Religiosity and reactions to terrorism

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A B S T R A C T

Although many of the world's most serious outbreaks of conflict and violence center on religion, social science research has had relatively little to say about religion's unique role in shaping individuals' attitudes about these events. In this paper we investigate whether Americans' religious beliefs play a central role in shaping attitudes toward the continuing threat of terrorism and their willingness to assist officials in countering these perceived threats. Our analysis of an original data collection of almost 1600 Americans shows that more religious respondents are more likely to express concerns about terrorism. However, this relationship is mediated by their level of conservatism. We also find that more religious respondents are more likely to claim that they will assist government officials in countering terrorism. This relationship remained even after accounting for conservatism, and people's general willingness to help police solve crimes like breaking and entering.

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1. Introduction

Grim and Finke (2007:633) argue that although many of the most serious outbreaks of violence and conflict in the world today center on religion, social science research has relatively little to say about religion's unique role in these events. This critique can be softened somewhat in the aftermath of the coordinated attacks of September 11, 2001. Along with other high profile terrorist strikes around the world, these attacks served to focus increased attention on the role of religion as a force that can powerfully shape individuals' attitudes toward political violence (Juergensmeyer, 2003; Bail, 2012; Disha et al., 2011; Welch, 2012). Nevertheless, much of the recent research has focused only on Muslims (McCauley and Scheckter, 2008; Tyler et al., 2010; Sun et al., 2011) while more inclusive research about the connections between religion and violent political conflict remains heavily influenced by a body of leading studies from the 1960s and 1970s. This research concluded that contemporary Americans have largely privatized religion and hence are far less likely today than in the past to use it to legitimate public attitudes or actions (Berger, 1967; Luckmann, 1967; Berger et al., 1973).

Of course, Berger et al. (1999) and others (Casanova, 1994; Simko, 2012) are well aware of the fact that religion has not disappeared from public or private life, but rather that it now competes with a wide range of other institutions that share responsibility in developing convincing explanations for critical life events. Indeed, Putnam (2000) has shown that almost half of association memberships in the United States are directly related to religious congregations and that half of Americans' volunteering takes place in a religious context. Taking a cue from these recent investigations of the continuing importance of religion in framing reactions to major life events, this study focuses on whether Americans' religious beliefs play a central role in shaping attitudes toward the continuing threat of terrorism and responses to it.

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Threats of high profile terrorist attacks increase uncertainty and religiosity has long been recognized as a psychological coping mechanism for responding to such threats (Bonanno and Jost, 2006). The iconic example here is the coordinated attacks of 9/11. Counting the passengers on the planes and the hijackers, the 9/11 attacks claimed nearly 3000 lives—more than the number who perished at Pearl Harbor at the start of the United States entry into World War II. The 9/11 attacks resulted in the greatest loss of life from a coordinated terrorist event in US history (LaFree et al., 2015; Mickolus et al., 2010). We argue that compared to less religious individuals, more religious Americans will be more likely to see terrorism as a potent and enduring threat, and be more willing to help address concerns about terrorism. Our multivariate analysis of nearly 1600 respondents to a national survey offers partial confirmation of these expectations. Religiosity shapes concerns about terrorism through a more conservative orientation. More religious people are more conservative, leading to greater concerns about terrorism. In contrast, religiosity has a unique influence on willingness to help address concerns about terrorism, and the influence remains even after accounting for more religious people's greater willingness to help stop general crime.

2. Religiosity and fear of terrorism

With the concept of "theodicy" Weber (1922, 1946) provides a general explanation for an expected connection between religiosity and concerns about terrorist threats. The term theodicy has a long history, originating in Leibniz's ([1710]1998) contemplation of how the banal reality of everyday human suffering can be reconciled with a belief in a just and benevolent deity. Weber (1946) conceptualizes theodicy as an attempt to reconcile the view of the divine characteristics of omnipotent and all seeing deities with the lived experience of suffering and evil in the world. Weber (1946:125) conceives of religion as a universal feature of culture that evolves out of a need for social order and in his writings on theodicy (Weber, 1922, 1946) he identifies three ideal-typical forms. Drawing heavily on Weber, Berger et al. (1973:185) take a more general view of theodicy, arguing that religion ultimately arises out of a need for social order; an "explanation of human events that bestows meaning upon the experiences of suffering and evil." In this paper we draw on this general view of religion as a construct for explaining the most painful and challenging of human experiences whether caused by natural or human agents.

The role of religion in making sense out of lived experience may be dependent on the scope of suffering experienced. Wilkinson (2005:58) notes that most of the time religious experiences center on routine practices and that the majority of people who follow religious teachings adopt a "pragmatic orientation" towards the business of everyday life. However, on occasion people are thrust into situations involving a much higher magnitude of displacement and death; situations whose irrationality challenges their sense of an ordered reality. In this regard, Grim and Finke (2007:635) offer several examples of horrendous historical events that could trigger this type of fundamental questioning, including the "sectarian massacres endemic in Iraq today, the so-called ethnic cleansing in Bosnia that fell along religious lines, the Holocaust of millions of Jews during World War II, or the forced movement and massacre of hundreds of thousands of Armenians prior to World War I." Bail (2012:857) argues that the four coordinated attacks of 9/11 provide a recent example of a non-routine challenge to the social order where thousands of innocent people were killed without an obvious rational justification. The sheer brutality of terrorist attacks such as 9/11 may leave many feeling that their traditional beliefs are inadequate and encourage them to reach out for extraordinary explanations. In this context, Weber (1946) points out the critical social and psychological functions of religion to provide explanations for existential challenges such as these.

While Weber's (1946) use of theodicy is mostly about accounting for events that have happened in the past, Berger and Luckmann (1966) and others (Scott and Lyman, 1968) point out that indeed such social constructions are used both to create explanations of the past and to build expectations for the future. In this paper we are especially interested in understanding whether religion has a role in constructing expectations about impending terrorist threats and appropriate responses to them.

