

# Religion and the Extension of Trust

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## **Abstract**

The ability to cooperate with others, both individuals and institutions, is an essential social function built on trust. We explore the competing religious logics that shape the radius of trust, placing emphasis on communicated values in the social context of the congregation. Using cross-sectional data from American adults, we show the effects of religious beliefs that augment risk, values that demand outreach, and practices that capture experience with collective action. With a survey experiment, we show that priming different religious styles (inclusive of beliefs, values, and outreach) shifts the propensity to trust government and the social other in expected ways. In this way, we attempt to make sense of previous variant findings by suggesting that religious influence is dynamic and dependent on the religious style choices communicated to congregants.

Keywords: political trust; social trust; religion and politics; experiment; devil

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The ability to cooperate with other individuals and institutions is an essential social function built on trust. Trust governs interactions between a person, others, and organizations, bridges the gap between the internal and the external, and allows for cooperation in the face of the problems caused by scarcity and rational self-interest. As a widespread social organization with aims about human relations, religion fits squarely in the middle of this process. But the literature on religion and trust has not been able to sort out whether religious effects are a function of individually held beliefs and values or whether they are a function of the social context, such as being in the majority, surrounded by ingroup members. We plot a middle path, building evidence for the effectiveness of communicated values, which ratifies the importance of values activated by the social context. Faith may present a powerful counter to self-interest, but it can either expand or restrict the radius of trust as individuals are called to give themselves over to both a set of beliefs and to a community of believers with whom to practice collective action.

The state of the religion and trust literature is best characterized by fragmentation. It has traditionally been split into investigations of social and political trust, and despite recent gains the latter remains a nearly empty set (Clifford and Gaskins, 2016; Putnam and Campbell, 2010; see also Allport and Ross, 1967). At the same time, claims about religious effects have been divided – some demonstrate that religion fosters prosocial behavior and greater trust in others (e.g., Beyerlein and Hipp 2006; Daniels and von der Ruhr 2010; Smidt 1999; Wuthnow 2002), while others argue that religion can direct trust inward, leading to atomization and isolation of social groups from one another (e.g., Granovetter 1973; Hempel et al. 2012; Rotolo 2000; Wuthnow 2002). These works have investigated varied targets of trust, levels of analysis, and religious variables – although rarely are they found together and compared.

In this paper we seek to provide empirical support for a theoretically consistent relationship between religion and trust that accommodates the diverse, and seemingly contradictory, findings in this body of work. We do so by adopting an approach that is rooted in the structure and effects of religious communities. As people join religious communities, they acquire a normative mix of beliefs and behaviors (Green et al. 1996; Stark and Bainbridge 1985), a set of salient values (Djupe and Calfano 2013a; Haidt 2012; Leege and Kellstedt 1993; Schwartz 2007), and working relationships with fellow community members (Seymour et al. 2014; Uslaner 2002). All of these elements must be learned, practiced, and applied (Cornwall 1987; Welch and Baltzell 1984). Through this social process involving accountable relationships with others (Djupe and Gilbert 2009; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Wald, Owen, and Hill 1988), we believe these learned beliefs and values develop into worldviews that shape trust judgments.

This view of religion is full, affirming 1) the importance of the content of religious beliefs and values, 2) the experience of ongoing involvement in organizational tasks, and 3) the constant reevaluation of religion's place in the world by religious actors who adopt and communicate shifting religious styles in response. We therefore argue that religion hosts a series of logics that bear on trust and that these logics are not fixed but are made applicable upon contextual activation.

For the purposes of investigating religious influence, we need to reorient the discussion of trust from its varied targets and forms to its core mechanisms and central processes. We first review the separate literatures of social and political trust, finding common roots on which religious logics may come to bear. We then begin our analysis with cross-sectional survey data to explore how religious logics are connected to these forms of trust at one point in time, and then turn to the results of a survey experiment to show that

individuals' trust judgments respond consistently to activated religious styles, approximated through priming.

### **The Logic of Trust**

Trust is a relational concept involving one person (the principal) forfeiting autonomy and control over a situation to another (the agent), thereby making the principal vulnerable and dependent upon the agent to accomplish (or abstain from) a task (Levi and Stoker 2000; Yamagishi and Yamagishi 1994). This social exchange of autonomy is made possible by trust, an internal calculation based on a history of judgments that generate expectations of the agent and the current exchange (Hardin 1996; Levi and Stoker 2000; Weatherford 1992). The cooperation enabled by trust serves the crucial social function of allowing for complex social interaction and overcoming boundaries and difference (Coleman 1990; Miller and Mitamura 2003; Mishler and Rose 2001; Yamagishi 1998).

Defined this way, to forfeit autonomy *is* to trust and seems applicable to a wide variety of contexts (Hardin 2002). While some scholars (most notably Newton 1999) suggest political trust warrants a separate investigation from social trust, there are many points of connection between the two, including their definitions. Social trust is generally defined as an expectation that others will contribute to the general wellbeing and not do harm (Offe 1999), while political trust is defined as the belief or expectation that the government will do right, subject to normative standards (Hetherington and Globetti 2005). Their functions facilitating collective action indicate their common roots, differentiated only by the actor.

### **Political Trust**

At its heart, the government functions to distribute limited resources counter to both scarcity and rational self-interest, a function that we find to mirror the transactional definition of trust rooted in “encapsulated interest” put forth by Hardin (2002). Citizens

elect representatives to distribute these resources with the expectation that they do so in a way that benefits the citizen's best interests (e.g., Key 1966). This relationship between the citizen and representative, or principal and agent, is one that is enabled through trust. This specific brand of trust is what the literature has defined as political trust and the evidence for its capacity to function this way is widespread across policy areas.

Trust had the power to mobilize national support for the Iraq war and engagement in Afghanistan (Hetherington and Husser 2012), foster cooperation with procedural justice decisions (Tyler 1990), augment willingness to pay taxes (Levi 1988), and encourage compliance with racial policies (Hetherington 2004; Hetherington and Globetti 2002; Scholz and Lubell 1998). Citizens who trust the government enable it to function; conditional upon compliance with expectations, institutional confidence grows (Hetherington 1998; Hetherington and Globetti 2002; Tyler and DeGoey 1995). Thus, regime support can erode through the failure to meet expectations (Hetherington and Nugent 2001), an outcome that generally mirrors the ebb and flow processes of social trust.

