt et al., 1999).

Religious Appeals

I expect that a politician's use of religious language will be persuasive. The United States is a particularly religious country. When compared to citizens of other countries, especially other advanced industrial democracies, Americans are among the highest in religious service attendance and in their ratings of importance of God in their lives (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). Also, the majority of Americans want their politicians to express their religious beliefs. While the majority of Americans think that churches should not endorse political candidates (Pew, 2008), they are not as timid about mixing religion and politics when it comes to politicians. In a recent Pew Survey, 36% of Americans believe that political leaders share their religious beliefs too little. Twenty-eight percent think that currently we have the right amount and 29% feel that there is too much (Pew, 2008).

Research on symbolic politics contends that "people acquire stable affective preferences through conditioning in their pre-adult years" which affect how they respond to politics later in life (Sears et al., 1980, p. 671). This perspective is useful for considering the role of religion in politics because many Americans are exposed to religion early on in their lives and experience a lifetime of religious socialization. A study of Christian households in Pennsylvania found that religion was a frequent topic of conversation between parents and children, occurring more than every other day (Boyatzis & Janicki, 2003). In a nationally representative survey (The Monitoring the Future Study) conducted between 1976 and 1996, roughly 60% of American 12th graders consistently said that religion is either very or pretty important (as opposed to "not important" or "a little important"; Smith et al., 2003). As teenagers reach adulthood, religiosity tends to drop. Religious service attendance fell for nearly 70% of 18–25-year-olds, but disaffiliations from religion and diminished religious salience are far less common, indicating that teenagers do not lose their religious convictions (Uecker, Regnerus, & Vaaler, 2007). Also, religious exposure in childhood can create positive associations with religion that may or may not be consistent with a person's current religious beliefs. I hypothesize that a politician's religious appeal taps into people's religious associations and leads to more positive impressions of the politician. Similar to the Dasgupta and Greenwald studies (2001), I expect that religious language on the part of a politician is analogous to a liked member of a racial or age group; in U.S. politics, using religious language may be putting your best face forward.

Participants and Design

One hundred and forty-eight subjects were recruited from a large undergraduate American politics course. Fifty-two percent of subjects identified as Democrats while only 27% identified as Republican. This was a religiously diverse sample,

which is useful given my expectations that religious exposure moderates the effect of religious appeals. This study used a 2×2 between subjects design, varying speech content (religious language or no religious language) and political figure (George W. Bush or Bill Clinton). There are advantages and disadvantages to any convenience sample, but this student population provides an interesting case for religious persuasion because of their religiously diverse backgrounds and their opposition to religion in politics. Religious diversity will allow me to test whether the effectiveness of religious appeals depends on a match between the speaker's appeal and the receiver's background, and their opposition to religion in politics makes discordance between implicit and explicit processes likely.

The study measures implicit attitudes with the Implicit Association Test (IAT), which has not yet been widely used in political science research. Research using the IAT was first published in 1998 (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998), and the IAT has quickly become the most widely used implicit measure in psychology (Fazio & Olson, 2003). The IAT has been used to study racial and ethnic attitudes (Dasgupta, Greenwald, & Banaji, 2003; Devine et al., 2002; Greenwald et al., 1998), gender stereotypes (Blair et al., 2001; Rudman & Heppen, 2003), and attitudes towards the elderly (Dasgupta & Greenwald, 2001). The measure is based on the assumption that the ease with which people can pair two distinct concepts reflects the strength of the association between those concepts in their mind. A typical IAT is administered on a computer and begins by offering subjects two categories and a series of stimuli. The subject's task is to assign each stimulus to the appropriate category as quickly as possible. One category is assigned to the left hand and the other is assigned to the right. The subject assigns stimuli to the appropriate category by typing a designated key with the appropriate hand. For example, the category names might be "Good" and "Bad," and a subject will be presented with a series of words on the screen. The words might be "vomit," "joy," "terrible," or "happy," and the subject is responsible for classifying these as either good or bad words. The subject might perform two category tasks multiple times to warm up. Then, the participant is presented with four categories: two categories assigned to the left hand, and two categories assigned to the right hand. For example, a commonly used IAT asks respondents to pair the racial categories "Black" and "White," with the categories "good" and "bad." "Good" and "White" are assigned to the left hand, and "Black" and "bad" are assigned to the right for one block of stimuli. Then, the categories are switched: good words and black faces are assigned to the right hand, while bad words and white faces are assigned to the left. The relevant measure on the test is typically how long it takes the respondent to categorize each stimulus: faster response times for paired concepts indicate stronger associations between concepts.⁴