3. Religiosity and concerns about terrorism

Except for a handful of post-9/11 studies focused mostly on Muslim communities, we identified very little research linking religion to attitudes regarding terrorism. Moreover, almost all of the extant research has been on attitudes toward terrorism among Muslim communities outside the United States (McCauley and Scheckter, 2008; Shapiro and Fair, 2009; LaFree and Morris, 2012). Two exceptions to this general pattern are recent studies by Tyler et al. (2010) and Sun et al. (2011), which center on Muslims in the United States. Based on interviews with 300 Muslim Americans living in New York City, Tyler et al. focused especially on people's reported willingness to cooperate with the police to prevent terrorist attacks. Similarly, Sun et al. (2011) used survey data from 810 Arab Americans in the metropolitan Detroit area to evaluate support for antiterrorism measures, including surveillance, stop and search policies, and detention. The research showed that the majority of Arab Americans indicated weak to modest support for aggressive law enforcement practices, especially those targeting Arab Americans. These studies focused on a very small part of America's ethnic and religious landscape. Additionally, neither of these studies directly tested whether more religious respondents were more likely to express concerns about terrorism and a willingness to work with authorities to prevent it. Although there is disagreement about the extent to which results from more common forms of crime generalize to terrorism-related crime (cf., LaFree and Dugan, 2004; Clarke and Newman, 2006; Bjorgo, 2012), we briefly consider the literature on the relationship between religion and crime for its potential to shed light on the relationship between religious attitudes and terrorism.

Most of the recent studies reveal no significant relationship between religion and crime-related views (Applegate et al., 2000; Barkan and Cohn, 1994; Bohm, 1991; Durham et al., 1996; Flanagan and Longmire, 1996; McCorkle, 1993; Samuel and Moulds, 1986). One partial exception is Blumstein and Cohen (1980) who show that for most types of offenses, respondents who reported no religious affiliation were significantly less punitive toward hypothetical offenders than were other respondents. However, among those who reported an affiliation, the sentences assigned to offenders did not differ significantly by respondents' religious affiliation (also see Flanagan, 1996:89).

Researchers have also examined the potential influence of Christian fundamentalism on crime views, assuming that because of their conservative stance on other issues, fundamentalists will be more likely to endorse punitive treatment of criminal offenders. The consensus from much of this research (Grasmick et al., 1993a; Grasmick and McGill, 1994) is that compared to others, fundamentalists are more punitive in terms of correctional policies and also in terms of supporting capital punishment. Thus, Borg (1997), Grasmick et al. (1993b), Young (1992), and Young and Thompson (1995) all found that compared to other religious groups, fundamentalist Protestants were more favorable toward capital punishment. Grasmick et al. (1993b) also reported that compared to other religious groups, fundamentalists showed greater support for strict criminal legislation and for harsh sentencing. In a related study, Grasmick et al. (1992) found that compared to other religious groups, fundamentalist Protestants were significantly more supportive of retribution as a penal philosophy.

However, recent research (Leiber, 2000; Unnever and Cullen, 2006, 2007) presents a more nuanced picture showing that depending on the specific measures or demographic group examined Christian fundamentalist beliefs and involvement were associated with both increased and decreased support for punitiveness toward offenders. Thus, in a study of 264 juvenile court personnel, Leiber (2000) found that belief in a Christian fundamentalist doctrine was significantly related to support for the punishment of juvenile offenders, the death penalty for serious violent youth, and the need for a stricter juvenile court. But, Lieber also found important differences by gender: for female juvenile court offenders only, fundamentalism was associated with support for rehabilitative as well as more punitive orientations. Similarly, in a statewide survey of 1000 Ohio residents Applegate et al. (2000) found that religion was related to both support for punitiveness and rehabilitation. The authors argue that religious beliefs not only encourage harsh reactions to crime but also passionate responses more in keeping with rehabilitation and restoration of individual offenders. This type of reasoning led Unnever and Cullen (2007:193) to conclude that "Christian fundamentalists hold beliefs that positively predict support for capital punishment (e.g., a harsh image of God) but also express beliefs that negatively predict support for the death penalty (e.g., compassion)." In short, research linking religiosity to crime and punishment suggests cross-cutting effects rather than a clear and consistent relationship.

Despite evidence showing the continued relevance of religious beliefs and practices, especially in the United States, relatively few studies have explored the relationship between religious views and attitudes toward and responses to terrorism. In general, research examining connections between religiosity and attitudes toward punishment for crime suggests a complex relationship with more religious respondents supporting both punitiveness and rehabilitation. Nevertheless, we suspect that connections between religiosity and terrorism may be stronger than those found previously for relationships between religiosity and more common types of crime. Compared to most ordinary crimes, high profile terrorist attacks, such as those epitomized by the events of 9/11, may be more likely to leave individuals feeling that their traditional beliefs are inadequate and encourage them to reach out for extraordinary explanations. While commonsense explanations of ordinary crime can easily emphasize familiar human emotions like greed and revenge, understanding the motivation of terrorists, especially those who give their own lives for a cause, may require different explanations.

Although our discussion has concentrated on the direct influence of religion, there is reason to suspect that religion may have an indirect effect on concerns about and willingness to help address terrorism by first shaping respondents' level of self-reported conservatism. Even though we know of no published studies that examine the impact of religiosity on attitudes toward terrorism and also account for level of conservatism, there is some research suggesting that political conservatism may be associated with attitudes toward terrorism and responses to terrorism. In fact, the notion that highly threatening situations can lead people to embrace conservative attitudes that provide simple yet more rigid interpretations of security-related issues has a long pedigree in the social sciences made famous by the work of Adorno et al. (1950) but also supported by more recent research (McCann, 1997; Peterson et al., 1993; Breckenridge and Moghaddam, 2012; see Jost et al., 2003 for a review).

