

Violence With a Conscience: Religiosity and Moral Certainty as Predictors of Support for Violent Warfare

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Objective: Emerging research on the moral licensing effect implies that increasing a person's moral certainty may decrease concerns about the moral consequences of violent warfare. Therefore, if religion increases moral certainty, then it may also contribute to support for violent warfare. The present experiment tested the extent to which religion's contribution to moral certainty explains participants' support for the United States' war in the Middle East. **Method:** Ninety-three predominantly Catholic and Protestant participants from a university setting completed the present study. The study was completed across two separate days. On the first day of the experiment, individual differences in a variety of types of religiosity (e.g., prayer), and moral certainty were measured. On the second day of the experiment, the perception that the United States' war in the Middle East is a religious or geopolitical conflict was experimentally manipulated, and support for violent warfare was measured. **Results:** Regression analyses and an analysis of variance yielded support for the moral certainty hypothesis. As predicted, greater religiosity relates to greater moral certainty, and greater moral certainty strengthens the (positive) relation between religiosity and support for violent warfare. Furthermore, moral certainty is a stronger predictor of support for violent warfare in religious conflict than it is in geopolitical conflict. **Conclusion:** The results support the moral certainty hypothesis and suggest that stronger moral certainty (1) predicts greater support for violent warfare, (2) is an underlying moderator of the relation between religiosity and support for violent warfare, and (3) is particularly influential in religious conflict.

Keywords: moral certainty, religion, violent warfare, moral licensing

Many of the world's enduring conflicts involve religion. Israel and Palestine, India and Pakistan, Ireland and Northern Ireland, the Sunnis and the Shiites, the Holocaust, and the Crusades indicate that conflict incited in the name of religion can have far-reaching and devastating consequences (Juergensmeyer, 2003). The rash of religious terrorism in the past decade sparked an interest in the psychology of religiosity and its relationship with violence (Bushman, Ridge, Das, Key, & Busath, 2007). Thus, the purpose of this study is to test the extent to which a novel construct, moral certainty, ex-

plains the relations between religiosity and support for violent warfare.

There is conflicting research on the relationship between religion and support for violent conflict. Some researchers argue that religion alone does not predict support for violent warfare. For example, from a political perspective, a threat to a religion's political authority may fuel violent acts committed by religious people (Philpott, 2007). In this case, the extent to which religious communities are integrated in the political decisions of the state will predict whether religious people retaliate against religious suppression. In support of this argument, empirical research further suggests that additional sociopolitical variables mediate the relationship between religion and support for violent conflict (Zaidise, Canetti-Nisim, & Pedahzur, 2007; Canetti, Hobfoll, Pedahzur, & Zaidise, 2010). A series of studies conducted in Israel indicated that greater religiosity among Israeli Jews and Muslims was associated with

This article was published Online First August 29, 2011.

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less support for political violence. However, across both religious groups, greater religiosity was associated with support for political violence when people experienced deprivation. These findings suggest that religion does not directly predict support for political violence, and the relationship between religion and support for violence is found only when religious people perceive and experience social inequity.

Other researchers argue that religion can directly predict support for violent warfare. For example, religion, more than other social identities such as political nationalism, predicts stronger support for anti-Western terrorism (Kruglanski, Fishman, Orehek, Chen, & Dechesne, 2006). Also, people who support violence against the United States for religious reasons are more likely to support attacks against civilians than those who support violence for nationalistic reasons (Weber et al., 2006). For example, among Middle Eastern Muslims, the belief that Islam is under threat is one of the best predictors of support for suicide bombing in Iraq and attacks against civilians. Kruglanski and colleagues (2006) argue that combating terrorism in places that foster strong religious identity presents a major challenge to lessening support for anti-Western terrorism.

Researchers have asserted several theories to explain religion's attraction to violent intergroup conflict. For instance, Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992) created a measure of Religious Fundamentalism, a religious orientation associated with rigid adherence to one doctrine as absolute truth. They argued that the relation between religion and problematic intergroup relations is a result of Religious Fundamentalism. Congruently, they found that Religious Fundamentalism is positively linked with prejudice toward African Americans, Jews, homosexuals, religious out-groups, and communists (Duck & Hunsberger). Religious Fundamentalism is also negatively correlated with intergroup helping (Jackson & Esses, 1997).

