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# A Clash of Civilizations?

## The Influence of Religion on Public Opinion of U.S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East

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The authors argue in this study that religious beliefs play a significant role in predicting American public opinion on foreign policy issues in the Middle East. Their findings reveal that Evangelical Christians have remained strong supporters of a hawkish foreign policy toward the Middle East, even as overall public support for the Iraq War declines. They also find that Evangelicals are among the strongest supporters of Israel and hold more negative views of Islam than others. These results reinforce the growing importance of the “faith factor” in public opinion and American politics as a whole.

**Keywords:** *Evangelical Christians; foreign policy; Middle East; public opinion; religion*

In a November 2006 article of the *American Political Science Review*, Kenneth Wald and Clyde Wilcox called for political scientists to “rediscover” the “faith factor.” They wrote, “Apart from economics and geography, it is hard to find a social science that has given less attention to religion than political science” (Wald and Wilcox 2006, 523). The authors noted, for example, that the *American Journal of Sociology* and the *American Sociological Review* each published four times as many articles with a religious title as the *American Political Science Review* did from 1906 to 2002.

Of the religion articles that have been published across social science disciplines, most of the scholarship during the past two decades has focused on religious–secular conflicts concerning so-called culture war issues, such as abortion, gay rights, and pornography (Hunter 1991; Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox 1992; Wald 1992; Guth et al. 1996; Layman and Carmines 1997; Sherkat and Ellison 1997; Layman 2001; White 2003). However, there has been considerably less attention devoted to the influence of religion in shaping public opinion on foreign policy issues. As one noted scholar concluded, “the role of religion in explaining attitudes toward issues of international relations is somewhat limited” (Jelen 1994, 391). More recently, James Guth, an expert on religion and politics, observed, “Whatever progress over

the past decade in explaining the sources of foreign policy attitudes, there have been few systematic efforts to include religious variables” (2006, 3).

These shortcomings, particularly in the political science literature, point to the need for additional research on religion’s role in shaping public opinion on foreign policy issues. To fill this gap in the literature, we examine the role of religion in shaping U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. We focus on the Middle East because it is the region that has most dominated the public agenda since the Iraq War began in 2003. There are also strong reasons to suspect that religious beliefs are especially important to understanding public opinion toward U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. First, several prominent Evangelical Christian leaders (e.g., James Dobson, Jerry Falwell, and Pat Robertson) have been vocal supporters of the war and President Bush’s foreign policy in the region. By contrast, Catholic bishops, the National Council of Churches, several constituent mainline denominations, and many black Protestant denominations have publicly opposed the Iraq War. These elite cues would suggest that there might be distinct religious differences among Americans on issues such as the Iraq War or Middle East foreign policy issues more generally.

Second, biblical interpretation may also shape foreign policy attitudes. Those with a literal interpretation of the Bible believe that the land of Palestine

permanently belongs to Israel and that world conflict, especially conflict in the Middle East, is a possible sign of Armageddon and the imminent return of Christ as described in the book of Revelation. As Boyer (2003) explained, "For many believers in biblical prophecy, the Bush administration's go-it-alone foreign policy, hands-off attitude toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and proposed war on Iraq are not simply actions in the national self-interest or an extension of the war on terrorism, but part of an unfolding divine plan."

For these reasons, we see ample justification to heed Wald and Wilcox's (2006) call to "rediscover" the "faith factor" in the study of American public opinion on foreign policy. While several scholars have examined or commented on the importance of religion in shaping public opinion on foreign policy issues in general (see, e.g., Hero 1973; Wittkopf 1990; Ribuffo 1998) and foreign policy in the Middle East (Mayer 2004; Boyer 2005; Daniels 2005; Guth et al. 2005; Smidt 2005; Phillips 2006), our study is unique in that it relies on data from surveys taken after overall public support began to drop significantly for the Iraq War. Using data from the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, we find that religion is a significant factor in predicting support for the Bush administration's increasingly unpopular Middle East policy. Specifically, we find that Evangelicals stand out as the strongest supporters of a hawkish foreign policy in the Middle East, despite sharp declines in overall public support for the Iraq War.