There is also a body of research showing that more religious people are more likely to hold conservative attitudes (Layman, 1997; Jelen, 1991; Wald et al., 1993, 1988). Biblical precepts, belief in god and the afterlife, and more proximate experiences of evil in the world, including the attacks of September 11, 2001, may dispose more religious people to hold themselves and others to high moral standards and identify with officials and politicians who are tough on perceived enemies (Greeley and Hout, 2006; Morone, 2003). Regular interaction with other active religious affiliates and church leaders who support traditional views should further encourage more religious individuals to develop and maintain a conservative orientation. Because conservatism may be related to both levels of religiosity and concerns about security, we also consider its potential influence in shaping the relationship between religiosity and concerns about and willingness to respond to potential threats of terrorism. These ideas lead to our first two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. More religious people will be more likely than less religious people to be concerned and fearful about the danger of terrorist attacks but this effect will be mediated by self-reported conservatism.

Hypothesis 2. More religious people will be more likely than less religious people to have changed their behavior because of the possibility of a terrorist attack but this effect will be mediated by self-reported conservatism.

4. Religiosity and responses to terrorist threats

We expect that religiosity has consequences that go far beyond perceptions of the threat of terrorism. If people hold strong world views about the continuing relevance of terrorism there is good reason to think that they will also be more likely to work with authorities to prevent terrorism. Again, we could not identify any research directly linking religiosity to willingness to help stop terrorism. However, there are studies that connect religiosity to crime victims. Most prior research (Pettersson, 1991; Lee, 2006) on the relationship between religion and crime has focused on the association between the number of religious organizations or believers within a community and crime rates. It is clear that religious groups often deliver important community services including physical care and social support (Smidt, 2003) and some provide opportunities for members to meet additional congregants and develop network ties with people in other community organizations (Scheitle and Adamczyk, 2009). Because of the services and opportunities religious organizations provide, the level of religious belief within communities is typically seen as contributing to or being an indicator of trust, strong network ties, and/or social capital (Smidt, 2003). The more people know and trust each other the better able they are to connect with each other and government officials to address problems that impact their communities (Sampson and Groves, 1989; Kirk and Laub, 2010).

While much research has conceptualized religion as a community-level variable that is associated with crime rates, very little work has examined whether more religious people are more likely than others to work with government officials when these residents either suspect terrorist activities or are asked to help the police. Indeed, we do not know of a single study that has used a representative sample of Americans to examine the influence of personal religious beliefs on willingness to help government officials address terrorism or crime. However, much research has examined the influence of religion more generally on volunteering and helping behaviors (Park and Smith, 2000; Regnerus et al., 1998; Perry et al., 2008; Einolf, 2011). Overall, this work shows that more religious people are more likely to help others both within and outside their congregations.

With regard to terrorism in particular there is good reason to think that compared to others, more religious people will be more willing to help government officials. More religious people are not only more likely to engage in prosocial behavior (Batson et al., 1993), but they are also more likely to help people they know, trust and see as part of their in-group (Saroglou et al., 2005; Johnson et al., 2012). The majority of Americans see themselves as religious and 82% of Americans belong to a Judeo-Christian faith (ARDA, 2005). As a result, we suspect that religious Americans may be more willing to assist government authorities, in part, because the US government is likely to be seen as supporting American Judeo-Christian beliefs.

Although more religious people may be more likely to help authorities respond to crime in general, we think that more religious Americans will be particularly concerned about terrorist-related activities. We argued above that religion provides a compelling explanation for the type of seemingly senseless violence represented by terrorist attacks. Moreover, because of the religious and cultural background of the 9/11 attackers, it may be even easier in the post 9/11 world for more religious Americans to view terrorism as an attack on their beliefs. In short, even after accounting for their greater willingness to help stop crime, we suspect that more religious Americans will be more likely to report a willingness to contact authorities in response to preventing further terrorist attacks. This reasoning leads to our remaining hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3. Even after accounting for their greater willingness to help officials investigate crime, more religious people will be more willing than less religious people to report potential terrorist concerns.

Hypothesis 4. Even after accounting for their greater willingness to help officials investigate crime, more religious people will be more willing to meet with police officers and the government to investigate terrorism.

5. Data and methods

Our analysis uses data from a cross-sectional survey designed to provide information on whether respondents had thought about terrorism, how much it worried them, and how likely they were to help the government address terrorism and more general crime-related issues. The polling company Knowledge Networks (KN) was contracted to collect the data using a self-administered questionnaire of computer users. The national panel consisted of a probability sample of non-institutionalized adults who were 18 years of age and older and resided in the United States at the time of the survey. In contrast to "opt- in" Web surveys, which recruit participants of unknown characteristics via "blind" internet solicitations, KN panel members are selected on the basis of known, nonzero probabilities. Individuals are not permitted to self-select for participation in KN panels. Respondents who did not have a computer when they joined the panel were provided with one free of charge. The confidential, software-administered survey format reduces the impact of social desirability bias and other effects associated with interviewer-based methods (for reviews and a discussion of strengths and weaknesses, see

Schlenger and Silver, 2006; Breckenridge and Moghaddam, 2012). Results from KN surveys have been validated with a variety of traditional large-scale surveys (e.g., Baker et al., 2003; Dennis and Li, 2007; Heeren et al., 2008) and in recent years have been widely used in the study of attitudes toward terrorism and natural disasters (Fischhoff et al., 2005; Viscusi and Zeckhauser, 2006; Brecknridge and Mogahaddam, 2012).