Others argue that the relation between religion and intergroup conflict has less to do with the strength of a person's religious devotion and more to do with people's commitment to defending their religious group. Ginges, Hansen, and Norenzayan (2009), for example, measured how often a large sample of Palestinian Muslims reported praying (a measure of religious devotion), how often they attended services at a

Mosque (a measure of group commitment), and the extent to which they supported violent attacks against the United States. They found that Mosque attendance, but not frequency of prayer, predicted greater support for suicide attacks. They concluded that the attraction between religion and conflict emanates from a commitment to defending one's religious in-group rather than religiosity alone.

Religion and Moral Certainty

The present research takes the view that there is a common process underlying the relations between religion and intergroup violence, regardless of whether it is a commitment to one's religious beliefs, a specific religious orientation, or a religious group. Specifically, the present research argues that religion allows people to feel certain about their own moral principles. Feelings of moral certainty, in turn, satisfy a person's need to feel moral and alleviate concerns about the moral consequences of violent warfare. Thus, any type of religious commitment that increases a person's moral certainty will increase support for violent intergroup conflict. The following introduction will review research indicating that (1) religion should lead to greater moral certainty and (2) that greater moral certainty should lead to a greater "moral license" to support violent conflict. One study that tests the relations between religion, moral certainty, and support for violent warfare is then presented.

Religion creates communities of people bound together by a set of moral principles regarding right and wrong (Graham & Haidt, 2010; Johnson & Mullins, 1990; Hasenclever & Rittburger, 2000). For instance, sociological research finds that Christian fundamentalists are more likely to obey laws regarding sexual morality than the general population (Medoff & Skov, 1992). Also, religious people see religious law and moral law as interchangeable. Morewedge and Clear (2008) measured Christian youth's belief in a theological and an anthropomorphic God and the extent to which they considered violations of the Ten Commandments morally wrong. Results indicated that participants with a stronger belief in God were more likely to consider transgressions of religious law immoral. In addition, experimentally priming people's "God concept" also in-

creases moral behavior. Shariff and Norenzayan (2007), for instance, had participants complete a scrambled word task with religious words such as “religious” and “divine.” Other participants completed a scrambled word task with neutral words. Both sets of participants then played an anonymous game in which they were allowed to allocate 10 dollars to themselves and (ostensibly) another participant. The results demonstrated that relative to participants in the control condition, participants in the God prime condition left an average of \$2.38 more for the other participant. Because of religion’s close association with moral behavior, it is reasonable to expect that greater religious devotion will be associated with greater feelings of certainty about one’s own moral principles. Yet, the power of a religious identity to increase one’s moral certainty has not been directly tested and is the first goal of this study.

Moral Certainty as a Predictor of Support for Violent Warfare

The idea that religion should encourage moral certainty may be obvious. What is counterintuitive about the moral certainty hypothesis is that this increase in moral certainty might increase people’s support for violent warfare. Yet, research on moral licensing indicates that when a person feels that they are moral *enough*, their motivation to be moral in other domains decreases (Sachdeva, Iliev, & Medin, 2009). Sachdeva et al. (2009) provided participants with a list of moral traits such as kindness, compassion, and generosity. They asked participants to write a story about themselves that included all of the traits in the list. Participants whose morality was affirmed donated less money to charity.

Similarly, Khan and Dar (2006; Study 4) gave research participants the opportunity to commit to helping an international student understand a lecture. Then, they gave them two dollars and asked them to indicate how much of their money they wanted to allocate to charity. They found that participants who previously committed to helping the international student donated less than participants who had not helped the international student. Similar research shows that a person’s ability to morally justify violence and aggression absolves him from concerning himself with the rights of oth-

ers (e.g., McAlister, Bandura, & Owen, 2006). Finally, moral licensing also increases prejudice and discrimination between groups. Monin and Miller (2001) showed that allowing people to establish themselves as nonprejudiced (e.g., by having them argue with sexist statements) increases the likelihood that they will discriminate against women and African Americans interviewing for a job. These results were interpreted as evidence that people regulate their moral behavior. They up-regulate it when they feel they are not moral enough and down-regulate it when they feel that they are already moral people.