We also examine public opinion toward the state of Israel, which many Evangelicals consider critical to the second coming of Christ, as well as attitudes toward Islam as a religion. Our results again indicate that Evangelicals have significantly different attitudes than Americans do with other religious beliefs. Evangelicals express more sympathy for Israel and a greater likelihood of describing Islam as the world's most violent religion. Our results are important because they provide evidence that even in the face of ever-trying circumstances in Iraq, religion remains a significant variable in understanding public opinion toward American foreign policy in the Middle East.

### **Public Opinion of Foreign Policy**

The early literature on foreign policy was concerned primarily with public opinion about World War I and II and the Cold War. A common focus was the explicitly normative concern over the nexus

between public opinion on foreign policy matters and the decisions that leaders make as well as characterizing the American public as isolationist or internationalist. The foundation for this work was Walter Lippmann's general tracts on public opinion, published after World War I (Lippmann 1922, 1925). In 1950, Gabriel Almond narrowed the focus and expanded on Lippmann's work in what many consider the pioneering study on public opinion of foreign policy (Almond 1960). For several decades, an "Almond-Lippmann consensus" dominated thinking about this subject (Holsti 2006, 55-88). The prevailing wisdom was that most people do not pay a great deal of attention to foreign affairs. At least partly as the result of this, most experts considered public opinion about foreign policy to be highly volatile and "so lacking in structure and coherence that they might best be described as 'non-attitudes'" (Holsti 2006, 58). Research on foreign policy opinion was consistent with the popular notion that mass opinion lacked ideological foundation or constraint (Converse 1964).

Using data from Gallup, John Mueller (2002) proposed "eleven propositions" regarding our understanding of foreign policy opinion. In addition to finding some support for the Almond-Lippmann consensus (in particular, that the public still pays little attention to international affairs), he suggested that the public has little tolerance for losing American lives in matters that lack a direct link to national security. This is particularly relevant to our study of foreign policy attitudes toward the war in Iraq and the Middle East in general. While many equate foreign policy in these areas to the general war on terror, the connection is not necessarily straightforward. This might explain why overall support for continued efforts in Iraq has waned as the conflict has progressed.

Although our understanding of foreign policy opinion has advanced during the past few decades, relatively few studies have examined the sources of foreign policy beliefs (Holsti 2006, 63; but see Hero 1973; Martin 1999), including the influence of religious factors (Jelen 1994; Guth 2006). Nevertheless, there is reason to believe that religious beliefs will have an effect on public opinion of foreign policy issues. Almond noted, for example, that some Protestants (e.g., the American Council of Christian Churches) took a "more conservative and nationalist position on domestic and foreign policy" (1960, 180). Other studies confirm Almond's assertion. Jelen (1994) found that Evangelicals were hawkish on a number of international issues. In a study of public opinion on foreign policy from 1974 to 1986, Wittkopf (1990) found

that while religion was not an especially important variable, Protestants were generally more conservative in foreign policy matters than were Catholics and seculars. Ribuffo (1998) came to a similar conclusion but asserted that foreign policy hawks tended to be more theologically conservative Protestants, whereas doves were likely to be theological liberals (see also Daniels 2005). Most of these studies, however, are qualitative in nature or rely primarily on descriptive data, and none are current enough to account for post-Iraq public opinion on foreign policy matters.

Beyond these observations in the literature, there is good reason to expect that some specific religious variables should matter. We expect that those who consider themselves Evangelical Christians should demonstrate greater support for a hard-line stance on Middle East policy as well as continued support for the war in Iraq. There are several reasons to expect this.

First, many Evangelical leaders have taken strong public positions in support of the war in Iraq. For example, Pat Robertson, the founder of the Christian Coalition, branded Islam a “bloody, brutal type of religion,” suggesting that Americans, “especially the American left,” need to “wake up” to the “danger” of Islam (Robertson labeled Islam 2006). Franklin Graham, son of Billy Graham, stated “that Islam is an evil and wicked religion” (Nightline report 2006). Jerry Falwell was quoted as saying, “I think Muhammad was a terrorist” (he later apologized; Falwell sorry 2002). And Gary Bauer, the president of the organization American Values—a group with close ties to the Evangelical community—suggested on more than one occasion that the United States and the Middle East are in a “clash of civilizations” (Goldberg 2002; Slavin 2002; Whitehead 2004). Indeed, a survey of 350 Evangelical leaders found that 45 percent agreed with the statement, “The war against terrorism is basically a war between the West and Islam” (Evangelical views of Islam 2003).