The questionnaire, which has a 62% response rate, was completed by 1576 individuals. The survey took place between September and October 2012; before the December 2012 Sandy Hook school shooting and the April 2013 Boston Marathon terrorist attack. This is the first academic journal article to use these data.

6. Dependent variables

Table 1 provided descriptive statistics on all variables included in our analysis. We have two sets of dependent variables, reflecting the two sets of hypotheses outlined above. The first three dependent variables focus on the anticipation of terrorist attacks (Hypotheses 1 and 2) and the final three address the likelihood of helping government officials in anti-terrorism efforts (Hypotheses 3 and 4). Our first dependent variable that focuses on anticipation of terrorism is from a question that asks, "How likely is it that there will be a terrorist attack in the United States in the next 12 months?" Responses to this question range from "1" = extremely unlikely to "7" = extremely likely. Our next dependent variable is taken from a question that asks whether respondents had thought in the last seven days about the possibility of a terrorist attack in the United States where "0" = no and "1" = yes. The final dependent variable for anticipation of a terrorist attack is taken from a question that asks whether the respondent did anything differently in the past year because of the possibility of a terrorist attack where "0" = no and "1" = yes.

Our first dependent variable that focuses on helping behaviors was created from five questions that asked whether respondents would call the police if they saw or heard a person: (1) talking about joining a terrorist group, (2) talking about planting explosives in a public place, (3) reading material from a terrorist group, (4) traveling overseas to join a terrorist group, and (5) distributing handouts that express support for terrorism. For all of these questions the response categories were reverse coded so that they range from "1" = not at all likely to "4" = very likely. The five items have an average correlation of .70, and combined they have an alpha reliability score of .92. We created an index of the five items by adding them together.

The final helping outcome consists of two questions that ask whether the respondent would be willing to meet with (1) the police or (2) people from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to talk about terrorism where "0" = no and "1" = yes. Ninety percent of the people who said they would meet with local police said that they would also meet with DHS and 87% of people who said they were unwilling to meet with the local police said that they would be unwilling to meet

Table 1
Descriptive statistics of variables included in the analysis (N = 1427).

Variables	Mean/proportion	Std. dev.	Min	Max
Outcome variables				
Likelihood of there being a terrorist attack	3.21	1.48	1	7
Thought about a terrorist attack	0.18	0.38	0	1
Done something differently because of possible terrorist attack	0.07	0.25	0	1
Contact police if saw/heard potential terrorist activities (index)	15.80	3.81	5	20
Willing to meet with police/ DHS officials about terrorism	1.21	0.92	0	2
Key independent variable				
Religiosity (importance and attendance)	−0.02	0.91	−1.50	1.37
Control variables				
Self-reported conservatism (liberal vs. conservative)	4.16	1.51	1	7
Contact police if saw/heard discussion of neighborhood break in	3.60	0.76	1	4
Conservative Protestant (reference)	0.49	0.50	0	1
Mainline Protestant	0.17	0.37	0	1
Catholic	0.23	0.42	0	1
Other religion	0.07	0.26	0	1
No religion	0.04	0.18	0	1
White (reference)	0.76	0.43	0	1
Black	0.08	0.27	0	1
Hispanic	0.10	0.30	0	1
Mixed or other race	0.06	0.24	0	1
Married (reference)	0.59	0.49	0	1
Widowed	0.04	0.21	0	1
Divorced or separated	0.11	0.31	0	1
Never married	0.19	0.39	0	1
Living with partner	0.07	0.26	0	1
Female	0.47	0.50	0	1
Household income	12.26	4.31	1	19
Education	2.90	0.95	1	4
Age	49.88	16.73	18	90

with DHS. Because of the high level of overlap, we combine these two questions so that "0" = will not meet with either; "1" = will meet with one, but not the other; and "2" = will meet with both.

7. Religiosity

Our key independent variable is religiosity, which is created from measures of religious importance and attendance. The religious importance question asks "How important is your religious faith in providing guidance in your day-to-day living?" Responses were reverse coded so that they range from "1" = not important at all to "6" = extremely important. The religious attendance question asks how much respondents attend religious services and response categories range from "1" = never to "6" = once a week. The variables have a correlation of 0.68. Before combining them each variable was standardized so that it had a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one. In a separate analysis we examined the single influence of religious importance and found that the results were very similar. We present our results using the combined religiosity measure, which should have greater reliability than the single survey item.

Finally, we include a measure of conservatism as a potential mediator of the relationship between religiosity and the dependent variables. Our conservatism[1] measure comes from a question that asks respondents, "In general do you think of yourself as….." with responses ranging from "1" = extremely liberal to "7" = extremely conservative.[2]

8. Control variables

When we test our hypotheses about religiosity we also include a range of control variables. Hypotheses 3 and 4 focus on the influence of religiosity after accounting for more religious people's willingness to help. In these models we measure willingness to help with a question that asks whether respondents would call the police if they saw or heard two people discussing breaking into a house in their neighborhood. Responses were reverse coded and range from "1" = not at all likely to "4" = very likely.

In addition to religiosity, affiliates of different major religious groups may differ in their feelings about terrorism and willingness to help stop potential terrorist activities. We, therefore, include a measure of religious affiliation, which is constructed from a question that asks respondents to choose their affiliation from a list of the 40 largest religious groups in the United States. If their religion or denomination was not on the list, respondents were asked to provide it. Using Steensland et al.'s (2000) classification scheme,[3] we coded all responses into five religious categories: conservative Protestant, mainline Protestant, Catholic, other religion, and no religion, which includes atheists and agnostics. The reference category in our analysis is conservative Protestant.