Therefore, allowing a person to affirm their morality decreases their moral behavior. It is possible, then, that certainty about one’s moral principles creates a license to behave immorally. People who have strong moral principles may chronically think of themselves as sufficiently moral. If that is the case, people with stronger moral certainty will be more supportive of violent warfare and less concerned about its moral consequences. As an extension, religion’s relation to moral certainty makes it a potential predictor of support for intergroup conflict. Moreover, research suggests that the relation between religious commitment and moral certainty is stronger than the relation between other group identities and moral certainty. Support for this comes from survey data on moral communities. Moral communities are defined as coherent social networks that foster meaningful social relationships and common attitudes, values, and practices (Johnson & Mullins, 1990). Johnson and Mullins (1990) find that religious congregations are more effective than any other type of organization at creating and inspiring feelings of moral community. Thus, if religion is especially capable of creating moral community, it should be especially capable of inspiring moral certainty. Therefore, moral certainty should have a stronger relation with support for religious conflict than other types of conflict.

In sum, it is likely that greater religiosity is associated with greater moral certainty and that greater moral certainty licenses people to support violent conflict. These predictions, however, have never been tested. Therefore, this study advances previous research on the relations between religion and support for violent warfare by introducing moral certainty as a

novel predictor of support for violent warfare, testing the extent to which moral certainty is an underlying moderator in the relation between religiosity and support for violent warfare, and testing whether the influence of moral certainty over support for violent warfare is particularly strong in religious conflict.

The following experiment tests these three hypotheses by measuring participants' religiosity and moral certainty, manipulating their perceptions that radical Muslim terrorist attacks against the United States are religiously or geopolitically motivated, and then measuring the impact of religiosity, moral certainty, and the conflict type on support for violent warfare. Specifically, this study predicts that (1) stronger religiosity is associated with stronger moral certainty, (2) greater moral certainty strengthens the positive relation between religiosity and support for violent warfare, and (3) moral certainty will play a stronger role in religious conflict than in geopolitical conflict.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Ninety-three participants from the University of Texas at El Paso participated in the present study. Participants were enrolled in introductory psychology courses and were compensated with course credit. Participants were 31% male and 69% female, 56% Catholic, 29% Protestant, 7% nonreligious, and 7% indicated belonging to other belief systems (e.g., Agnostic, Buddhist, Atheist). Additionally, 85% were Latino, 9% were Caucasian/non-Hispanic, and 6% belonged to other ethnicities (e.g., Asian American and Black American). On average, participants were about 20 years old ($M = 19.88$, $SD = 5.30$).

When participants signed up on the Psychology Department's participant-recruiting software, they were told they would complete a study that took place across two separate days. The study was described as an experiment investigating attitudes toward current events in the United States. Upon signing up for the experiment, participants were linked with an initial survey that had the measures of religiosity and moral certainty. They completed the preliminary survey on their own time before com-

pleting the second part of the experiment in the laboratory.

Day-1 Measures

Religious group identity–Collective Self Esteem Scale. In the preliminary survey, participants first completed the Collective Self Esteem scale (CSE; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). This measure was included to capture the extent to which participants identified with their religious identity. Participants responded to 16 items such as "The Group I belong to is an important reflection of who I am" and "I feel good about the Group I belong to" on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 8 (strongly agree). There were also items such as "I often regret that I belong to the Group I do" that were reverse-scored such that higher numbers always indicated greater CSE ($\alpha = .92$).

Demographic form with additional identity variables. The demographic form included items that addressed participants' religious group identity, religious engagement, and religious community involvement. Participants were asked to indicate how often they pray, how often they attend Church, and the extent to which they identified with their religious groups. They were also asked how often they participated in religious group activities. On this form, participants were also asked to indicate which identity had the strongest impact on their daily lives (religious, American, both, neither). Finally, they responded to questions about their age, ethnicity, place of birth, duration of residence in the United States, sex, citizenship, and educational background.