⁴ The IAT is the most widely used implicit measure and it has faced important criticisms. De Houwer et al. (2009) summarize several major criticisms of the IAT: for example, the IAT is a relative measure, results can be affected by the individual stimuli used to represent the categories, and task order affects outcomes. Beyond these difficulties, authors point out that IAT effects can be driven by

This study relies on a paper-based IAT, which has been used to adapt the IAT to a classroom setting (Lowery, Hardin, & Sinclair, 2001; Lemm, 2006; Lemm, Lane, Sattler, Khan, & Nosek, 2008). Subjects are asked to categorize words and pictures of people. Rather than relying on reaction times, the paper-based IAT constrains subjects to 25 seconds per page and captures the ease of associations through the number of correct categorizations per page.

Procedure

Subjects were asked to participate in a brief survey during class time. First, students were asked to take an Actor IAT (see Figure 1 for a schematic representation). They were presented with a page of 30 positive and negative words, with the categories “Good” and “Bad” at the top of the page. Subjects were given 25 seconds to categorize the words. The second page asked them to categorize pictures of Tom Cruise and Brad Pitt under the categories “Tom” and “Brad.” The third page had both pictures and words, and subjects were asked to check the left side for words that were good, or pictures of Tom, and the right side for words that were bad, or pictures of Brad. The purpose of the actor IAT was to teach subjects how to perform an IAT without bringing political ideas to mind.





Next, all students were asked to read an excerpt from a political speech. In the control condition, the speech had no religious reference. In the religious reference condition, the speech had a brief religious reference.⁵ The speech was attributed to George W. Bush for half of the subjects and to Bill Clinton for the other half. After reading the speech, students were asked to rate their reactions to the speech and issue importance.

Subjects were then asked to take a Clinton/Bush IAT, which was four pages long, and alternated between pairing “Clinton/Good & Bush/Bad” and “Bush/Good & Clinton/Bad.” This marked the end of the timed portion of the survey. Subjects were then asked other questions about their attitudes towards Clinton and Bush, followed by demographic questions and questions about their religious beliefs.⁶

factors other than attitudes and stereotypes, such as knowledge of societal views, salience or semantic similarity of the categories, and a subject’s cognitive abilities. The most fundamental critique is that the IAT does not necessarily capture implicit processes. I address this argument in the results discussion.

⁵ See appendix for speech text. The language is from a Saturday morning radio address by Bill Clinton.

⁶ The study presented explicit measures after the Implicit Association Test, while often studies randomize the order of implicit and explicit measures. The IAT always preceded the explicit measures in this experiment because it was administered in a classroom setting with uniform instructions. Research indicates that order effects involving the IAT and explicit measures are minimal (Nosek, Greenwald, & Banaji, 2005).

		Category Labels	Sample Stimuli	Category Labels
Step 1	Practice block	Good		Bad
			joy	
			hatred	
Step 2	Practice block	Tom		Brad
				X
Step 3	Practice block	Tom Good		Brad Bad
			horrible	X
		X		
Step 4	Experimental Manipulation: Clinton's Speech			
Step 5	Measurement block	Clinton Good		Bush Bad
		X	joy	
				X
Step 6	Measurement block	Clinton Bad		Bush Good
		X		
		X	vomit	
Step 7	Measurement block	Bush Bad		Clinton Good
Step 8	Measurement block	Bush Good		Clinton Bad

Description of the IAT used in this experiment. The correct answer for each section is indicated by an X. IAT scores were calculated by adding the number of correct responses from the two Clinton/Good sections, and the two Bush/Good sections. The correct Bush/Good score is then subtracted from the correct Clinton/Good score, creating the overall IAT measure. Chart adapted from Brunel et al. (2004).