We also control for race, marital status, gender, household income, education and age because previous research (Stark, 2002; Iannaccone, 1997; Miller and Hoffman, 1995; Johnson, 1997; Taylor et al., 1996) has found that these variables may be associated with religious beliefs or helping behaviors. Race consists of four dummy variables, Black, Hispanic, mixed or other race where white is the reference group. Marital status is assessed with a set of five dummy variables, which are widowed, divorced, separated, never married, and living with partner where married is the reference. Females are coded "1" and males are coded "0." Household income is assessed with a 19 category question which ranges from "1" = less than $5000 to "19" = $175,000 or more. Education is measured with a question that ranges from "1" = less than high school to "4" = bachelor's degree or higher, and age is measured in years. Finally, we also considered the possibility that respondents living in metro areas ("1" = yes; "0" = no) might be more concerned about terrorism. But, preliminary analysis showed that it was not significant in any of our models and we, therefore, exclude it here.

9. Methods

Our analysis begins by presenting bivariate results of the mean outcome for higher and lower levels of religiosity. For this bivariate analysis we dichotomized our key religiosity variable where the bottom 50% of responses were categorized as having low religiosity and the top 50% were coded as having high religiosity. We then move to a multivariate analysis of respondents' assessments of the possibility of a terrorist attack, which is analyzed using ordinary least squares regression methods. Next, we examine whether respondents thought another terrorist attack was likely or did anything differently in the past year because of the possibility of a terrorist attack. Both of these outcomes are dichotomous and we therefore use logistic regression methods. In preliminary analysis we found that the effect of religiosity was mediated by conservatism. To show this relationship in the tables we first present each of the outcomes using all of the variables, except for conservatism. We then include conservatism and test whether it mediates the influence of religiosity on the outcome using the Sobel-Goodman test of mediation for the OLS regression analysis, and a binary test of mediation for the logistic regression analysis.

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[1] The correlation between conservatism and religiosity is moderate (0.34) and significant ($p < .001$).

[2] Because it is correlated with conservatism, we also experimented with a measure of political party affiliation. The results did not differ in any meaningful way based on the measure used. Because the conservatism variable also better captures our concept, we report results here for this measure.

[3] After Steensland et al. (2000) we combined affiliates of the traditional black church with conservative Protestants, in part, because there was a high degree of overlap between the black race/ethnicity category and the black church, which could cause problems with the analysis.

Our next set of analyses focus on the extent to which respondents are willing to help government officials address terrorist threats. We begin by presenting a comparison of the percentage of people who are "very likely" to contact the police if they heard discussions about breaking into a neighborhood house or a series of potential terrorist-related activities. We then move to a multivariate analysis that assesses respondents' willingness to contact the police if they hear about possible terrorist activities. Because willingness to help stop terrorism may be shaped by respondents' general willingness to help officials, in a second model we include willingness to contact the police about investigating a potential break-in.

Data were missing for 145 cases, which is less than 5% of the sample. Missing data were handled using listwise deletion. We account for nonresponse and noncoverage by using the probability weights, which ensure that the distribution of major background variables for the sample match seven key variables (i.e., age, sex, region, race, Hispanic ethnicity, education, and income) from the 2012 Census Bureau's Current Population Survey. Details on the KN sample weighting are available at http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/knpanel/KNPanel-Design-Summary.html.

10. Results

Table 2 shows each of the outcomes by higher and lower levels of religiosity. There is a significant difference in each of the five outcomes by religiosity. More religious respondents reported that a terrorist attack was more likely in the next year, had thought about a terrorist attack in the last seven days, and had done something differently in the past year because of a potential attack. Likewise more religious respondents are more likely to say that they would contact the police if they saw or heard about potential terrorist activities and they are more likely to report that they would meet with the police and Department of Homeland Security officials about terrorism.

In Table 3 we present our multivariate analysis of the first two hypotheses. We argued above that more religious respondents will be more likely to think about terrorist attacks and to change their behavior out of their concerns about possible attacks, but that these effects will be mediated by their self-reported conservatism. We test for this possibility with three different dependent variables. Given the expected importance of conservatism as a mediating variable, for each of the three analyses we include two models: one with and one without the conservatism measure.

The first model in Table 3 shows that religiosity is significant in explaining the likelihood that respondents think that a terrorist attack will happen in the next year. Specifically, every unit increase in religiosity is associated with a 16% increase in the likelihood that respondents think a terrorist attack will happen in the next year. The second model includes conservatism, which is significant. More conservative people are more likely to think that an attack will happen. When conservatism is included, religiosity is no longer significant. Because more religious people are more likely to be conservative, we tested whether conservatism mediates the relationship between religiosity and the dependent variable. Using a Sobel-Goodman test of mediation we found that conservatism significantly mediates 54% of the religiosity effect. Model 2 also shows that older people and women are more likely to think that a terrorist attack is likely. Conversely, more educated people are less likely to think that a terrorist attack will occur in the next year.

The results for Models 1 and 2 in Table 3 are based on a question that asks about a terrorist attack in the United States. The 9/11 terrorist attacks occurred in the Northeast, and most Americans are unlikely to have personally known the victims or their family and friends. Because 9/11 is likely to have been the event that has shaped the majority of Americans' understanding and concern about terrorism, we thought that respondents would be most concerned about an attack on the country as a whole, rather than an attack on their specific communities or on the people that they may know. Our survey included questions that asked about the likelihood that "you, a friend, or a relative" will be the victim of a terrorist attack or

Table 2

Mean values on concerns about terrorism and willingness to work with government officials by higher and lower levels of religiosity.

Lower religiosity[a]	Higher religiosity
Likelihood of there being a terrorist attack	
3.060	3.370[***]
Thought about a terrorist attack	
0.154	0.202[*]
Done something differently because of a possible attack	
0.043	0.090[***]
Call police if saw/heard potential terrorist activities (index)	
15.440	16.168[***]
Will meet with police and government officials about terrorism	
1.104	1.321[***]

[**] $p < .01$.
[*] $p < .05$.
[***] $p < .001$.
[A] "Lower" and "higher" indicate the bottom and top fifty percent for religiosity.