The moral certainty measure. To measure participants' sense of moral certainty, they completed the "moral absolutism measure" (Peterson, Smith, Tannenbaum, & Shaw, 2009). This measure was originally developed to capture the extent to which people believe their morals are absolute, inviolable truth. The measure instructs participants to "take a moment to think about some moral values that [they] think are important." The instructions give participants examples such as racial/gender equality, freedom of speech, protecting the right to life or the right to choose, and being loyal to one's group. Religion and other group identities were not highlighted so that this scale could be easily relevant to either religious or nationalistic (or

other) moral principles. Participants were asked to “take as much space as [they] need to fully describe [their] personal conception of morality and what it means to be moral.”

Then, participants responded to 9 items such as “right and wrong are not usually simply a matter of black and white; there are many shades of gray” and “there are absolutely clear guidelines about what is good and evil. These apply to everyone, whatever the circumstances” on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 8 (strongly agree). There were items such as “the moral values that enrich my life may not necessarily work for everyone” that were reverse scored such that higher scores on the moral absolutism measure always indicated a stronger sense of certainty about one’s moral principles ($\alpha = .76$).

The religious fundamentalism scale. In addition to measuring participants’ CSE for their religious identity and the religious identity/devotion measures on the demographics form, participants completed the Religious Fundamentalism scale, which measures the extent to which participants are committed to one specific religious doctrine as absolute truth (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992). This scale includes 12 items such as “The fundamentals of God’s religion should never be tampered with or comprised with other beliefs” and “To lead the best, most meaningful life, one must belong to the one, fundamentally true religion” on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 8 (strongly agree; $\alpha = .91$).

Day 2

When participants arrived for the second session, they were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions (the religious conflict condition, the geopolitical conflict condition, or the control condition).

Religious conflict condition. Participants assigned to the religious conflict condition read an adapted version of a real letter from Osama bin Laden which claims that the attacks against the United States were committed for religious reasons. The original letter had both religious and geopolitical reasons for the terrorists’ war on the United States. In the letter that participants in the religious conflict condition read, all of the geopolitical reasons were omitted and the religious reasons for the attacks on September

11th were embellished. For instance, participants read, “Christians have no shame. They preach that Christianity is the way to God and that Muslims are terrorists. Yet, the biggest hypocrites in the world today and the worst terrorists are the Christians.” Then, to further highlight that this attack was against Christians (and to ensure that participants read the article thoroughly), participants were asked to indicate, on a checklist, which criticisms bin Laden levels against Christians in the letter. This manipulations check had 17 total statements, including 14 statements that were included in the article (e.g., Christians are delusional) and three statements that were not included (e.g., Christians are religious).

Geopolitical conflict condition. Participants assigned to the geopolitical conflict condition read an adapted version of the same real letter from Osama bin Laden. In this version, all of the religious reasons were omitted and the geopolitical reasons for the attacks on September 11th were embellished. For instance, participants read, “American’s position against Middle Eastern People is despicable and disgraceful. Americans have no shame. The worst thieves in the world today and the worst terrorists are the Americans.” Then, to further highlight that this attack was against Americans (and to ensure that participants read the article thoroughly), participants were asked to indicate, on a checklist, which criticisms bin Laden levels against Americans in the letter. This manipulations check had 17 total statements, including 14 statements that were included in the article (e.g., Americans have no shame) and three statements that were not included (e.g., Americans are intelligent).

Control condition. Participants assigned to the control condition read an article about the ongoing drug wars in Juárez, Mexico. For instance, participants read, “In the last year thousands of innocent people have become casualties of the drug war in Juárez.” Then, to mirror the critical experimental conditions, participants were asked to indicate, on a checklist, which facts about the drug wars were included in the article. This manipulations check had 17 total statements, including 14 statements that were included in the article (e.g., The killings take place in Juarez’s plaza) and three statements that were not included (the death toll in Juarez is low). The control condition was developed to

highlight an intergroup conflict participants are familiar with that is drug-related rather than religious or geopolitical. The three conditions were equated for word length (388 words), language (where possible), and the number of attacks against Americans or Christians.