### **Social Trust**

Similar to the cooperative function political trust plays in citizen-government interactions, social trust greases the functioning of social groups, whether they be composed of friends, family, acquaintances, or unknown others (Putnam 2000; Stolle 2002; Yamagishi and Yamagishi 1994). While not without legitimate critique (Delhey, Newton, and Welzel 2011), social trust has often been defined as the belief that “others will not knowingly or willingly do him harm” (Newton 2001: 202). This relational definition between the trusted vs. not trusted tends to mirror the boundaries of groups, a common medium for social interaction, leading to trust to be viewed as a key phenomenon that enables social cooperation, collective action, and democratic stability (Brewer and Kramer 1985; Kramer

and Isen 1994). Like political trust, social trust is generally understood to be learned through repeated interaction, with the most trusting often being the most involved (Levi and Stoker 2000; Stolle 1998; Welch et al. 2004).

As trust in institutions and the government depends (to a certain extent) upon the outcome of an action, agreement facilitates social trust as well. A common critique of social trust is that an ingroup variant can build up at the expense of trust in the out-group “other” (Granovetter 1973; Lawler 2001; Putnam 2000; Wuthnow 2002). This safe kind of “bonding” social trust occurs within the boundaries of the group, therefore making trust in the unknown other the more demanding form. This riskier form of trust across boundaries involves greater risk and consequentially a greater degree of autonomy to be surrendered.

For years this “bridging” variant of trust has been measured by the familiar question, “Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful when dealing with other people?” (Putnam 2000). Ratifying this understanding, Delhey et al. (2011) found this question to target trust in “out-groups,” while finding that the radius of trust in most people varies considerably from country to country. Based on the risk associated with extending beyond one’s familiar boundaries, it is here where we expect more variation in trust to form based on individual beliefs, shared values, past engagement with others, and invocations to engage diverse others.

Thus, we propose that common to all trust events are considerations of risk (Luhman 1988; Newton 2001) that accompany an exchange of autonomy (Hardin 1996; Levi and Stoker 2000). Although the questions of “who” is being trusted with “what” vary greatly, the risk of a situation is either accepted and autonomy is forfeited (trust) or rejected and autonomy is retained (distrust). This does not mean that autonomy moves in lockstep

with risk – for instance, values that demand working with others or deep experience doing so may overcome high estimations of risk.

This investigation of trust is built upon the foundational assumption that the trust calculus is driven by a set of dispositions that are updated through evaluation of experiences (Citrin 1974; Gamson 1968; Hetherington 1998; Keele 2007; Miller and Mitamura 2003). Thus, variation in trust might be caused by differences in social experiences as well as relevant beliefs and values, all of which may vary over time and context. In this way the logic of trust is flexible in its application to trust objects and is rooted in expectations that raise or lower boundaries that either serve to restrict trust or radiate it outwards. In the following section we map religious concerns onto this framework.

### **Religion and Trust**

Investigation into the relationship between religion and trust has steadily grown, filling a significant gap in our thinking about the role of religion in knitting together civil society. A common starting place is to recognize that religion is multifaceted (Stark and Glock 1968, Stark and Finke 2000), and since the turn of the century Layman's (2001) "three major components of religion" – beliefs, representing the fundamental content of religion; behavior, reflective of religious practice; and belonging, representing a "conscious recognition of membership in a social group" – have been commonly recognized as potential influences on politics (Layman, 2001: 57). However, the evidence that has resulted from this perspective has been mixed, leading to our new framework.

Early work adopted an "ethnoreligious perspective" (Smidt, Kellstedt, Guth 2009) and focused on differences in social trust between religious traditions (e.g., Smidt 1999; Wuthnow 2002). Those results suggested that the religious were more trusting than the nonreligious and that more conservative religious groups were more distrusting than less

orthodox groups (Daniels and von der Ruhr 2010; Smidt 1999; Smith 1998). The relationship is not driven by affiliation per se, but by the engagement with a group of people through worship attendance and involvement beyond worship (Hempel et al. 2012). However, subsequent research with access to better measures (e.g., Welch et al. 2004, 2007) found significant variation within face-to-face (religious) communities, indicating that ingroup membership (“belonging”) alone is not determinative of trust decisions (Seymour et al. 2014; see also Anderson, Mellor, and Milyo 2010). However, this work has a limited focus within the congregation, making application to general trust measures difficult (but see Freitag and Traunmüller 2009).

An alternate perspective highlights the content of beliefs and their role in creating politically influential worldviews (Hempel et al. 2012; Smidt, Kellstedt, Guth 2009; Wuthnow 1988). While beliefs are central to all religions (Stark and Glock 1968), most generic religious belief batteries ex ante are difficult to parse as the most salient to trust decisions. This is arguably why previous work has found contradictory results among belief items (e.g., Tan 2006), though the elements of Protestant conservatism – biblical authority, sin, and the necessity of salvation – have been found to both undermine trust and undercut any benefit of church attendance (Hempel et al., 2012). To complicate matters, some belief indexes tend to tap religious traditionalism and stray into the theoretical realm of belonging (e.g., Leege and Kellstedt 1993). Perhaps this is why in controlled experiments, religious beliefs play little part in how trust games are played (e.g., Anderson, Mellor and Milyo 2010). Small differences in religious responses in trust games may, however, reflect a belief that they are surveilled from on high, though the surveillance effect can be induced in secular ways too (e.g., Shariff and Norenzayan 2007).



While incorporating measures that cover behavior, beliefs about sin in the world, and belonging in religious traditions, we wish to highlight a missing dimension, religious values, that focus our attention on the social boundaries religion commands followers to build up or tear down. This comes across clearly when parsed in terms of the two component understanding of the trust calculus. That is, principals arrive in potential trust situations with certain dispositional risk levels driven by beliefs and are more or less willingness to forfeit autonomy through value commandments and organizational experiences.

*Religious influences on perceptions of risk*

Perceptions of risk should follow from two aspects of religious belief. Beliefs, whether religious or not, are conceptions about the state of the world, the content of which may raise or lower perceived risk levels. Religious beliefs reinforcing the notion of a vengeful God, the sinful nature of humans, and the existence of the devil may raise perceived risk levels by indicating that there is evil in the world (e.g., Froese, Bader, and Smith 2008; Hempel et al. 2012). The belief that people are under the power of sin or evil until saved would make trusting such agents (absent salvation) difficult. Though it has not been applied to trust judgments before, belief in the devil has been connected through this same logic to greater threat perceptions from least-liked groups (Djupe and Mockabee 2015) and decreased political tolerance (Gibson 2010). The fact that religious people trust others more in areas where they are in the majority (where the devil has less influence) is suggestive of this mechanism (Traunmüller 2011).