Table 3

OLS and logistic regression analysis of religiosity for explaining anticipation of a terrorist attack.[b]

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
	Likelihood of a terrorist attack (OLS)		Thought about a terrorist attack (logistic: exponentiated coefficients)		Done anything differently (logistic: exponentiated coefficients)	
Self-reported conservatism[c]		0.167**,a		1.428**,a		1.371**,a
		(0.034)		(0.101)		(0.145)
Religiosity[d]	0.160**	0.073	1.285*	1.068	1.338*	1.130
	(0.057)	(0.061)	(0.126)	(0.114)	(0.193)	(0.178)
Mainline protestant	0.045	0.052	1.024	1.060	0.811	0.825
	(0.132)	(0.132)	(0.258)	(0.272)	(0.326)	(0.340)
Catholic	−0.127	−0.107	1.192	1.273	1.502	1.617
	(0.124)	(0.121)	(0.266)	(0.287)	(0.524)	(0.570)
Other religion	−0.331+	−0.321+	0.933	0.982	0.809	0.842
	(0.180)	(0.186)	(0.345)	(0.379)	(0.391)	(0.429)
None, agnostic, refused	−0.019	0.003	1.313	1.426	0.661	0.725
	(0.274)	(0.254)	(0.730)	(0.845)	(0.690)	(0.757)
Black	−0.436**	−0.280	0.577	0.770	1.328	1.839
	(0.162)	(0.175)	(0.218)	(0.314)	(0.594)	(0.833)
Hispanic	−0.032	−0.054	0.558	0.515+	0.527	0.496
	(0.165)	(0.159)	(0.205)	(0.191)	(0.297)	(0.285)
Mixed or Other race	−0.449*	−0.402+	0.517+	0.561	1.172	1.331
	(0.217)	(0.218)	(0.206)	(0.226)	(0.724)	(0.839)
Divorced or Separated	0.122	0.169	1.264	1.438	0.558	0.601
	(0.161)	(0.164)	(0.365)	(0.424)	(0.317)	(0.347)
Widowed	−0.073	−0.114	1.639	1.508	0.235*	0.209*
	(0.257)	(0.253)	(0.672)	(0.652)	(0.167)	(0.153)
Single	−0.134	−0.069	1.288	1.520	0.704	0.784
	(0.128)	(0.129)	(0.368)	(0.435)	(0.305)	(0.340)
Living with Partner	0.187	0.201	1.202	1.295	0.999	1.071
	(0.161)	(0.155)	(0.443)	(0.488)	(0.551)	(0.595)
Gender	0.217*	0.236**	1.082	1.157	0.942	1.004
	(0.092)	(0.091)	(0.193)	(0.211)	(0.251)	(0.275)
Household income	0.002	0.003	1.015	1.017	1.031	1.032
	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.024)	(0.026)	(0.035)	(0.035)
Education	−0.145**	−0.128*	1.119	1.152	1.176	1.208
	(0.053)	(0.052)	(0.123)	(0.130)	(0.192)	(0.193)
Age	0.012**	0.011**	1.021**	1.020**	1.014	1.013
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.010)	(0.010)
Observations	1427	1427	1427	1427	1427	1427
R-squared/pseudo R-squared	0.08	0.10	0.05	0.08	0.05	0.07

Robust standard errors in parentheses.

+ $p < .10$.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

[a] Conservatism significantly ($p < .001$) mediates the influence of religiosity.

[b] In separate analyses we also examined the potential moderating influence of religiosity on gender, race, and religious affiliation for explaining anticipation of a terrorist attack. None of these interactions were significant.

[c] In separate analyses we found that conservatism remains significant, even when political party affiliation is also included. In contrast, political party affiliation was significant in Models 2 and 4, but not Model 6. We would have shown the results with political party affiliation and conservatism, but these two variables have a moderately high correlation of .6 ($p < .001$). Additionally, the key concept of interest was conservatism, rather than political party identification.

[d] In a separate analysis we examined the influence of religious importance instead of the combined measures and the results were very similar to those presented here.

that "there would be a terrorist attack in your community in the next 12 months." The three likelihood questions had the same responses ranging from "1" = extremely unlikely to "7" = extremely likely. Whereas the mean for the likelihood of a terrorist attack in the United States was 3.09, the mean for the likelihood of knowing a victim of a terrorist attack was 2.16, and the mean for the likelihood of an attack in the respondent's community was 2.27. These patterns suggest that rather than being concerned about an attack in their own communities or one directed at someone they know, respondents were most concerned about generalized attacks that might affect anyone living in the United States.

We ran a separate multivariate analysis (available on request) and found that religiosity was only significantly related to terrorist concerns about the country as a whole. Even before controlling for conservatism, religiosity was not important for knowing a victim of an attack or concern about an attack in one's own community. These findings suggest that the connections between religiosity and attitudes toward terrorism are highly general and non-specific. In other words, respondents seem to use their religion to provide a general explanation for a disturbing type of human behavior rather than as a way of gauging actual threat in their personal lives.

Models 3 and 4 focus on whether respondents thought about the possibility of a major terrorist attack in the past seven days. Model 3 shows that a one unit increase in religiosity is associated with a 29% increase in the odds that respondents thought about an attack. Model 4 includes conservatism, which is significant and positive. A one-unit increase in conservatism is associated with a 43% increase in the odds that the respondent thought about a terrorist attack. When conservatism is included religiosity is no longer significant. Using a binary test of mediation, we found that conservatism is a significant mediator and explains 84% of the effect of religiosity.