There is also evidence to suggest that Evangelical parishioners adopt these same positions, which would be consistent with some research on the role of elite cues in shaping public opinion (Zaller 1992). For example, a significant percentage of Evangelical parishioners, similar to Evangelical leaders, believe that “the nation is faced with an apocalyptic threat” (Yankelovich 2005). In addition, a spring 2003 poll conducted by the Pew Research Center reported that 17 percent of Evangelicals said that their religious leaders had a “great deal” of influence on how they viewed the conflict in Iraq, and 33 percent said religious leaders had “some” influence. Among

non-Evangelicals, only 6 percent said their religious leaders had a “great deal” of influence on the same subject, and 16 percent said their religious leaders had “some” influence (Pew Research Center 2003).

A second reason that we expect Evangelicals to support hard-line policies in the Middle East more than would other Americans is that these policies are generally consistent with a belief in “dispensational premillennialism” (also referred to as “premillennial dispensationalism”). Rooted in interpretations of the books of Daniel and Revelation, dispensational premillennialism predicts that an epic battle between the forces of good (Christians) and evil (the Anti-Christ). This battle (including a shorter period known as the Tribulation) will end with the second coming of Christ, who will vanquish the Anti-Christ and establish 1,000 years of peace on earth (see Kilde 2004; Weber 2004). The doctrine also requires the existence of an Israeli state and foretells the destruction of Babylon, the ancient city that Saddam Hussein had rebuilt in the 1980s. The doctrine was first popularized by John Nelson Darby in Great Britain during the nineteenth century and later Cyrus Scofield in the United States, whose annotated version of the Bible (known as the Scofield Bible, first published in 1909 and revised in 1917) became a main source of dispensational premillennial eschatology and fundamentalist teaching (Boyer 2003; Wagner 2003; Schaefer 2004). Recent empirical evidence suggests that many Evangelicals take dispensational premillennial doctrine seriously. One poll found that 71 percent of Evangelicals believe that Armageddon will unfold as described by the book of Revelation (Princeton Research Associates 1999).

To appreciate the influence of this doctrine further, one can look to the success of the *Left Behind* book series by Timothy LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins. These novels “depict the end of the world from a fundamentalist perspective” (Mead 2006) and chronicle the struggles of several born-again Christians as they battle forces of the Anti-Christ (Forbes 2004). Since 1995, more than 60 million copies of these books have been sold. Almost one in ten adults (9 percent) and almost one in five of all born-again Christians (19 percent) have read at least one of the books in the series (Forbes 2004). Similar books (e.g., Lindsey and Carlson 1970; Duty 1975) containing prophetic, anti-Muslim messages are also popular with Evangelicals (Boyer 2003).

A third consideration is that some two-thirds of Evangelicals interpret the Bible literally, which might affect their positions on foreign policy matters,

notably support for Israel. Biblical literalists believe that the Bible states unequivocally that God gave the land of Palestine to the Jewish people and that this gift is permanently valid. One commonly cited passage supporting this belief comes from the book of Jeremiah 30:3 (King James version): "For, lo, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will bring the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the Lord: and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave their fathers, and they shall possess it." Greater support for Israel, in other words, could be the result of greater adherence to Biblical literalism.

Indeed, literal biblical beliefs seem to have an effect on public opinion toward the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. For example, one recent survey suggests that 63 percent of Evangelicals believe that events in Israel are essential to fulfilling biblical prophecy (Religion and politics 2003). Another survey reports that more than one in five Americans (21 percent) cited "religious beliefs" as the primary reason for their position on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. This reason was cited more frequently than personal experience (8 percent), the views of family or friends (4 percent), or education (19 percent). Only the media had a greater influence (35 percent) than religion (Pew Research Center 2006b).

Finally, there is some recent research that has examined the connection between religious beliefs and foreign policy attitudes. Corwin Smidt (2005) examined how religion influenced the American public's attitudes on Islam as well as support for the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq that began in 2003 (see also Cimino 2005). Using data from late 2002, Smidt found that religiosity, including Evangelical affiliation and whether an individual was "born again" was significantly associated with a more hawkish view on removing Saddam Hussein from power with force. Evangelical Christians further held a more negative overall view of Muslims and were more likely to agree that Islam was a violent religion.