*Religious influences on surrendering autonomy*

The second half of the trust decision process involves surrendering autonomy. We focus attention on 1) religious values that demand action and 2) organizational experiences in congregations that facilitate reliance on others. In contrast to beliefs about the state of the

world, values are visions about how the world should work that then demand action (e.g., Haidt 2012; Rokeach 1973; Schwartz and Bilsky 1987). Though of course value systems run both in and outside of religious worldviews (Haidt 2012), religious institutions are central players in formulating value systems (e.g., Legee and Kellstedt 1993). A great many religious values and value sets could be implicated in “the interactional requirements for interpersonal cooperation” (Schwartz and Bilsky 1987: 550), while a great many more, such as the desire for salvation, could encourage greater protection of autonomy. However, we wish to focus on two sets of religious values directly applicable to surrendering autonomy and trust - religious commands to overcome social difference and reach out to include others (inclusive values) or to remain socially closed and surrounded by fellow believers (exclusive values).

These religious values map onto core functions of religious organizations, which are (at a minimum) to gain new members (inclusion) while holding on to existing ones (exclusion – Barkun 1986; Finke and Stark 2005), a combination which has long made evangelicals “embattled and thriving” (Smith 1998). These values have been linked to perceptions of threat toward disliked out-groups among both clergy (Djupe, Burge, and Calfano 2015) and citizens (Djupe and Calfano 2013a; Schaffer, Sokhey, and Djupe 2015), attitudes toward cooperative foreign policy (Djupe and Calfano 2013b), and attitudes regarding immigration policies (Djupe and Calfano 2013c). The logic of these relationships is that more inclusive values work to break down barriers and extend personal support to others (even strongly disliked ones), while exclusive values build up barriers and retract that support.

We also expect congregational experiences that provide opportunities for individuals to cooperate with others in ongoing collective efforts to influence the surrendering of autonomy. These could be organized experiences that develop skills undergirding civic

engagement (Djupe and Grant 2001; Schwadel 2005; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), or organic spaces where group members share social and political concerns that foster the potential for civic recruitment (Djupe and Gilbert 2009). These experiences have been long thought to be a source of religion's positive influence on democratic attitudes, including, but not limited to, trust (e.g., Bellah et al. 1985; Brehm and Rahn 1997; Neiheisel, Djupe, and Sokhey 2008; Stolle 1998; Welch et al. 2007; Wuthnow 2002).

While more exposure to religious teachings and the simple social pressures of group membership work to standardize beliefs and behaviors and build social trust (Wildavsky 1987), it is not entirely clear how this logic relates to *political* trust unless that connection is explicitly made. Religious institutions are not neutral vending machines of civic resources, but are instead inherently coercive groups that seek to impose the norms of the collective (Cavendish, Welch, and Legee 1998; Djupe and Gilbert 2009; Jelen 1992; Wald, Owen, and Hill 1988; Welch and Baltzell 1984). Furthermore, while political information diffuses through most churches (Brewer, Kersh, and Peterson 2003; Djupe and Gilbert 2003), relatively few churches can be considered “political churches” (Beyerlein and Chaves 2003; Calhoun-Brown 1996; Djupe and Gilbert 2009). Political churches could direct people to apply their religious worldviews and organizational experiences to the government as a trust target. The logic is apparent in other work – church-gained civic resources only boost political activity when political information is plentiful in the church (Djupe and Gilbert 2009: 199-201).

### **Data and Design**

We begin to test the scheme discussed above using author-collected cross-sectional data that allow us to analyze the impact of various religious measures have on political and social trust measures through the two components of our trust framework: perceptions of

risk and the forfeiture of autonomy. We expect cross-sectional analysis to be alone insufficient to demonstrate a consistent connection between social and political trust outcomes and anticipate conditional effects for our measures, thereby necessitating our experimental design, which we will discuss later.

We expect those religious measures that affect the same component of the trust calculus to be substitutable while exerting an independent effect from those measures that bear on the other. That is, inclusive religious values that encourage outreach and the habitual practice of working with others in organized commitments (religious engagement and attendance) should both influence trust outcomes by influencing one's willingness to surrender autonomy. Either of these two measures should be sufficient and they should be substitutable, such that inclusive values only have an independent effect on trust in the absence of religious organizational engagement and religious engagement can make up for the lack of a value system that would otherwise encourage one to reach out and work with others (H1). The effect of these related measures should also be independent from those that bear on perceptions of risk, for which belief in the devil should drive down trust (H2). Finally, we expect religious involvement to affect political trust outcomes only when made applicable within a politicized church (H3).

Responses to a national survey of 412 randomly chosen respondents identified through the Qualtrics web interface and data collection service were collected February 15-17, 2012 and had a gender quota of 50 percent of each males and females to match the distribution in the US.<sup>1</sup> Before this point there are no studies with measures appropriate measures of religion to test our working theory. The first of many measures included was religious tradition, built on the framework that separates Catholics, Jews, Black Protestants,

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<sup>1</sup> See the Appendix for discussion of the sample.

and “other” religious affiliations from non-believers.<sup>2</sup> Evangelical identification was also included, measured from self-reported agreement with whether one considers oneself a “‘born again’ or evangelical Christian.” This measure of evangelicalism is widely used (see Green 2007 and most Pew reports) and was highly correlated with other beliefs common to evangelicals suggesting its validity.<sup>3</sup> Non-evangelical Protestants are the excluded reference category throughout.

We included a measure of attendance at religious services (1=never, 6=more than once a week), but we recognize that considerable religious socialization occurs outside of worship services in small groups (Djupe and Gilbert 2009). Religious engagement was measured by asking respondents if they had held a leadership position or attended small group sections (0=No, 1=Yes – similar to measures used previously by Hempel, Bartkowski, and Matthews 2012; Welch et al. 2007). In an attempt to capture the belief in evil in the world, we used a likert-scaled item, “The Devil actually exists.”

The inclusive and exclusive values items were included following Djupe and Calfano (2013a), who used agreement with two statements for each value (see the Appendix for full variable coding). A measure of political messages communicated in religious contexts was also included to gauge whether such messages work to direct religious logics toward a governmental target. The survey asked whether respondents experienced various political messages in their congregation such as, “my clergyperson encourages participation in

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<sup>2</sup> This is not a denominational measure, but starts with identity with a religious family and then uses evangelical/born again status and race to differentiate among Protestants. Thus “Black Protestants” self-identify as black and select either Protestant or “Other Christian.” For updated code, please see Stetzer and Burge (2016).