Support for violent warfare measures. All participants completed two dependent measures of support for the United States' war against terrorists. First, to measure people's attitudes about violence specifically toward Middle Eastern terrorists, participants completed the Revised Attitudes toward Violence Scale (Anderson, Benjamin, Wood, & Bonacci, 2006). For this scale, participants rated their agreement with nine items such as "The War against Osama bin Laden, 'Al Qaeda,' and other terrorist groups is necessary" on an eight-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 8 (strongly agree). Second, we developed another measure specifically for this study to assess participants' personal willingness to support this war (See Appendix A). This newly developed measure included seven items such as, "How likely would you be to join the military to fight in this war?" and "To fund this war, the President tells the American people that he will increase their taxes. Would you support this increase?" Participants also responded to these items on an eight-point scale. The two measures of support for violent warfare were highly correlated ($r[93] = .80$) and the results were the same regardless of whether the hypotheses were tested on the Support for War and the Revised Attitudes toward Violence measures. Therefore items on both scales constructed one composite measure of support for violent warfare ($\alpha = .95$).

Results

Data Treatment

The manipulation check allowed us to test the extent to which participants adequately learned the content of the articles they read, and error rates were calculated. The mean error rate was .15 ($SD = .14$). In addition, the error rate was originally included in the analyses of all three hypotheses and did not account for a significant amount of variance explained in support for violent warfare ($ps > .05$). Therefore it was removed from the model. Also, more than half

of this sample was Catholic. Although the religious manipulation clarified that Christians were anyone who believed in Jesus Christ and the Bible, people sometimes draw distinctions between Catholicism and Christianity. Therefore, religion was included in the regression model for each of the above predictions. Results indicated that the effects were not different for participants who self-identified as Catholic versus Protestant ($ps > .05$). Sample sizes were not sufficient to test effects separately for other religious groups.

Hypothesis 1

The moral certainty hypothesis makes three separate predictions. The first is that stronger religiosity is associated with stronger moral certainty. A simple way to test this is to measure the bivariate correlations between all of the measures of religiosity and moral certainty. Across all measures, stronger religiosity correlated with greater moral certainty, $r(93) = .24-.49$, $p = <.0001-.02$. For a full report of these correlations, refer to Table 1.

Hypothesis 2

The second prediction of the moral certainty hypothesis is that greater moral certainty strengthens the (positive) relation between religiosity and support for violent warfare. Embedded in this hypothesis is the assumption that this relation will hold regardless of the type of religiosity measured. Therefore, we tested this hypothesis with eight separate, simultaneous mul-

Table 1
Correlations (R) Between Religiosity and Moral Certainty

Religiosity measure	$r(p)$
Collective Self Esteem for religious identity	.33 (.0013)
Religious fundamentalism	.49 (<.0001)
Religious	.40 (<.0001)
Importance of religious identity	.41 (<.0001)
Prayer frequency	.30 (.0027)
Church attendance	.41 (<.0001)
Religious activities	.34 (.0008)
Commitment to other members of one's religious group	.42 (<.0001)

Note. $n = 93$.

tiple regressions, regressing support for violent warfare on Religiosity \times Moral Certainty interactions with each of the measures of religiosity. The results of these interactions (reported in Table 2) yielded support for the moral certainty hypothesis. Moreover, this pattern emerged regardless of whether the measure of religiosity focused on individual religious devotion (e.g., prayer) or commitment to one's religious group (e.g., Church attendance). For instance, prayer frequency alone does not predict support for violent warfare, $\beta = -.002$, $SE = .11$, $t(89) = .02$, $p = .983$, and moral certainty alone relates to greater support for violent warfare, $\beta = .29$, $SE = .11$, $t(89) = 2.72$, $p = .008$. This interaction, however, shows that for participants who pray more often, stronger moral certainty relates to greater support for violent warfare, $\beta = .20$, $SE = .09$, $t(89) = 2.10$, $p = .038$. Similarly, CSE for one's religious group is unrelated to support for violent conflict, $\beta = -.09$, $SE = .10$, $t(89) = -.88$, $p = .381$. In this

model, moral certainty also related to greater support for violent conflict, $\beta = .29$, $SE = .11$, $t(89) = 2.68$, $p = .009$. However, this interaction shows that, at higher levels of moral certainty, stronger religiosity relates to greater support for violent warfare, $\beta = .28$, $SE = .10$, $t(89) = 2.68$, $p = .009$. These effects are only representative; this pattern emerged among all of the measures of religiosity and moral certainty.