Figure 1. Schematic Description of IAT Experiment.

Measures

Speech Reactions. Immediately after reading the speech, subjects were asked for their impressions. They were asked to offer their initial impression by placing themselves on a 5-point scale, ranging from “very negative” to “very positive.”

Implicit Attitude Measure. For subjects in the Clinton conditions, the IAT score is computed as each subject’s number of correct categorizations of Clinton and positive words (Bush and negative words) minus the number of correct categorizations of Bush and positive words (Clinton and negative words). Subjects in both the Clinton and Bush conditions show a preference for Clinton on the IAT, averaging 10.75 in the Clinton conditions and 7.72 in the Bush conditions (ns).⁷ This measure is reversed for subjects in the Bush conditions in all further analysis. The IAT Score is always a measure of relative preference, and is scaled as preference for Bush over Clinton in the Bush conditions and as a preference for Clinton over Bush in the Clinton conditions. The variable ranges from -42 to 41.

Explicit Attitude Measures. All subjects were asked to rate their feelings towards both Clinton and Bush on a feeling thermometer, which ranged from 0 to 100. Subjects were also asked to assess Bill Clinton’s (George Bush’s) likeability, and whether they thought Bill Clinton (George Bush) was a good president. Both questions asked respondents to place themselves on a 5-point scale. Subjects were only asked to evaluate likeability and presidency for the politician used in their experiment.

Political Behavior Measure. Subjects reported how likely they were to attend a speech given by either George Bush or Bill Clinton in a nearby town on a 5-point scale, ranging from very unlikely to very likely.

Partisanship. Party identification was measured on a 5-point scale, and is ordered from Strong Democrat to Strong Republican for subjects in the Bush conditions and from Strong Republican to Strong Democrat for subjects in the Clinton conditions, so that the variable should always be positively related to evaluations of the politician.

Religion Measures. Subjects were asked for their current religious affiliation, what religion they were raised in, and religious service attendance. They were also asked whether they thought there was currently too much, too little, or about the right amount of expression of faith and prayer by political leaders.

I construct a variable separating Christian and non-Christian subjects. The Christian category consists of the 36% of subjects who identify as Catholic and the 18% who identify as Protestant. I also include in the category “Christian” the 18 subjects who were raised either Protestant or Catholic but do not currently identify as Christian. Theoretically, it makes sense to include the “former Christian” subjects in the analysis of Christians, given that I expect that appeals work at an implicit level

⁷ All comparison of means analysis is based on a t-test and p values are reported based on a two-tailed test.

based on prior exposure. The 49 subjects without exposure to Christianity were raised either Jewish (45%), Muslim (14%), in no religious tradition (16%), or in another religion. I expect that the religious appeal in this experiment, which was a quote from the New Testament, will not affect these subjects at an implicit level. They may demonstrate “nontarget” effects at the explicit level and show preference for these politicians when they are not coupled with religious language.

Models include an interaction term for Christian subjects and the experimental manipulation when there is a conditional hypothesis. Conditional effects are analyzed according to recommendations in Brambor, Clark, and Golder (2006), and standard errors for the conditional effects are reported when appropriate. All analysis relies on OLS regression and includes partisanship as a control variable.

Results

First, I analyze whether the religious appeal had any effect on impressions of the speech. This question was asked immediately after the speech, and evaluations from the largely Democratic sample favored Clinton (4.18 vs. 3.60, $p < .01$), even though the speeches were the same. Speech evaluations are modeled as a function of being in the treatment condition, being a Christian, the interaction between being in the treatment condition and being a Christian, and partisanship. The interaction demonstrates that non-Christians evaluated the speech more negatively when it included religious language ($-.69 (.27)$), but Christians’ evaluations were not affected by the inclusion of religious language ($.02 (.20)$).