Models 5 and 6 examine whether the respondent had done anything differently because of the possibility of a terrorist attack. Like the previous models, Model 5 shows that religiosity is initially significant and positive. A one unit increase in religiosity is associated with a 34% increase in the odds that the respondent did something differently because of the possibility of an attack. Model 6 includes conservatism, which is again significant and shows that a one unit increase in conservatism is associated with a 37% increase in the odds that the respondent had done something differently. Consistent with the previous models when conservatism is included religiosity is no longer significant. A binary test of mediation shows that conservatism significantly mediates the effect of religiosity and explains 55% of religiosity's influence. Consistent with our first two hypotheses we initially found that religiosity is significantly and positively related to having thought about and anticipated a terrorist attack and having done something differently because of a potential attack. However, for these first three outcomes conservatism significantly mediates the influence of religiosity.

In Table 4 we test our second set of hypotheses, those that focus on the influence of religious importance for explaining willingness to help government authorities. The first two models look specifically at whether more religious people are more willing than less religious individuals to help local government authorities stop terrorism. Model 1 includes religiosity and conservatism. Unlike the models presented in Table 3, religiosity has an independent effect on respondents' willingness to help stop terrorism and our measure of conservatism is not significant. To assess the size of the religiosity effect in Model 1 we produced marginals. The outcome variable ranges from 5 to 20. Respondents who are one standard deviation below the mean on the religiosity measure have an average value of 15.09 on the outcome after controlling for all other variables in Model 1. If they have the mean level of religiosity, they have a value of 15.56, and if they are one standard deviation above the mean they have a value of 16.04.

The second model includes whether respondents reported that they would contact the police if they saw or heard about a neighborhood break-in. Not surprisingly the variable is significant,[4] but as hypothesized, religiosity also remains significant. While more religious people may be more likely to help officials stop crime, even after accounting for their greater willingness to help, more religious respondents are still more willing to help stop terrorism.

Models 3 and 4 focus on the respondent's willingness to meet with the police or DHS officials to help stop terrorism. The first model shows that even after accounting for conservatism, religiosity is significant. A one-unit increase in religiosity is associated with a 29% increase in the odds that respondents were willing to meet with officials to help stop terrorism. Model 4 includes the measure of whether respondents will contact the police if they hear about a neighborhood break-in, which is again significant and positive. And in support of our final hypothesis, when this variable is included the religiosity coefficient remains significant, decreasing only slightly (0.29–0.25).

11. Discussion and conclusion

Several high profile terrorist attacks in recent years have focused attention on the role of religion as a force that can powerfully influence attitudes on this topic. Prior research has drawn attention to the role of religion in shaping Americans' general attitudes toward punitiveness and altruism in the criminal justice system and also about the importance of religiosity in understanding willingness to help others. However, little research to date has explored how religion shapes concerns about terrorism or the public's willingness to work with authorities to address terrorist threats. We argued above that those who adhere more strongly to religious beliefs will be more concerned about the threat of terrorism but that these effects will be largely mediated by respondents' conservatism. We also argue that controlling for respondents' willingness to help police solve ordinary crimes, those with stronger religious beliefs will be more willing to work with authorities to prevent terrorism. We found strong support for our hypotheses about respondents' attitudes toward terrorism and willingness to help prevent it. More religious respondents were significantly more likely to express concerns about the threat of terrorism and this effect was largely mediated by self-reported conservatism. We also found that more religious Americans were more likely to express willingness to help the government address terrorism-related concerns, even after accounting for conservatism. Moreover, this effect remained significant when we controlled for individual willingness to help government officials respond to an ordinary crime.

In our analysis of Americans' perceptions of terrorist threats and their willingness to work with the government to avert them we attempted to shift the focus of religiosity away from macro-level accounts of major events to micro-level explanations of human differences. However, our results show that while religiosity is indeed significantly related to ordinary American's concerns about terrorism, this effect is largely mediated by their conservatism. Specifically, more religious Americans are more likely to be conservative, which is also associated with their concerns about terrorism.

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[4] When this variable is included the model goes from explaining 9% of the variance to explaining 57%.

Table 4
OLS and ordered logistic regression analysis of religious importance for explaining helping government authorities.[a]

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
	Help stop terrorism (index) (OLS)		Willing to meet about terrorism (ordered logistic: exponentiated coefficients)	
Contact police if saw/heard about break-in		3.622**		1.653**
		(0.106)		(0.143)
Religiosity[b]	0.521**	0.229*	1.290**	1.249**
	(0.182)	(0.108)	(0.110)	(0.107)
Self-reported conservatism[c]	−0.047	0.096	1.020	1.038
	(0.113)	(0.064)	(0.049)	(0.051)
Mainline protestant	−0.060	−0.255	1.131	1.081
	(0.349)	(0.261)	(0.215)	(0.205)
Catholic	0.218	0.125	1.300	1.301
	(0.316)	(0.222)	(0.228)	(0.233)
Other religion	−0.392	−0.748*	1.264	1.167
	(0.554)	(0.368)	(0.346)	(0.324)
None, agnostic, refused	−0.289	0.321	0.992	1.081
	(0.856)	(0.440)	(0.387)	(0.434)
Black	−0.885	−0.080	1.128	1.338
	(0.577)	(0.313)	(0.280)	(0.346)
Hispanic	−0.840	0.244	0.776	0.872
	(0.519)	(0.294)	(0.165)	(0.195)
Mixed or other race	−1.802**	−0.228	0.754	0.934
	(0.634)	(0.360)	(0.225)	(0.297)
Divorced or separated	−0.558	−0.515+	1.063	1.089
	(0.424)	(0.294)	(0.235)	(0.240)
Widowed	0.400	0.504	0.823	0.832
	(0.582)	(0.326)	(0.299)	(0.302)
Single	−1.350**	−0.498+	0.757	0.835
	(0.408)	(0.256)	(0.140)	(0.161)
Living with partner	−0.344	0.161	1.254	1.361
	(0.607)	(0.349)	(0.340)	(0.393)
Gender	0.232	0.024	0.924	0.896
	(0.274)	(0.178)	(0.123)	(0.122)
Household income	0.057	−0.033	1.029+	1.016
	(0.035)	(0.023)	(0.017)	(0.018)
Education	−0.027	−0.155	1.089	1.071
	(0.148)	(0.097)	(0.081)	(0.083)
Age	0.020*	−0.005	1.010*	1.007
	(0.009)	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Observations	1427	1427	1427	1427
R-squared/pseudo *R*-squared	0.09	0.57	0.03	0.05

[a] In separate analyses we also examined the potential moderating influence of religiosity on gender, race, and religious affiliation for explaining willingness to help government authorities. None of these interactions were significant.