Other religious affiliations also might have an effect on the public's foreign policy opinions. While Jews were fairly divided about the Iraq War (Cooperman 2003), many other Christians, including black Protestants, Catholics, and some mainline Protestants, opposed the war before military action even began. As noted earlier, the National Council of Churches, which represents 50 million members from various different faiths that include thirty-six Protestant (e.g., Lutherans, Episcopalians, and Methodists) and Orthodox denominations, publicly opposed the Iraq

War, as did the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, which represents 65 million Roman Catholics (Nieves 2002). Church leaders in the African American community were also very active in organizing their opposition to the war. Groups, such as Black Voices for Peace, worked in close alliance with African American churches (St. George and Fernandez 2003). Even culturally conservative black churches, such as the Church of God in Christ (which represents some 6 million followers), publicly opposed the Iraq War (Milbank 2003).

Public opinion concerning foreign policy in the Middle East more generally, such as support for Israel, is likely to reveal some religious divisions as well. Previous research, for example, indicates that Jews are, not surprisingly, very sympathetic and supportive of Israel (see, e.g., Eizenstat 1990; Green 2004). Mainline Protestants are also sympathetic toward Israel, as are Roman Catholics, although to a slightly lesser degree (Pew Research Center 2005). However, unlike Evangelicals, very few mainline Protestants and Catholics support Israel on the basis of religious or biblical grounds (i.e., they believe that God gave the land to the Jews). As a recent Pew survey showed, 69 percent of Evangelicals believe that God gave Israel to the Jews compared to a much smaller 27 percent of mainline Protestants and Catholics. Black Protestants were much closer to white Evangelicals, with 60 percent reporting that they believe God gave Israel to the Jews (Pew Research Center 2006b). Yet despite their religious beliefs, black Protestants are typically among the least sympathetic toward Israel (Green 2004).

Most of the previous research on religion and foreign policy opinion toward the Middle East, however, has been performed before public support began to drop significantly for the Iraq War. According to the Gallup Organization, it was not until late November 2004 that public support for the war dropped to less than 50 percent, and it was not until June 2005 that public support dropped to less than 40 percent. In this environment, we anticipate that religious convictions become very significant to understanding public opinion on foreign policy in the Middle East. Rising death tolls, spiraling financial costs, and negative media reports about the Iraq War should have the least effect on Evangelicals because of their firm religious beliefs that conflict in the Middle East is part of a divine plan. We therefore hypothesize that Evangelicals will show the most distinctive views on issues related to foreign policy in the Middle East.

## Data and Method

To conduct our analysis, we rely on data from three surveys from the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press: the 2005 News Interest Index/Religion Overflow Survey, the 2005 Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, and the March 2006 News Interest Index Survey. The News Interest Index/Religion Overflow Survey occurred from July 13 to 17, 2005. The results of the survey are based on telephone interviews drawn from a nationally representative sample of 1,502 adults (eighteen years of age or older) in the continental United States. The margin of sampling error for the data is  $\pm 3$  percent. The survey on Religion & Public Life took place from July 7 to 17, 2005. Data for this survey came from telephone interviews drawn from a nationally representative sample of 2,000 adults (eighteen years of age or older) in the continental United States. The margin of sampling error for the data is  $\pm 2.4$  percent. The March 2006 News Interest Index Survey occurred from March 8 to 12 and came from telephone interviews drawn from a nationally representative sample of 1,405 adults (eighteen years of age or older) in the continental United States. The margin of error for the data is  $\pm 3$  percent. (For more information about these surveys, see <http://people-press.org>.)

These three surveys allow us to examine public opinion on seven foreign policy–related questions. We selected questions that deal primarily with the Middle East, given that the region is a major focus of biblical prophecies. The first four questions come from the 2005 News Interest Index/Religion Overflow Survey. Three of these four questions cover the specific policies of George W. Bush. For these survey items, respondents were asked, “Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling: (1) The situation in Iraq; (2) Terrorist threats; (3) The nation’s foreign policy?” The fourth item from the survey made no specific mention of Bush, asking respondents, “Do you think the U.S. made the right decision or the wrong decision in using military force against Iraq?”

The next two questions come from the 2005 Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. These are more general questions about American foreign policy in Israel. The two questions ask, (1) “In the dispute between Israel and the Palestinians, which side do you sympathize with more, Israel or the Palestinians?” (2) “Thinking about the Mideast situation these days, do you think the U.S. should take Israel’s side more, less or about as much as it has in the past?” The final question

comes from the March 2006 News Interest Index Survey. This item asked, “Which one of the religions that I name do you think of as most violent—Christianity, Islam, Judaism, or Hinduism?”