<sup>3</sup> Evangelical identification was significantly correlated to belief in the Devil ( $r=.42$ ,  $p=0.00$ ), belief in Jesus’s eventual return ( $r=-.50$ ,  $p=0.00$ ), and the belief that God decides the course of one’s life ( $r=.38$ ,  $p=0.00$ ).

politics.” Finally, we included age, education, gender, race, and partisanship in the model as standard demographic controls.

Political trust was measured in our cross-sectional data in terms of whether respondents believed they could trust the federal government to “do what is right.” This question mirrors the preference satisfaction definition of political trust used in the ANES (see e.g., Hetherington 1998; Ulbig 2002). In response to criticism of the standard measure of social trust (Naef & Shupp, 2009; see also Yamagishi et al. 1999) and in line with the ANES (1964-2004), we measure social trust through agreement with two statements, “You can’t be too careful in trusting others,” and “People too often try and take advantage of others.”

### **Descriptive results**

Responses from the full sample were heavily weighted towards distrust in the federal government’s ability to do what is right. Only 17 percent agree (or strongly agree) that they can trust the government, while 59 percent disagree (an average of .34 when the measure is rescaled to run from 0-1). This is just shy of the same rate as reported by Pew (2015) that in 2012 only 22% of the nation said they could trust the government to do what is right most of the time or always. The sample was just as distrusting socially, the result of a long-term decline (Clark and Eisenstein 2013). Only 7 percent disagree that people generally try to take advantage of others while a whopping 74 percent agree (the rescaled 0-1 average is .27).

There was only some variation by religious tradition (see Figure A1 in the Appendix); white evangelicals were the least trusting of both the government and of each other and were the only group to display significantly less political trust than the rest of the sample (the difference in their social trust is not significant but nearly so –  $p=.13$ ). This suggests that respondents conform to some themes in prior studies and deviate in other ways: the

nonreligious are not less trusting in this sample during the Obama administration, while evangelicals specifically seem to trust marginally less (Smidt 1999; Welch et al. 2004). The rest of the religious traditions are not different from the total sample with the exception of black Protestants, who are both more trusting of the federal government and social others.

These results are only suggestive of the mechanism linking religion to trust and it is not clear whether religious beliefs and values, belonging to a religious community, or something else explains these noisy relationships.<sup>4</sup> For instance, evangelicals are more likely than others to believe in the devil ( $r=.34, p<.01$ ), adopt inclusive values ( $r=.34, p<.01$ ), and engage in church activities outside of worship ( $r=.15, p<.01$ ). Since these variables work in potentially conflicting directions, it is clear that a multivariate model is necessary to sort out what is influential and just how religion is connected to trust decisions.

### **Model Results**

We present the OLS results and effect of each variable on political and social trust in Figure 1 absent interactions (the coefficients are available in Table A.1 in the Appendix).<sup>5</sup> Social and political trust are linked with different variables in these cross-sectional data. Religious salience is linked to less social trust, but has no link to political trust. Evangelicals have less political trust, but Catholics and religious others have more social trust. Religious engagement is linked to more social trust (see Welch et al. 2007), but not quite significantly to political trust. Political activity is linked to less social trust, but neither more nor less political trust since that is dependent on partisanship – Republicans in this period trust the federal government less – whereas social trust does not.

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<sup>4</sup> See the online Appendix for descriptive results in Figure A.2 of how religious attendance and religious engagement beyond attendance are linked to both forms of trust.

<sup>5</sup> For these models we used OLS, though the results are almost identical using ordered logit.

Perhaps one of the reasons why social and political trust have different relationship patterns is the flexibility of the social trust measure. Political trust was measured in relation to a concrete referent for trust (the federal government), but social trust was measured in regards to respondent's trust in "other people," a noticeably weak and subjective target that is largely dependent upon one's social experience (Freitag and Traunmüller 2009; Traunmüller 2011). Calling the reliability of this measure into further question is the resulting insignificance of the control measures of age, education, race, and party identification, all of which were significantly related to political trust. Thus, the remainder of this cross-sectional investigation will focus predominately on political trust, but with the expectation that once the conditions of trust are fixed through the experimental design a clear religious effect will emerge.

Political trust was consistently linked to an individual's religious worldviews that shape boundaries with others. The visual representation of the OLS model results in Figure 1 demonstrates that belief in the Devil and inclusive values return opposite, yet theoretically consistent, effects on political trust. Inclusive values had one of the strongest effects in the model, the full effect of which was quite large – the most inclusive respondents display levels of trust 16% higher than those who are least inclusive (though this is involved in interactions we will discuss below). Inclusive values function to lower boundaries, even going so far in other research to buoy considerations of "least liked groups" by reducing the perceived threat they pose (Djupe and Calfano 2013a). Thus, it is not surprising that this positive effect carries over from tolerance to trust. Conversely, belief in the Devil worked to cut trust by



approximately 18%.<sup>6</sup> This difference in effect tells a consistent story that boundaries, and hence trust, could be either raised or lowered depending upon the most salient beliefs and values.

[Figure 1 about here]

From here we examine interactions between those aspects of religion that help illuminate different aspects of the trust calculus (perception of risk and surrendering of autonomy).<sup>7</sup>

#### *Substitutable Effects of Values and Experience (H1)*

Involvement in a community and the accompanying social pressures can build positive experiences that encourage the willing forfeiture of autonomy necessary to trust in the same way that religious directives could encourage trust. These influences – involvement and values – are likely substitutable and similar effects will result from either. When inclusive values are interacted with religious attendance, a significant effect appears for part of the variable ranges that confirms this logic.<sup>8</sup> Figure 2 shows that inclusive values have no effect on high attenders but increase the trust of non-attendees to bring them equal to frequent attenders. Thus, highly inclusive, non-attending respondents are indistinguishable from highly inclusive, frequent attenders. Put another way, the values that one holds do work to influence trust, but are only necessary for those outside of a religious community. This

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<sup>6</sup> In another dataset (a different national sample of American adults fielded through Qualtrics Panels), we find a positive correlation between belief in the Devil and threat perceived from the respondents' least liked groups ( $r=.10, p=.01$ ).

<sup>7</sup> We also assessed whether these interactions varied by race (white-nonwhite) and evangelical ID. Neither of these triple interactions suggested additional conditional effects.