[b] In a separate analysis we examined the influence of religious importance instead of the combined measure and the results were very similar to those presented here.

[c] In separate analyses we found that when political party affiliation was used instead of conservatism, the findings for religiosity were virtually the same. Since our key concept of interest was conservatism, rather than political party identification and these two variables have a moderately high correlation, we use conservatism in all of our models.

Some scholars (for a review see McCullough and Willoughby, 2009) have argued that religion's influence on deterring crime and deviance may really be the result of less religious people having lower self-control and, as a result, being more likely to engage in criminal or deviant acts. We also considered that the relationship between religion and willingness to help stop terrorism was spurious, resulting from more religious people being generally more altruistic and willing to help. Indeed, we found that more religious people were more willing to contact the police if they suspected that a break-in was about to happen. But, when we included this variable in our models, it did not fully explain the relationship between religious importance and willingness to help officials prevent terrorism. This finding underscores the unique relationship between religion and feelings about terrorism.

Although we found some effects of religiosity, we did not find any religious affiliation differences. There are some important methodological reasons why we may not have found differences. The vast majority of Americans are Christian, and in our study 88% of respondents claimed a mainline Protestant, conservative Protestant, or Catholic religious affiliation. Because our survey did not include an oversample of religious minority groups, we had little statistical power to detect significant differences between or among smaller groups, such as Muslims and Hindus. Additionally, some Christians may not know the official name of their denomination and the titles of many Christian denominations sound similar (e.g., American Baptist Association vs. American Baptist Churches in the USA) or are fairly nondescriptive. Because of these complications, other studies (Regnerus, 2007; Adamczyk, 2009) have also found that religious affiliation is less important than religiosity (e.g. religious importance) for explaining attitudes and behaviors. Finally, differences between mainline Protestants, conservative

Protestants, and Catholics may not be that great. Nevertheless, the results are consistent with the conclusion that compared to less religious respondents and regardless of their affiliation, religious Americans are likely to be more concerned about terrorism and more willing to work with authorities to prevent it.

Our study has some limitations, which merit discussion. Because the data are cross-sectional we were unable to establish empirically the correct causal order between religiosity, conservatism, and concerns about terrorism. There are a few possibilities. We think that the most likely prospect is that because of biblical precepts and the influence of other religiously conservative people, more religious individuals develop more conservative perspectives, leading to greater concerns about security threats, such as those that occurred on September 11, 2001. However, it is also possible that people who have more rigid personalities and are more likely to hold rigid (e.g., right or wrong) views of the world may be at once more concerned about threats to their safety and more interested in religion. Finally, more conservative people may be drawn to religion, and as a result may be more concerned about terrorism threats. Because the intergenerational transmission of religious belief is so strong (Myers, 1996), religiosity is likely to precede conservatism, and attitudes about and willingness to address terrorism concerns. Indeed, the proportion of Americans that experience a major religious conversion is low compared to the proportion that maintains similar religious beliefs throughout adulthood (Scheitle and Adamczyk, 2010). Nevertheless, longitudinal data are needed to more fully unravel the pathways between religiosity, conservatism, and concerns about terrorism.

Terrorism has long been a concern in America, but 9/11 changed the way the government approached terrorism and likely affected what people thought were the most important terrorist threats. Unfortunately, we do not have data to assess the extent to which the 9/11 attacks and subsequent government actions influenced Americans' concerns about terrorism. Our findings suggest that more religious Americans are most concerned with potential terrorist attacks that do not occur locally or necessarily affect someone they know. We suspect that there may be differences in concern about terrorism between people living in major cities and suburban and rural areas. Although we did not find a significant relationship between living in a metro area and concerns about terrorism, our study did not oversample respondents in major cities and thus we had limited statistical power to detect significant effects by population size of the respondent's community.

In the United States and elsewhere there has been a lot of interest in isolating the most important factors in stopping terrorist plots (McNeill et al., 2010; Strom et al., 2010; Beutel, 2010; Jackson and Frelinger, 2009). In one study Dahl (2011) used unclassified data to track 176 terrorist plots against American targets that had been thwarted or otherwise failed during the past twenty-five years; 103 of these plots were planned and carried out within the United States and the other 73 were aimed at US targets outside the United States (e.g., embassies and military bases). Dahl attempted to determine why the terrorist plots in his study failed, and, especially, what kinds of intelligence and security efforts were most successful in preventing them. In general, he found (p. 635) that the intelligence needed to prevent terrorist attacks was not the high profile tactics that usually get the most media attention, "such as spies who penetrate terrorist cells, enhanced interrogations of captured suspects, or covert operatives listening in on terrorist chatter overseas... (but rather) tips from the public, informants inside home-grown cells, and long-term surveillance of suspects." That is, whether the public was actively willing to support anti-terrorism efforts was a key determinant of whether an attack was foiled or executed. And our results suggest that religiosity may be important for understanding the willingness of Americans to assist in preventing terrorist attacks.

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