These seven questions serve as the dependent variables in this study. We coded 1 for any answer that indicated approval for George W. Bush’s policies, the Iraq War, or support for Israel. We coded all negative responses toward Bush, the Iraq War, or support for Israel as 0. Respondents who answered “don’t know” or refused were not included in the analysis. In the item that measured views on the most violent religion, we coded those who listed Islam as 1 and all other responses as 0. Because of the binary nature of the seven dependent variables, we rely on maximum likelihood estimation (probit analysis) to test for the effects of religion, while controlling for political, social, and demographic factors.

The primary independent variables in our analysis are a series of religious measures. Our study takes an ethno-religious approach, which is simply a shorthand reference for combining religious denominations and cultural attributes (e.g., Hispanic Catholics, black Protestants, or white Evangelicals). We believe this approach is the most logical for studying foreign policy opinion given that ethno-religious conflicts are often at the center of international conflict. Using this perspective, we categorize survey respondents into the major ethno-religious group to which they reported belonging. These include (in no particular order): (1) mainline Protestant, (2) Evangelical Christian, (3) black Protestant, (4) white Catholic, (5) nonwhite Catholic, (6) other Christian, (7) Jewish, (8) other non-Christian, or (9) no religious affiliation (for an excellent discussion on these various different groups, see Steensland et al. 2000).

The Evangelical Christian measure was constructed from two religion questions. The first question asked, “What is your religious preference—Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Mormon, or an orthodox church such as the Greek or Russian Orthodox Church?” The second question was a follow-up for those who identified themselves as Protestant, Roman Catholic, Mormon, Orthodox Christian, “other religion,” or did not know. It asked, “Would you describe yourself as a ‘born-again’ Evangelical Christian, or not?” Those who answered “yes” were coded as Evangelical (with the exception of black respondents; see explanation below).

A significant portion of the black Protestants in our surveys identified themselves as Evangelical Christians. There was also a small amount of overlap

**Table 1**  
**Religion and Public Opinion on Foreign Policy in the Middle East**

Variable	Approve of Bush's Handling of Iraq	Approve of Bush's Handling of War on Terror	Approve of Bush's Foreign Policy	Agree Use of Force in Iraq Was Right Decision	Sympathy Toward Israel	Agree That United States Should Take Israel's Side More Often	Agree Islam Is the Most Violent Religion
Evangelical	0.517 (.170)**	0.441 (.169)**	0.551 (.179)**	0.380 (.117)***	0.539 (.143)***	0.392 (.157)*	0.327 (.150)*
Black Protestant	-0.119 (.295)	0.277 (.249)	0.024 (.288)	-0.231 (.187)	-0.238 (.211)	0.070 (.236)	0.116 (.149)
White Catholic	0.107 (.184)	0.139 (.175)	-0.056 (.190)	0.119 (.120)	-0.077 (.156)	-0.329 (.187)	0.450 (.419)
Nonwhite Catholic	-0.441 (.574)	-0.151 (.456)	-0.582 (.576)	-0.057 (.267)	-0.231 (.373)	0.368 (.339)	-0.030 (.239)
Other Christian	0.001 (.229)	-0.343 (.219)	-0.121 (.237)	0.302 (.156)	0.048 (.202)	-0.200 (.220)	-0.462 (.369)
Jewish	-0.665 (.727)	-1.139 (.706)	-0.834 (.758)	-0.345 (.338)	1.115 (.556)*	1.034 (.340)**	-0.194 (.388)
Other non-Christian	-0.471 (.359)	0.006 (.286)	-0.412 (.351)	-0.252 (.203)	-1.121 (.349)***	0.006 (.313)	0.045 (.189)
No religious affiliation	-0.081 (.195)	-0.088 (.185)	-0.228 (.202)	-0.157 (.126)	-0.349 (.163)*	-0.118 (.211)	-0.242 (.330)
Republican	1.420 (.140)***	1.219 (.150)***	1.351 (.149)***	1.220 (.100)***	0.390 (.120)***	-0.030 (.134)	0.541 (.138)***
Democrat	-0.571 (.146)***	-0.578 (.130)***	-0.796 (.150)***	-0.424 (.089)***	0.003 (.122)	-0.213 (.143)	-0.044 (.129)
Male	0.099 (.119)	0.098 (.114)	-0.057 (.126)	0.110 (.077)	0.115 (.099)	0.327 (.110)**	0.338 (.108)**
Education	-0.016 (.041)	-0.048 (.038)	-0.045 (.042)	-0.076 (.026)**	-0.038 (.032)	-0.104 (.036)**	0.134 (.037)**
Income	0.032 (.031)	0.034 (.030)	0.046 (.033)	-0.004 (.020)	0.004 (.025)	-0.040 (.027)	0.024 (.026)
Constant	-0.761 (.239)***	-0.047 (.227)	-0.343 (.246)	0.069 (.158)	-0.016 (.213)	-0.455 (.227)*	-0.670 (.218)**
LR chi-square	308.49***	226.90***	308.59***	443.70***	98.66***	62.19***	74.85***
n	690	677	642	1,395	742	847	673