<sup>8</sup> We also tried this interaction successfully with religious engagement (engagement and attendance are correlated at  $r=.4, p<.01$ ). The same pattern obtains – holding more or less inclusive values has no effect on the highly engaged and holding more inclusive values strongly boosts trust among the non-engaged.

interaction suggests that they work in equivalent and substitutable ways; their average effects are equivalent (just above 25 percent) helping to further confirm their substitutability.

[Figure 2 about here]

### *Independent Belief Effects (H2)*

We suggested that the factors that affect risk perceptions are independent from those that affect one's willingness to surrender autonomy. Thus, the next interactions examine two measures just explored in conjunction with a third (and theoretically separate) belief measure: inclusive values, religious attendance, and belief in the devil. Belief in the devil (affecting risk) should weigh down trust judgments even as holding more inclusive values and frequent attendance build trust. Further analysis confirms that belief in the devil has a consistently negative effect on political trust regardless of attendance or inclusion levels (see Figure A.3).

### *Religious Engagement and Politicized Churches (H3)*

The last interaction assesses whether religious variables are applied to a specific target given the provision of salient information. That is, we assess whether the effect of greater religious engagement (beyond attending worship services) is linked to greater political trust given the degree of politicization of the church.<sup>9</sup> Figure 3 demonstrates that people in non-political churches trust the government at a constant level regardless of their level of religious engagement – religious engagement does not add to or subtract from political trust among those not exposed to political messages. However, in churches that expose congregants to political themes, the more engaged exhibit greater trust in government than

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<sup>9</sup> The appendix reports some results (Figure A.4) to show the distribution of political churches across evangelical status and religiosity.

those who are less involved.<sup>10</sup> Hearing a list of grievances in the absence of collective action may produce more frustration with government and hence less trust. When grievances are dropped in the loamy soil of an engaged congregation, people trust that the government will do what is right, perhaps as a result of their engagement (see also McClendon and Riedl 2015). Messages making salient the link between religion and politics help extend trust beyond the social boundaries of the congregation as long as the organizational infrastructure is in place.

[Figure 3 about here]

### *Discussion*

As suggested by the interactions, religion's effect on trust calculations appears to come from its effect upon the two components of the trust process. The preceding results suggest that beliefs shift perceptions of risk independently of other religious attributes (H2; see also Bloom and Arikan 2012) while religious values, engagement, and social pressures work similarly to affect trust through a willingness to surrender autonomy (H1). What is more, there is some evidence to suggest that for religion to affect trust in specific targets, like government, religion must be contextualized and made salient in relation to that target (H3). This is most clear in the interaction between religious engagement and political churches (Figure 3). These results stress the need to take into account the messages and information communicated in religious contexts to standardize the situations and agents in mind as they consider trust judgments. Thus, in order to test this directly, we designed an experiment that controls the religious messages that religious respondents are exposed to.

### **Experimental Design and Results**

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<sup>10</sup> There are two ways to read this result. One is as stated in the paper following this note. The second is available in the online appendix (Figure A.5), which suggests that political distrust is actually a function of experiencing political disagreement in the congregation.

While the results of our cross-sectional study suggest effects of beliefs and values and the necessity of the application of religion (through political communication, for instance), cross-sectional data are insufficient to understand causality as well as whether the process is dynamic or fixed. Therefore, we constructed a question order experiment embedded in a survey (via the Qualtrics web platform) and distributed it to 600 opt-in respondents through Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk.<sup>11</sup>

We employed a 1x3 experimental design that variably primed inclusive or exclusive religious styles (compared to a control) prior to measuring levels of trust.<sup>12</sup> Each style was captured with 7 statements that, in the inclusive case, framed religious boundaries as if they were low, that faith demands overcoming boundaries to reach new people, and that people are essentially equal and should be treated as individuals. The exclusive religious style was also presented with 7 statements framed to reify boundaries by emphasizing the importance of avoiding sin and remaining pure, the reality of evil in the world, and the mandate to keep company with other members of the faithful.<sup>13</sup> The control condition did not include any of these questions prior to the trust battery.

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<sup>11</sup> Please see the Appendix for further description of the sample. While MT samples are notoriously irreligious, the religious respondents in the sample show roughly the same relationships with political variables as GSS respondents (see Lewis et al. 2015).

<sup>12</sup> Although there was some variation in the composition of the treatment groups, ANOVA tests confirmed that randomization was successful across demographic groups. There was no significant variation in gender ( $p=.57$ ), education ( $p=.47$ ), or age ( $p=.89$ ). We include controls in the models of treatment effects to balance out the cells. This survey included another experimental design that allowed a manipulation check, which 96% passed. We excluded the 3.8% who did not pass this test.

<sup>13</sup> The items in the two religious style batteries were highly internally consistent with alphas of .87 for the inclusive and .93 for the exclusive battery. These levels obtained regardless of placement in the survey (if they were not primed with the battery, it was asked later, well after the trust measures). Moreover, the levels of agreement with the two sets of questions were statistically identical whether primed or not (both  $p>.10$ ). Please see the Appendix for a full description of the religious styles.

Following exposure to one of these treatments (or the control – which was the absence of one of these batteries) we measured respondent’s social and political trust. Our measures mirror those used in the cross-sectional analysis and we tested both single item and index variables to measure social and political trust (see Appendix Table A.3). After measuring levels of trust, respondents in one treatment group were shown the other religious style questions and those in the control were shown both.

Because we believe that religion must be activated to have an effect, we expect to see priming effects. Those primed with the exclusive style should trust less than those not primed. We expect the opposite effect to manifest for those exposed to the inclusive style, who should display more trust than those not primed with them. Our design allows for two contingencies. First, it is possible that these styles are effectively primed only among those who adopt them, i.e., the inclusive style treatment would be most effective for those who agree with those measures. This would indicate that religious styles are relatively settled, but that adherents need to be reminded of them when forming opinions. Second, these effects will be compared between religious and secular respondents in order to see if religious priming only affects trust among the religious. Moreover, this strategy allows us to assess whether there is any backlash against these religious styles by secular respondents. Such a finding would align with work demonstrating a negative reaction to the more exclusive religious style of some religious conservatives (e.g., Hout and Fisher 2002).

### *Results*

A first look at the results suggests there was no systematic, sample-level movement produced by the treatments. A sample-level ANOVA was insignificant for both social ( $F=.97, p=.38, N=554$ ) and political trust ( $F=.24, p=.79, N=555$ ). Nor was there significant movement in the treatment groups for religious compared to non-religious subgroups (all

generally well above  $p < .10$ ). Instead, the treatments were conditionally effective, demonstrating that priming religious styles moved trust judgments in expected ways among religious respondents who adopted the style.

