

Beliefs about the God of the Other in Intergroup Conflict: Experimental Results from Israel and Palestine

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Abstract : In the Middle East, conflict is often viewed as religiously motivated. In this context, an important question is how we think the religion of the other drives their behavior. If people see conflicts as religious, they may expect the belief of the other to motivate intergroup bias. Beliefs about the motivations of the other impact how we engage with them. Conflict may result if actors believe the other's religion promotes parochialism. To examine how actors on the ground in Israel-Palestine think about the God of the other as it relates to the other's behavior towards them, we ran two studies in winter 2019 with an online sample of Jewish Israelis and fieldwork with Palestinians in the West Bank. We asked participants to predict the behavior of an outgroup member participating in an economic game task, dividing the money between themselves and another person, who is either an ingroup or outgroup member. Our experimental manipulation asks participants to predict the behavior of the other when the other is thinking of their God. Both Israelis and Palestinians believed outgroup members would show in-group favoritism, and that group members would give more to their in-group when thinking of their God. We also found that participants thought outgroup members would give more to their own ingroup when thinking of God. In other words, Palestinians predicted that Israelis would give more to fellow Israelis when thinking of God, but also more to Palestinians. Our results suggest that religious belief is seen to promote universal moral reasoning, even in a context with over 70 years of intense conflict. More broadly, this challenges the narrative that religion necessarily motivates intractable conflict.

Keywords : conflict, psychology, religion, meta-cognition, morality

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