Hypothesis 3

The third prediction of the moral certainty hypothesis is that moral certainty will play a stronger role in religious conflict than geopolitical conflict. To test this, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. The relation between moral certainty and support for violent warfare in the religious conflict condition was compared with the relation between moral certainty and support for violent warfare in the geopolitical

Table 2
Multiple Regression Interactions Between Religious Ideology/Identity Measures and Moral Certainty on Support for Violent Warfare

Religious identity measure	β	SE	t	R^2
CSE Religious ID ^a	-0.09	0.11		-0.88
Moral certainty	0.28	0.10	2.68**	
CSE-Religious ID \times Moral certainty	0.28	0.10	2.68**	0.20
Importance-Religious ID ^b	0.01	0.11		-0.09
Moral certainty	0.30	0.11	2.77**	
Importance-Religious ID \times Moral certainty	0.19	0.09	2.14*	0.16
Religious fundamentalism	0.14	0.11	1.34	
Moral certainty	0.21	0.11	0.18	
Rel. fundamentalism \times Moral certainty	0.19	0.09	2.15*	0.18
Religious	0.02	0.11	0.28	
Moral certainty	0.28	0.11	1.98*	
Religious \times Moral certainty	0.19	0.09	1.98*	0.16
Prayer frequency	0.00	0.11	0.02	
Moral certainty	0.29	0.11	2.72**	
Prayer frequency \times Moral certainty	0.20	0.09	2.10*	0.16
Church attendance	-0.19	0.10		-1.81
Moral certainty	0.37	0.11	3.54***	
Church attendance \times Moral certainty	0.22	0.09	2.45*	0.20
Religious activities	-0.23	0.10		-2.30*
Moral certainty	0.36	0.10	3.59***	
Religious activities \times Moral certainty	0.20	0.08	2.40*	0.21
Commitment-coreligionists ^c	-0.18	0.10		-1.78
Moral certainty	0.36	0.08	2.55*	
Commit-coreligionists \times Moral certainty	0.21	0.08	2.55*	0.21

Note. $n = 89$. CSE = Collective Self Esteem; ID = Identity.

^a Collective Self Esteem for religious identity. ^b Importance of religious identity. ^c Commitment to other members of one's religious group.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

conflict condition. We predicted and found a Conflict Condition \times Moral Certainty interaction, $F(2, 87) = 3.66, p = .03, R^2 = .20$. Simple slope analyses revealed that stronger moral certainty related to stronger support for violent conflict in the religious conflict condition, $\beta = .42, SE = .14, t(26) = 3.15, p = .004$, and the control condition, $\beta = .51, SE = .13, t(31) = 3.93, p = .0004$, but not in the geopolitical conflict condition, $\beta = -.15, SE = .25, t(30) = -.62, p = .541$.

Discussion

The results of this study support the moral certainty hypothesis of religious warfare and its three predictions. First, greater religiosity is associated with greater moral certainty. Second, moral certainty strengthens the relation between religiosity and support for violent warfare. Third, moral certainty was a stronger factor in religious warfare than geopolitical warfare. For instance, stronger moral certainty related to greater support for war when a conflict is framed as religious but not geopolitical. Therefore, religion may be an effective way to achieve moral certainty. The moral certainty that comes along with belonging to a religion, in turn, down-regulates people's moral reservations about violent warfare. Finally, this experiment demonstrates that moral certainty plays a role in violent intergroup conflict in general. Alone, moral certainty correlates with greater support for violence. When combined with personal religious devotion, religious group identity, and religious community commitment, moral certainty influences how religion contributes to support for intergroup violence.

These conclusions are limited, however, by one counterintuitive finding. Specifically, the moral certainty hypothesis predicted that the relations between moral identity and support for violent warfare would be stronger in religious conflict compared with geopolitical conflict and a control condition that made the drug war in Juarez, Mexico salient. The fact that moral certainty also predicted greater support for violent warfare in the control condition suggests one of two possibilities. First, it is possible that there is something specific to geopolitical conflict that eliminates the relation between moral certainty and support for war. A second possibility is that, because this University is very close to the

United States/Mexico border, the violence in Juarez is a sensitive subject for students at this University. Therefore, it may have unintentionally elicited a stronger sense of threat than originally anticipated. Future studies should test this by replicating the effect with other control materials.