Next, I analyze whether the religious appeal had any effect on an explicit attitude measure, the commonly used feeling thermometer. The religious appeal did not affect feeling thermometer ratings for either non-Christians ($-2.63 (6.79)$), or for Christians ($3.73 (4.94)$) (Table 1). The fact that Christians did not show any effects on either the feeling thermometer or in their evaluations of the speech suggests that this will be a tough test for the implicit attitudes hypothesis.

Table 1. Effect of Religious Speech on Initial Evaluations and Feeling Thermometers

	Initial Evaluations		Feeling Thermometers	
	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE
Treatment	-0.69**	0.27	-2.63	6.79
Partisanship	0.21**	0.06	12.24**	1.36
Christian	-0.13	0.23	5.86	5.70
Treatment × Christian	0.71**	.33	6.37	8.41
Constant	3.40	0.27	12.89	6.78
n	148		148	
r ²	0.13		0.36	

indicates $p < .10$, **indicates $p < .05$ based on a two-tailed test.

Table 2. Effect of Religious Speech on Implicit Attitudes

	Model 1		Model 2 ¹		Model 3 ¹	
	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE
Treatment	-4.83	3.53	6.55**	2.85	9.72**	3.69
Partisanship	5.27**	0.72	4.74**	0.73	5.87**	0.83
Christian	-6.27**	2.97				
Treatment × Christian	12.37**	4.38				
Bush						
Condition			-12.45**	2.77		
Treatment × Bush Condition			0.22	4.04		
Less God						
Talk					-0.24	3.26
Treatment × Less God Talk					-2.78	4.78
Constant	-12.82	3.53	-10.70	3.28	-21.02	3.79
n	148		98		98	
r ²	0.27		0.54		.37	

Indicates $p < .10$, **indicates $p < .05$ based on a two-tailed test.

¹Models include only Christian respondents (raised or currently identifying).

Consistent with my hypothesis, exposure to religious language had a significant effect on implicit attitudes towards political leaders, but only for those with some exposure to Christianity (conditional effect for treatment among Christians: 7.54 (2.57)) (Table 2, Model 1). This finding adds support for the hypothesized mechanism by separating out effects based on religious upbringing.⁸ The lack of an effect among those who were not raised in a religious tradition that was consistent with the appeal lends support to my hypothesis: persuasion at the implicit level relies on a match between the nature of the appeal and the background of the individual (conditional effect: -4.83 (3.53)).⁹ Exposure to Christianity moderates the effect of religious speech on implicit attitudes. Now that the moderating effect has been established, all further analysis is restricted to subjects who currently identify as Christian or were raised Christian.

⁸ The difference in initial reactions to the speech suggests that Bush might have a particularly tough time moving attitudes based on the inclusion of a biblical quote. However, religious speech led to improved implicit attitudes for both Clinton and Bush when modeled separately (Among Christians, controlling for partisanship: Treatment coefficient for Bush, 6.08 (3.02), Treatment coefficient for Clinton, 6.67 (2.96)). I collapse across the Bush and Clinton conditions in most analysis due to the relatively small number of non-Christians.

⁹ I replicated Table 2, Model 1 with the relative feeling thermometer measure (Bush-Clinton or Clinton-Bush) as a control on explicit attitudes and find that the effect of the treatment on implicit attitudes remains significant. Under this specification, the conditional effect for the treatment among Christians holds (4.68 (2.04)), while the effect of the treatment among the non-Christian subjects remains not significant (-2.35 (2.78)).

Most of the analysis collapses across political figures, but religious appeals might be suspicious when paired with George W. Bush, especially given the liberal sample. I include an interaction term between the treatment and being in the George Bush condition, essentially breaking apart the two treatment conditions (Table 2, Model 2). The conditional effects and standard errors indicate that religious language led to improved implicit attitudes for both George Bush and Bill Clinton (George Bush: 6.55 (2.85), Bill Clinton: 6.77 (2.93)).