To test this conditional expectation, we interacted the priming treatment with agreement with the religious style as well as a dummy measure of religious identification (0=does not identify as religious, 1=identifies as religious). The interaction results are shown in Figure 4,<sup>14</sup> which shows the marginal effects of agreement (compared to disagreement) with the style when primed (see Appendix Table A.3 for full results). The effects of the inclusive style are in the left pane and the exclusive style effects are in the right pane. Generally, the styles are insignificantly related to trust judgments among the secular “religious nones,” whether primed or not. Moreover, adoption of these religious styles is insignificantly related to trust judgments among religious respondents when not primed. Instead, priming the religious styles affects trust levels only among religious respondents who adopt them. Those whose agreement with a more inclusive style is primed are more trusting of others and of the federal government (i.e., both social and political trust). Religious respondents whose exclusive style is primed are more distrusting of the federal government. The effect on social trust is consistent, but not quite significant at conventional levels.

The effect on political trust in these two scenarios is quite dramatic. From average political trust scores of .41 (0-1 scale), priming exclusive values among those who adopt the style drops trust in the federal government almost to zero. On the other hand, priming inclusion among those who adopt the style raises trust in the federal government almost to

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<sup>14</sup> The model also controlled for age, race, education, and gender; the results suggest that older, more educated, Democratic females trust more than less educated, poorer, Republican males.

one. The effects on social trust are less dramatic, but still present for priming inclusion. Activating an inclusive style boosts social trust by .31 on the 0-1 scale.

[Figure 4 about here]

There are two other features of these results that are worth consideration. First, the levels of social trust in the control conditions are the opposite of what we would expect. They point to the religious styles being correlated with the opposite level of trust from the primed condition. That is, those with a strong inclusive style are a bit less trusting of others, while those who adopt the exclusive style are somewhat more trusting of others. While merely suggestive, this pattern indicates that the social worlds of those who adopt inclusive versus exclusive styles are different. To reinforce this view, it is not surprising to learn that (from other data) those with higher (exclusive) barriers to the world have more insular and agreeable social networks, which are easier to trust, whereas those with lower (inclusive) boundaries have more diverse, disagreeable networks, which are harder to trust.<sup>15</sup> Hence, the baseline for social trust judgments – what “others” implies to people – may be different across groups (see also Delhey et al. 2011; Traunmüller 2011).

Second, there is also some suggestive evidence of a backlash effect. Secular respondents who were primed with the exclusive religious style evinced *more* trust in the federal government compared to the control. While this is just one result in an experiment not designed to test this, the result is consistent with the notion that secular citizens react negatively to representations of a highly exclusive faith. What is interesting is the inference that this exclusive faith is opposed to the federal government, which is not wrong per our

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<sup>15</sup> In survey data from a 2012 US national sample, more exclusive values (measured the same way as in the cross-sectional survey) were related to a decreased likelihood of having a political discussion partner with whom the respondent disagrees and an increased likelihood of having a church-member discussion partner.

cross-sectional results and previous findings (e.g., Daniels and von der Ruhr 2010; Smidt 1999). That highly exclusive faiths in the United States are closely linked to the Republican Party is no secret, with at least one scholar calling the identities of evangelicals and Republicans “fused” (Patrikios 2013).

## **Conclusion**

We approached this endeavor from a novel theoretical perspective in regards to both religion and trust. We argue that the trust logic functions similarly in both the social and the political cases and in order for religion to have an effect it must be adopted and activated. Our understanding of religious explanations of generalized political and social trusts benefits from breaking down the calculus into risk perceptions and willingness to forfeit autonomy. Though religious explanations still follow somewhat traditional lines of categorization – beliefs, values, and activities – they appear to work on different portions of the trust calculus. The belief about evil in the world appears to work to raise perceptions of risk independently from values and experiences that promote the surrendering of autonomy and collective action. What is more, the values we test and organizational experiences appear to work interchangeably in the promotion of outwardly radiating trust.

Religion’s effect on trust calculations came largely from the application of specific worldviews that were activated in religious respondents. This effect could not have been measured simply from traditional denominational measures, measures of attendance, or even religious participation. Instead, the major contributors to explanations of political trust were the religious values that bear on social boundaries. When aggregated into a religious style in the experimental results, these religious approaches could be activated to influence both kinds of trust in theoretically consistent ways. Priming an adopted inclusive style works to lower boundaries and augment trust in government and others. Priming an exclusive style



builds up those boundaries and undermines trust applied beyond high ingroup walls. These values are such a fundamental part of the religious economy, clergy report frequently communicating them, and they have been found to work with a consistent logic on questions as disparate as US foreign policy, immigration, political tolerance, and now trust. Therefore, we suggest that these measures be used more consistently in explanations of political and social phenomena.

This has not just been an exercise to suggest religious variables beyond the 3Bs should be captured, but that our understanding of religious influence should change. This approach highlights the social organizational view of religion in which congregations are communication environments – congregants learn values and their applications and interact with others in ways that may be consequential for their public life. The outcome is that we should expect some dynamism from religious influence. Depending on the needs of the congregations with respect to its social environment, different models of how to do church are presented which can shape congregants' social skins.

Previous work has battled back and forth about whether trust is a unified or differentiated concept (i.e., social vs. political). Our contention is that the logics are no different and if enough of the trust situation could be controlled, then the common dispositional influences would be made clear. The cross-sectional results showcased how different the explanations could be – religious variables had varied connections with social trust and worked in theoretically consistent ways with political trust. The experimental results, on the other hand, suggest that religious styles do have consistent effects on both political and social trust in controlled circumstances. This lends some support to our contention that the types of trust are not as different as previously thought.

The links to political trust were much stronger and theoretically consistent than they were for generalized social trust in both the cross-sectional and experimental results.<sup>16</sup> We suspect that this difference reflects the concreteness of the trust target. If there is an interaction of identity and context in shaping social trust (Delhey et al. 2011; Traunmüller 2011), then we would expect that variation in the baseline “other” in social trust calculations could undermine consistent effects from population-level religious worldviews and experiences. There are hints of this in the experimental data, where those who adopt an inclusive religious style have somewhat less trust in the control condition, whereas those adopting more exclusive styles have more trust in the control. This is not what we would expect if their modal social other was identical. To enable better predictions and theorizing about social trust we need to confront survey design challenges to more effectively anchor social trust questions as well as statistical or design demands to account for the contextual variation that would shape conceptions of the social other.