These findings present supporting evidence for the moral licensing effect. These results suggest that stronger moral (and religious) identity is related to greater support for violent warfare and that a person's moral identity can be strong and salient in times of war. People who feel moral certainty are more likely to support violence. Furthermore, these findings represent two contributions to research on moral licensing. First, the results suggest that individual differences in personal moral certainty can lead to a moral licensing effect. Second, the results demonstrate that moral licensing also affects people's attitudes toward violent warfare.

These results may also have implications for other studies that reveal a "dark side" of morality (Skitka & Mullen, 2002). For instance, Skitka and colleagues conducted studies demonstrating that moral mandates are related to greater outcome justice reasoning and interpersonal intolerance (Skitka & Houston, 2001; Skitka & Mullen, 2002). Moral mandates were defined as specific attitude stands rooted in the conviction that something is right or wrong, moral or immoral (Skitka & Mullen, 2002). In one study, Skitka and colleagues polled people about the Elian Gonzalez case, which was a controversy regarding a Cuban child who immigrated to the United States to live with his family while his father wanted him to return to Cuba. The results indicated that people with a moral mandate about the case still believed that Elian should have remained in the United States even though the courts' decision to return him to Cuba was based on sound procedural justice. The moral mandate effect is thought to be caused by a sense of anger or outrage toward those who disagree with one's moral convictions. From the perspective of this study, the effects of moral mandates may stem from a moral license to personally violate core values such as justice. To test this, future studies could test whether the effects of the broader construct, moral certainty, has effects similar to the moral mandate effect.

There are also implications for past research on core values. In some studies, reminding people of their core values reduces conflict. In others, the motivation to protect one's sacred values increases support for conflict. Fein and Spencer (1997), for example, had research participants circle values from a list that were important to them and then interact with a member of an outgroup. They found that, when people are given the opportunity to affirm their core values, they expressed less prejudice in interaction with outgroup members. Fein and Spencer reasoned that motivation to maintain distinctiveness from and derogate outgroup members stems from an underlying need to maintain one's positive self image. In contrast, people's emotional attachment to sacred values such as religious belief leads to less willingness to negotiate resolutions to political conflict (Atran & Axelrod, 2008). In this study, stronger moral certainty related to greater support for violent warfare. Thus, these results contradict the notion that affirming core values reduces prejudice and supports research suggesting that stronger moral values can lead to greater intergroup conflict. Future research should pinpoint the precise differential effects of core values and sacred values and moral certainty.

The findings in this study suggest a reexamination of several explanations for religious intergroup violence. For instance, these findings build on Ginges et al.'s (2009) study comparing religious devotion (prayer) with religious group identity (Mosque attendance). The results of Ginges study indicate that there is a relation between religious group identity and support for violence against the United States, but that there is no relation between religious devotion and support for violence against the United States. The present data indicate that both prayer and Church attendance (and a variety of other indicators of religiosity) relate to support for violent conflict when they are associated with a sense of moral certainty (see Table 2 for more details). The correlations between more frequent Church attendance and moral certainty in this study suggest that Mosque attendance and Muslim community life may be more effective in giving people moral certainty than personal religious devotion. However, prayer can have similar effects as Church attendance if it is related to moral certainty. Third, the effect of Religious Fundamentalism (Altemeyer & Hunsberger,

1992) on intergroup conflict may come from the sense that moral certainty is associated with religious certainty. Indeed, post hoc analyses in this study find that, when one controls for the effect of moral certainty on support for violent warfare, the effect of Religious Fundamentalism is reduced to nonsignificance. Therefore, this study indicates that the relation between stronger religiosity and support for violent conflict depends on the extent to which religiosity contributes to moral certainty rather than group identity or religious fundamentalism.

Limitations

The demographics in the present study are unique to the setting at the University of Texas at El Paso. This creates two major limitations to the study. First, the university is located on the U.S./Mexico border where the population is predominantly Mexican American, Hispanic, and Latino. Second, in addition to being a predominantly Hispanic sample, the participants in the present study are predominantly Catholic and Protestant. Although one could argue that these are two different religions, their common roots in Christianity make it such that these effects do not yet generalize across religions. Thus, the present findings should be tested on populations that include other major ethnic and religious communities, such as Muslims or Jews, who have been involved in major violent conflicts worldwide.