Source: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press's July 2005 News Interest Index/Religion Overflow Survey, July 2005 Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, and March 2006 News Interest Index Survey.

Note: Coefficients are probit estimates. Standard errors are in parentheses.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$  (two-tailed).

between other Christian faiths, such as Catholicism, and self-identification as an Evangelical. Because we treated self-identified Evangelicals as a mutually exclusive category, we had to apply a decision-rule in our coding. Based on the previous research of Steensland et al. (2000), Wilcox and Larson (2006), and Guth (2006), we treated self-identified black Protestants as unique from nonblack Evangelicals and coded non-Protestant self-identified Evangelicals as non-Evangelical Christians, as they fall outside the agreed-on definition of what constitutes the American Evangelical Christian base (see Wilcox and Larson 2006). For instance, the few Catholics who identified themselves as Evangelical Christians were not coded as Evangelicals but as Catholics. We treat mainline Protestants as the reference category for our analysis. We dummy code the remaining nine groups (with 1 indicating membership in the group and 0 indicating no membership in the group).

Of course, foreign policy opinion is likely to differ beyond religious lines. Foreign policy is often one of the most contentious partisan issues in American politics (Meernick and Ault 2001). We therefore control for partisan identification by including a dummy measure for Republican and Democratic respondents, leaving Independents/no preference as the reference category. We also control for the standard socioeconomic and

demographic factors that are common in most studies that focus on public opinion. These include controls for gender (coded 1 for *male* and 0 for *female*), education (coded 1 to 7, with higher values indicating greater levels of education), and income (coded 1 to 9, with higher values indicating greater levels of income).

### The Effect of Religion on Foreign Policy Opinion

The results displayed in Table 1 confirm that Evangelicals have significantly different foreign policy opinions than other Americans on all of the issues that we examined in our analysis. As expected, Evangelicals are more likely to approve of Bush's handling of the Iraq War, the war on terror, and Bush's overall foreign policy than other Americans are. Most impressive, however, is that this relationship holds even after controlling for the respondents' party identification. This confirms the powerful and independent influence of religion in shaping public opinion on what have become the most salient foreign policy matters during the past few years.

The next set of questions deals with force in Iraq and relations with Israel. Once again, there is a statistically significant relationship for Evangelicals.

The results indicate that Evangelicals are more likely than other Americans to agree that the use of force in Iraq was the right decision, and they are more likely than other Americans to have sympathy for Israel in its dispute with the Palestinians and to agree that the United States should take Israel's side more often in the Middle East. Finally, as the final column in Table 1 indicates, Evangelicals are significantly more likely than other Americans to agree that Islam is a more violent religion than Christianity, Judaism, or Hinduism.

Overall, Table 1 demonstrates that Evangelical affiliation is the only religious indicator that consistently influences public opinion on foreign policy issues. The only other religious variable that significantly influences more than one of the seven dependent variables is Judaism, which is positively associated with sympathy toward Israel and agreement that the United States should take Israel's side more often. The party identification variables are highly significant, but it is important to note again that the powerful effects of these political predictors do not diminish the effects of Evangelicalism.