A final consideration is the placement of questions in surveys. The simple placement of a battery of religious questions was enough to goad religious respondents into theoretically consistent trust responses. This may not be a problem for attitudes that are less flexible over time, perhaps such as abortion attitudes. However, given orientations toward social life that are expected to be updated with new experiences with others and institutions, religious experiences and mandates may not be at the forefront of the mind. At the same time, reminders may be necessary in order to make a determination of how religion can affect social and political behavior.

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<sup>16</sup> Issues caused by measurement error could be at fault as suggested previously. Not only do the Social Trust OLS Models return smaller adjusted  $R^2$  values for both the cross-sectional and experimental designs (.040 and .062 respectively), the control measures which were significant for each political trust model exhibit considerable variation and movement around 0 in the social trust models (see Table A.2).

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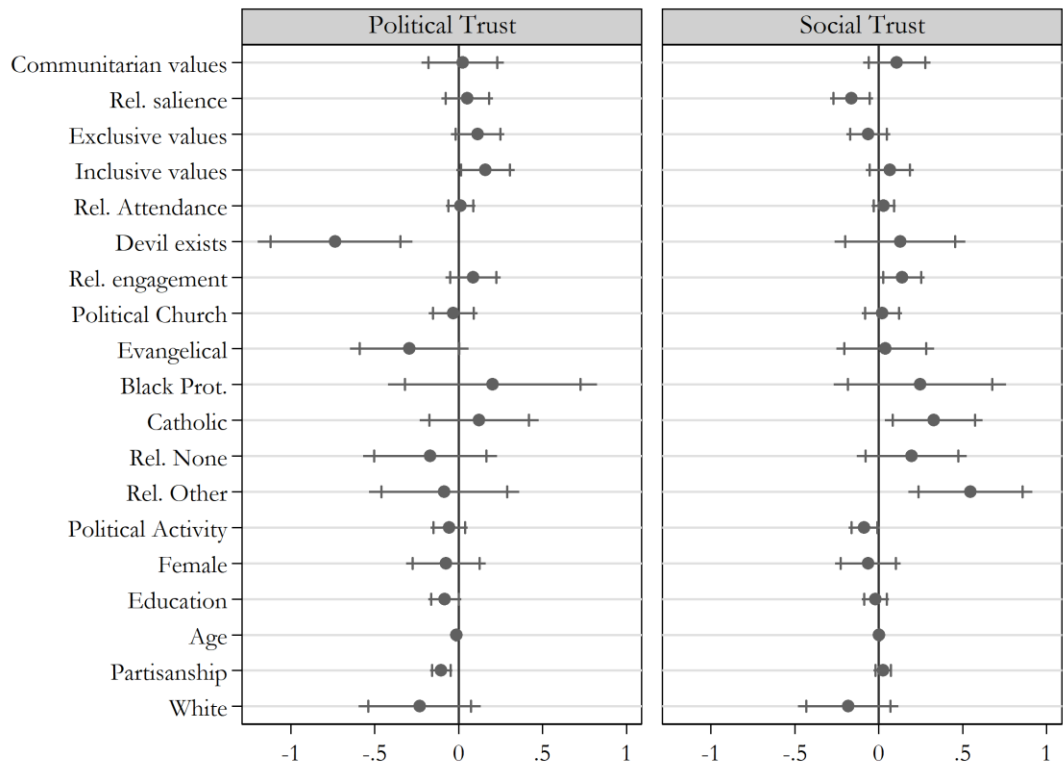
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**Figure 1** – OLS Estimates of Political and Social Trust Effects (cross-sectional data)

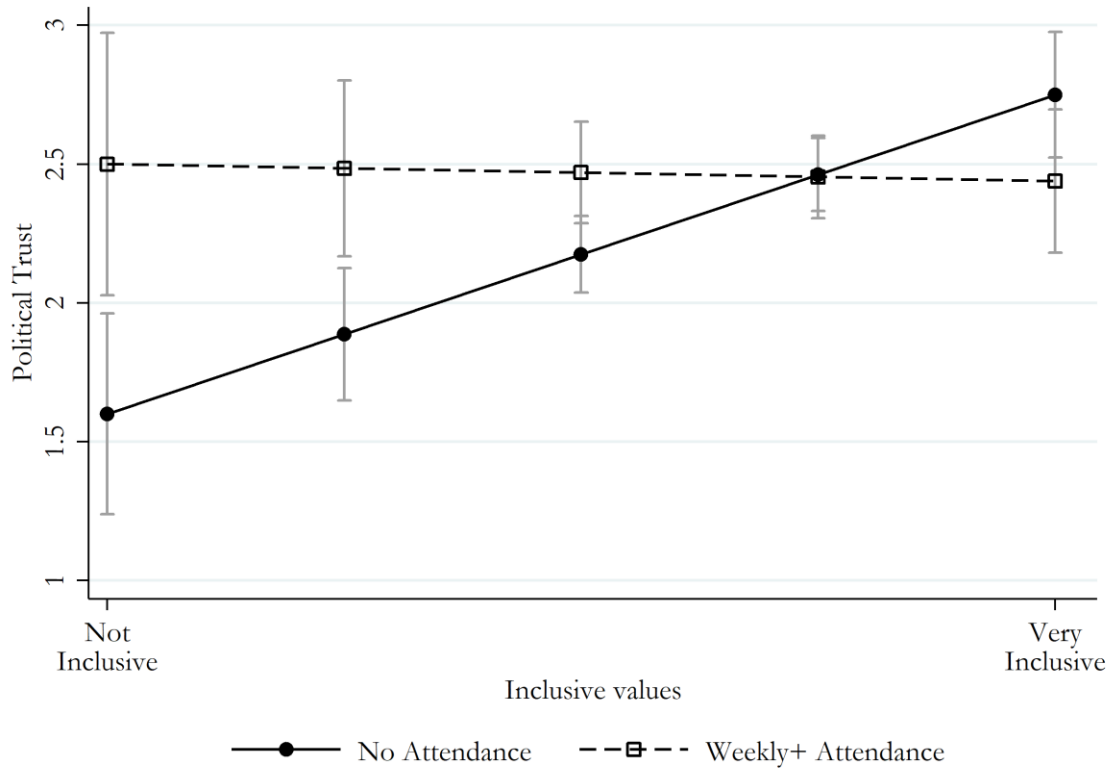


Source: 2012 cross-sectional data.