Subjects in this study were asked if they thought there was currently too much, too little, or the right amount of expressions of religious faith and prayer by political leaders. Sixty percent of the sample felt that there was too much, while 32% expressed that there is the right amount and only 8% thought there is too little religious expression in politics.¹⁰ A preference for less religious discourse in politics might temper the effectiveness of the religious appeal in this experiment. However, religious appeals might affect people who explicitly prefer less religion in politics because implicit attitudes function outside of conscious awareness. In Table 2, Model 3, I included an interaction term between exposure to religious language (treatment condition) and a preference for less religious language in politics (Less God Talk) to test whether a preference for less religious language in politics is a moderator. The conditional effect for the treatment among people who prefer less religious expression by political leaders is significant (6.95 (3.13)), indicating a preference for less religion in politics does not insulate people from the implicit effects of religious expression.

Are implicit and explicit attitudes distinct constructs in this analysis? Implicit attitudes as measured with the IAT were correlated with explicit attitudes as measured by the feeling thermometer ($r = .61$), which is typical in political attitudes. However, the lack of significant findings on explicit measures and the significant findings on the IAT indicate that this implicit measure has captured something that eludes conventional survey measures. The fact that a consciously held preference for less religion in politics does not guard against the effect on the IAT also lends support to the implicit interpretation.

Finally, I look for behavioral implications of the religious appeal among Christian subjects. The political behavior used in these models is subjects' likelihood of attending a public speech by either George Bush or Bill Clinton, measured on a 5-point scale, ranging from Very Unlikely to Very Likely. Table 3, Model 1 indicates that subjects in the treatment condition are significantly more likely to attend a political speech. This finding is interesting, particularly given the lack of effects on explicit evaluations of the candidates. In fact, the only significant effects demonstrated for the religious appeal have been on implicit attitudes and on a political behavior.

¹⁰ Though this question was asked at the end of the survey, after the experimental manipulation, exposure to biblical language had no effect on beliefs about the appropriateness of religious language in politics.

Table 3. Effect of Religious Language on Political Behavior

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE	Coef.	SE
Treatment	0.43*	0.25	.22	.25	0.25	0.26
Partisanship	0.55**	0.09	.40**	.10	.36**	0.11
Feeling Thermometer					0.01	0.01
IAT Score			.03**	.01	0.02*	0.01
Constant	1.22	0.34	1.76	.39	1.49	.46
n	98		98		98	
r ²	.30		.34		0.35	

*Indicates $p < .10$, **indicates $p < .05$ based on a two-tailed test. ¹models include only Christian respondents (raised or currently identifying).

Next, I turn to testing whether implicit attitudes mediate the relationship between the religious appeal and political behavior. Models 2 and 3 include potential mediators: two includes IAT scores, three includes both the IAT score and the relevant feeling thermometer.¹¹ According to Baron and Kenny (1986), three conditions must hold in order to demonstrate mediation: (1) the independent variable (treatment) must affect the mediator (IAT Scores). This is demonstrated in Table 2, Model 1. (2) The independent variable must affect the dependent variable (Attendance), which is demonstrated in Table 3, Model 1. (3) The mediator variable must affect the dependent variable when controlling for the independent variable, which is demonstrated in Table 3, Model 2. The coefficient for the treatment, which was significant in Model 1, is no longer significant once I control for implicit attitudes. I use a Sobel test (1982) to determine that the drop in coefficients is statistically significant ($z = 2.10$, $p = .04$).¹² The feeling thermometer cannot be a mediator because it is not significantly related to the treatment condition. However, a tough test of mediation through implicit processes includes both the IAT score and the explicit measure (Model 3). After controlling for the explicit measure the IAT score remains a mediator between religious language and a political behavior ($z = 1.65$, $p = .09$). Further, implicit attitudes are related to likelihood of attending a political speech, for both Bill Clinton and George Bush, after controlling for ratings of warmth towards the politician (results not shown). This indicates that implicit attitudes have independent explanatory power for political behavior.