Table 2 summarizes the predicted effects of the Evangelical variable on each of the dependent variables from Table 1 while holding all control measures at their mean values. The cell entries are the probability of a positive outcome (coded 1) in each probit model while varying the Evangelical predictor (Evangelical versus non-Evangelical). As the estimates indicate, the impact of the Evangelical variable on each dependent variable is quite impressive. The predicted differences between Evangelicals and non-Evangelicals reach at least .10 for all seven dependent variables, and in some instances, the differences are more than twice that level. For example, the probability of approving of President Bush's foreign policy jumps from .39 ( $\pm$ .03) for non-Evangelicals to .60 ( $\pm$ .06) for Evangelicals even when the model controls for all other independent variables (including party identification). Furthermore, sympathy for Israel jumps from .47 ( $\pm$ .02) for non-Evangelicals to .67 ( $\pm$ .04) for Evangelicals. These rather large effects confirm the powerful and substantive significance of Evangelical beliefs on foreign policy opinion.

## Discussion

Our results confirm that there is a connection between religion and foreign policy opinion. Specifically, Evangelical Christians are more supportive of President Bush's foreign policy on the Iraq War and his overall foreign policy. Also, we found that

**Table 2**  
**Predicted Probabilities for Public Opinion on Foreign Policy in the Middle East**

	Non-Evangelical	Evangelical	Difference
Approve of Bush's handling of Iraq	.35 ( $\pm$ .03)	.55 ( $\pm$ .05)	.20
Approve of Bush's handling of war on terror	.55 ( $\pm$ .03)	.71 ( $\pm$ .05)	.16
Approve of Bush's foreign policy	.39 ( $\pm$ .03)	.60 ( $\pm$ .06)	.21
Agree use of force in Iraq was right decision	.49 ( $\pm$ .02)	.64 ( $\pm$ .04)	.15
Sympathy toward Israel	.47 ( $\pm$ .02)	.67 ( $\pm$ .04)	.20
Agree that United States should take Israel's side more often	.13 ( $\pm$ .01)	.23 ( $\pm$ .04)	.10
Agree Islam is the most violent religion	.67 ( $\pm$ .02)	.78 ( $\pm$ .04)	.11

Source: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press's July 2005 News Interest Index/Religion Overflow Survey, July 2005 Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, and March 2006 News Interest Index Survey.

Note: The predicted probabilities are based on the multivariate results in Table 1, with all other variables held at their mean. We relied on CLARIFY to generate the estimates (see King, Tomz, and Wittenberg 2000; Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2001 for more information). The standard errors generated by CLARIFY are in parentheses.

Evangelicals are more likely to support Israel and to view Islam as the most violent religion. A few earlier studies have pointed to similar relationships, but our findings confirm that Evangelical support for the Bush administration's hawkish approach to foreign policy has not waned in the years following the 2003 invasion in Iraq even though American military deaths and Iraqi casualties have been much greater in number than most anticipated. It is important to note, however, that since the 2003 invasion of Iraq, support for the war among Evangelicals has declined overall, but at a much slower rate than that of the general public. Aggregate data from the Pew Research Center demonstrate that at the outset of the invasion, Evangelical support for President Bush's handling of the conflict was only 5 points higher than the general public's. By late 2005, this gap had grown to 13 percent.

As our results indicate, the effect of Evangelical beliefs on foreign policy attitudes toward the Middle East remained statistically significant even after controlling for the respondent's party identification. This suggests that



Evangelicals' foreign policy opinions transcend partisanship and tap into a larger religious effect. These findings are important because they provide confirmatory evidence that Evangelical affiliation does play a significant role in influencing public opinion on foreign policy.

Indeed, the outbreak of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah in the summer of 2006 highlighted once again that Evangelicals perceive these conflicts differently than do other Americans. Consistent with the findings in this article, almost two-thirds of white Evangelicals (59 percent) were sympathetic to Israel in that conflict, as compared to 33 percent of main-line Protestants and only 24 percent of seculars (Pew Research Center 2006a). One can only speculate as to the extent of the influence that Evangelical support had in the U.S. decision not to take a more hard-line stance in pressuring Israel to desist in their attacks.

In closing, we hope that rediscovering the faith or religion factor will generate new inquiries into how public opinion, guided by religion, affects actual U.S. foreign policy. While we have demonstrated that Evangelical opinion on foreign policy is distinctive, we can only speculate as to whether elite cues, biblical beliefs, or other religious influences are the driving force for these beliefs. Future studies could certainly explore that issue in greater detail. It also will be important to watch how Evangelical opinion on foreign policy may influence the 2008 presidential election. Given the continued war on terror and the ongoing conflict in Iraq, it is all but certain that foreign policy and national security will be salient issues in the presidential election of 2008.

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