Note: 95% and 90% confidence intervals shown (outer limit is 95%). Interaction results shown in Figures 2-3.

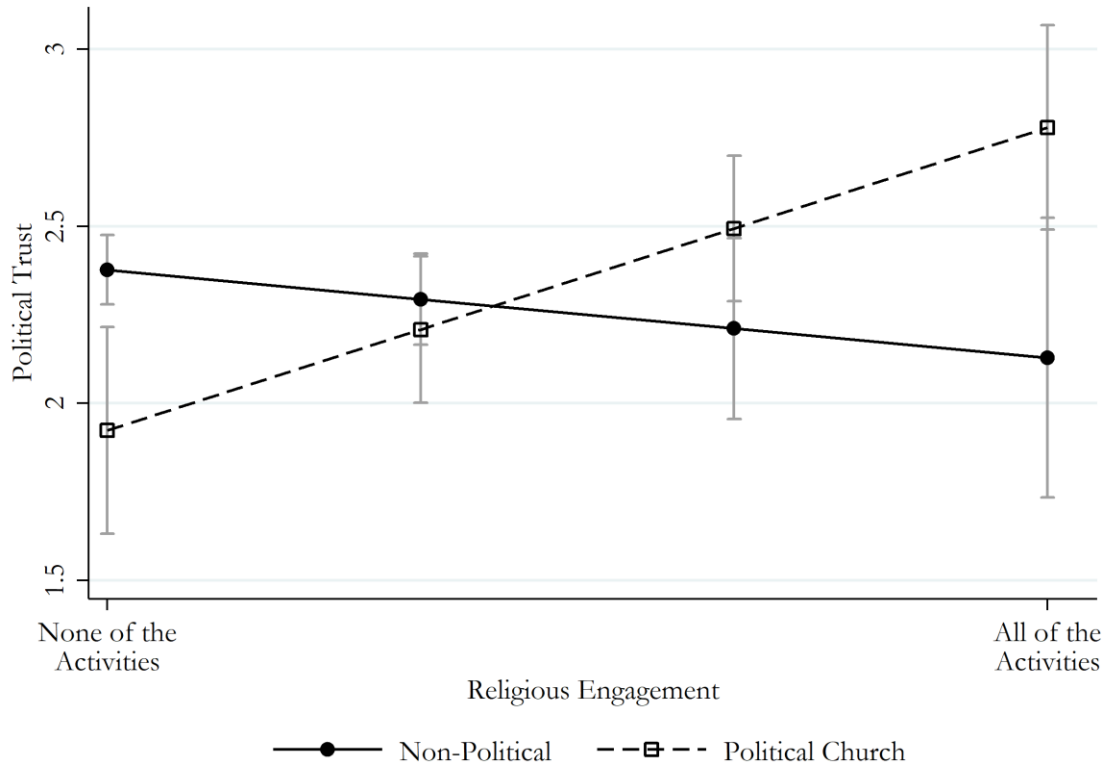


**Figure 2** – Inclusive Values Only Change the Political Trust of More Infrequent Worship Attenders (cross-sectional data)



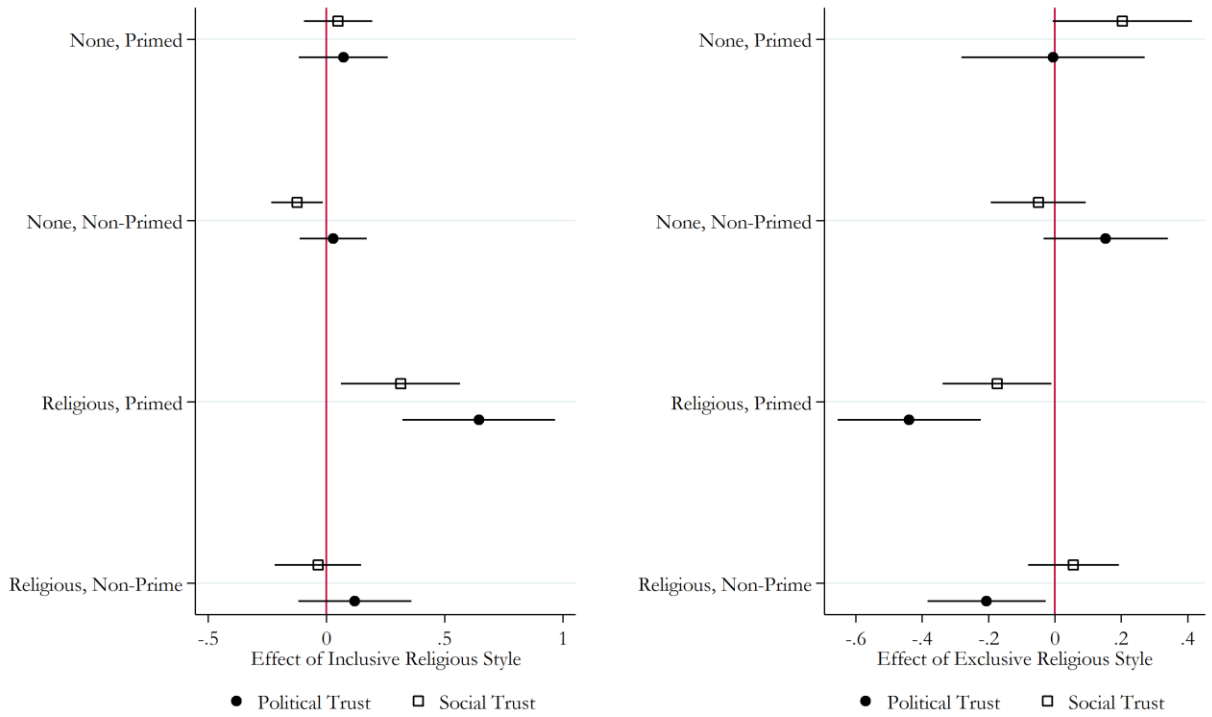
Source: 2012 cross-sectional data.  
 Note: 90% confidence.

**Figure 3 – Politics in Church without Church Collective Action Impedes Political Trust**  
(cross-sectional data)



Source: 2012 cross-sectional data  
Note: 90% confidence.

**Figure 4** – Interactive Effects of Experimental Activation of Inclusive and Exclusive Religious Styles on Political and Social Trust (Marginal Effects of Agreeing with the Treatments when Primed, 90% CIs)



Source: 2015 experimental data.

Note: See Table A.3 in the online Appendix for the full model results.