¹¹ I included the feeling thermometer for Bush for subjects in the Bush conditions, and the feeling thermometer for Clinton for subjects in the Clinton conditions. The relative version of the feeling thermometer measure would be a better match for the IAT score, but it's more interesting to see if the implicit measure can explain a political behavior when matched against the best available explicit measure.

¹² The Sobel test computes standard errors with the following equation (assuming that "a" represents the relationship between the independent variable and the mediator and "b" represents the relationship between the mediator and the dependent variable): square root of $b^2s_a^2 + a^2s_b^2$. The Aroian test and the Goodman test also yielded statistically significant results.

Discussion

This study shows similar effects for both Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, which suggests that the finding is generalizable across diverse political figures. The significant interaction between the student's religion and the treatment indicates that the appeal affected implicit attitudes only for those with exposure to Christianity. This difference in effects rules out several possible confounding explanations. For example, a positive response to the speech with the religious reference might signal that people like longer speeches. The effect could also be due to a general preference for imagery in speeches. The lack of a significant finding among people who have never been Christian suggests that these mechanisms are not at work; after all, they too read the longer speech and were exposed to the same imagery in the treatment condition. The difference in findings between the two groups indicates that there is something special about the religious language in the appeal and the religious exposure of the subjects that enables the appeals to affect implicit attitudes.

The study also allows for an examination of the relationship between implicit and explicit attitudes. For subjects exposed to a Clinton condition, initial reactions to the speech were not affected by the religious language. For the Bush conditions, the subjects showed a slight preference for the speech without religious language, which makes it particularly impressive that the manipulation shifted implicit attitudes in a favorable direction (results not shown). There were no effects on explicit measures for either president, indicating that this brief appeal only affected subjects at an implicit level. The behavioral aspect to this study further suggests the need to pay attention to implicit attitudes in the study of public opinion and behavior.¹³ Neither political figure will face another election, which makes the political behavior that we often care about, voting, irrelevant. However, attendance of a politician's speech in a nearby town is a relevant, costly political behavior that conveys interest and support. The likelihood of attendance was also highly variable in the population. For Christian subjects, the religious appeals affected their willingness to attend a political speech, and this relationship was mediated by implicit attitudes.

Finally, this study suggests a potential concern over the effectiveness of religious language in political appeals. The study of racial attitudes often addresses the mismatch between implicit and explicit attitudes (Correll, Park, Judd, & Wittenbrink, 2002; Dovidio et al., 2002). The divergence is not surprising considering the public norm of racial equality in the United States, and the continued socialization of Americans in a culture that negatively stereotypes African Americans (Blinder, 2007). On the topic of religion and politics, there is no widely accepted norm for or against the use of religious language in political speech (Pew,

¹³ But see De Houwer et al. (2009), who argue that the relationship between an IAT score and a criterion variable that cannot be predicted by an explicit measure does not necessarily mean that the IAT has captured an implicit process (p. 358).

2008). Instead, there is a range of preferences among the American population. Because implicit attitudes operate outside of conscious awareness, it is possible that religious appeals will move people who, at a conscious level, prefer less religious language in their politics. The current research shows divergence between implicit and explicit attitudes in this way; even those who at an explicit level prefer less religious expression in politics were moved by the religious appeal at an implicit level. The significant finding suggests that a personal preference against the use of religious language in politics might not insulate citizens from the effect of these appeals at an implicit level.

There are several important limitations to this study. Some people have negative associations with religion, which might be rooted in childhood or gained in adulthood. This study gauged a preference for less religious expression in politics, but this is mild compared to the negative associations that some people experience. Such individuals might reveal more negative implicit attitudes towards a politician who espoused religion. Another potential limitation is the particular religious language that was used in this study. Religious expression used by politicians is widely varied, and a different example might have provoked different reactions. The example in this study was taken from one of Bill Clinton's Saturday morning radio addresses. The fact that it was taken from an actual speech makes its relevance to contemporary politics clear and it has the advantage of being unambiguously religious. However, it is possible that another example would have been more off-putting, particularly for those who would prefer less religious discourse in politics.