Another limitation to the findings of this study is that the moral certainty measure is relatively new and requires further exploration and validation. Participants' responses to the measures' instructions to "take as much space as needed to fully describe your conception of morality" could be qualitatively analyzed to get a better sense of how they responded to and understood the measure.

The major goal of this study was to look at the interacting effects of religious identities and moral certainty on support for violent warfare. To identify moral certainty as a moderator of the religiosity-violence link, it was necessary to measure the independent effects of religiosity and moral certainty. Therefore, this design did not allow for tests of causal relations or the causal direction between religious identity and moral certainty. The results

indicated that they are related, but the extent to which religious identities increase moral certainty remains untested. It may be the other way around; those with a strong sense of moral certainty are more attracted to stronger religious identities. Similarly, moral certainty was only measured in this experiment. Therefore, future studies will manipulate moral certainty to test whether it causes greater support for violence and war and whether it interacts with religious identities to increase support for war. These studies should also expand to other group identities and ideologies that might increase moral certainty.

Research Implications

In addition to addressing the above limitations, future studies should look closely at the relations between religion and violent warfare when moral certainty is removed from the equation. Although they were qualified by the interactions, several main effects of this study indicate that prayer frequency, religious identity, and religious community involvement relate to less support for violent warfare when correcting for moral certainty. It may be that religion has the power to both cause *and* reduce conflict. This is a possibility that should be explored.

Clinical and Policy Implications

This line of research has implications for our understanding of religious warfare specifically and violent warfare in general. For example, Fox (2001) concludes that religion increases the likelihood and intensity of intergroup conflict. These results imply that religion gives people the moral certainty they need to support violent acts that otherwise threaten their moral selves. Support in the Middle East for violent attacks against the United States may not come from the strength of their religiosity so much as the strength of their individual moral certainty. In fact, the relationship between religion and warfare in general may not come from strong religiosity so much as decreased concern about the moral consequences of violent warfare. In addition, these results suggest that those who support or even perpetrate acts of violence in the name of religion against the United States are not driven by clinical pathologies. Rather, they are uninhibited by concerns for the moral con-

sequences of their actions. Therefore, policies designed to prevent, mitigate, or eliminate religiously motivated violence should avoid increasing aggressor's moral certainty for their cause.

Another important implication of this work is that moral certainty and religiosity operated and influenced support for violent warfare independently. Moral certainty, in this case, was not associated with a specific doctrine, dogma, or ideology. This suggests that any cause that increases moral certainty can build support for violent warfare. These results also call into question those identities, worldviews, and ideologies in our own lives that give us moral certainty anytime we start to feel licensed to hate, bomb, torture, kill, or in any way mistreat another human being.

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(Appendix follows)

Appendix A

Additional Religious Identity Measures

1. Do you consider yourself religious?
2. How important is your religious identity in your daily life?
3. How often do you pray?
4. How often do you go to a church/synagogue/mosque/other religious center?
5. How often do you participate in religious group activities?
6. How committed are you to your religious community?
7. Which identity most strongly impacts your daily life (American/religious/neither/both)
5. How likely would you be to support a family member's decision to fight in this war?
6. Would it be acceptable for our military to use violent interrogation tactics to gather intelligence in this war?
7. Would it be acceptable to use nuclear weapons in this war?
8. Would it be acceptable to kill terrorists in this war?
9. Would it be acceptable for civilians to die as a result of this war?
10. Would it be acceptable to injure terrorists in this war?
11. Would it be acceptable to imprison terrorists in this war?

Appendix B

Support for War Measure

1. How much do you support using violence in the war on terror?
2. How much time do you think the U.S. government should commit to this war?
3. To fund this war, the president tells the American people that he will increase their taxes. Would you support this tax increase?
4. How likely would you be to join the military to fight in this war?
12. Would it be acceptable to kill family members of terrorists in this war?
13. Would it be acceptable to use chemical weapons in this war?
14. Would it be acceptable for innocent people to die as a result of this war?
15. Overall, how much do you support the United States' involvement in this war?

Received October 4, 2010
 Revision received June 7, 2011
 Accepted June 8, 2011 ■