Conclusion

Political science is naturally concerned with opinions such as candidate preference and vote intention at an explicit level. However, the study of implicit attitudes is a useful addition to public opinion research because it allows us to better understand attitude formation and change. Attitudes develop through exposure that we are aware of but also through the innumerable associations we pick up every day without realizing. The effect of socialization on current political attitudes has been explored through research on symbolic politics. Implicit processes and implicit measures provide new tools for studying the effects of associations on attitudes and behaviors. The importance of implicit attitudes in studies of racial attitudes has been repeatedly demonstrated (Correll et al., 2002; Dasgupta & Greenwald, 2001). This paper argues for a broader application of our attention to implicit attitudes.

Overall, this study demonstrates that a politicians' use of religious rhetoric led to attitude change at an implicit level. Further, the research provided evidence that the implicit and explicit measures captured distinct underlying constructs. Through their use of religious language, Bill Clinton and George Bush were able to make positive associations more salient. This is because people do not have fixed "Bill Clinton" or "George Bush" attitudes. There are many facets to an individual, just as

there are many subsets to a broad demographic category such as “African American” or “the elderly.” Just as Dasgupta and Greenwald (2001) were able to make a subset of a category salient through exposing subjects to liked and disliked representatives of the larger categories, it seems these presidents were able to put a better face forward when they referenced the Bible. It is particularly impressive that religious language shifted implicit attitudes for such well known figures, and that attitudes shifted even for people who would prefer less religious expression in politics. If people who dislike mixing religion and politics were made aware of these processes they might be better able to guard against effects on attitudes and behaviors that are inconsistent with their conscious preferences. However, people are continually encountering new political stimuli and their attention is limited. If a religious appeal influences a voter through an implicit process, it might affect the way they process new information about the politician. Implicit attitudes might ultimately affect political behavior, such as attending a political speech as shown in this paper, or even voting, as demonstrated by Arcuri et al. (2008). Implicit processes might often be completely consistent with explicit preferences, but a case of discordance might go unnoticed or lead a voter to rationalize.

Implicit attitudes shifted because of the prominent role of religion in the lives of many Americans. The United States is a particularly “churched” nation; most Americans are exposed to religion early on in their lives, and many continually reencounter religious ideas and images as they grow up. The role of religion in politics is the subject of much normative debate. This research has provided empirical work that can help illuminate this discussion. One reason that religious appeals might be effective is that religion has old roots in the lives of many Americans. While this paper helps tease apart the mechanisms of religious persuasion in the United States, it also suggests possibilities for persuasion more broadly in American politics. After all, Americans have early exposure to other ideas, such as gender roles, racial associations, and partisanship. It is not just people’s current beliefs and attitudes that explain their politics: people carry emotional and cognitive residue from their pasts that are at work in their current political attitudes and choices.

Appendix

Speeches

Control Condition

“So to every parent I say, turn off the TV more, get to know your child’s teacher. Spend time together, read and learn together. Above all, teach your child right from wrong. If parents do their jobs, and the rest of us, including government do our part, America’s future will be assured, because we work together. Our children are what we give them. We dare not forget that basic truth. Their lives and our common future depend on it.”

Religious Language Condition

“So to every parent I say, turn off the TV more, get to know your child’s teacher. Spend time together, read and learn together. Above all, teach your child right from wrong. If parents do their jobs, and the rest of us, including government do our part, America’s future will be assured, because we work together. The Bible asks, “If your child asks for bread, would you give him a stone? If he asks for fish, would you give him a serpent? If he asks for an egg, would you give him a scorpion?” Our children are what we give them. We dare not forget that basic truth. Their lives and our common future depend on it.”

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