

Clerics and Scriptures: Experimentally Disentangling the Influence of Religious Authority in Afghanistan

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This article unpacks the psychological influence of a Muslim cleric's power to mobilize for collective action in an experiment in Afghanistan. The same cleric requests contributions for a hospital from day laborers when dressed as a civilian and as a cleric. In *Civilian* condition, 50 per cent contributed and 17 per cent made large contributions; in *Cleric* condition, 83 per cent contributed but average giving did not increase as most gave the smallest possible amount. Inclusion of a recitation of Qur'anic verses in the *Cleric* condition maintains the 82 per cent contribution rate while increasing large contributions to 30 per cent, doubling average contributions. Formal education and subjective perception of poverty appear to drive the opposing effects of cleric and scripture. These results suggest that the power to activate spiritual channels lies in the scripture, not with the human wielding religious authority, who instead appears to induce minimal compliance with Islamic norms of charitable giving.

Keywords: Afghanistan; altruism; experiment; public goods; religion

With the increasing secularization of the West,¹ scholars have argued that the traditional role of churches and clergy as repositories and nurturers of social capital in local communities has declined markedly.² In contrast, the importance of religious actors in large-scale social and political mobilization in the Islamic world has been steadily increasing for many years,³ ranging from fundraising⁴ to direction of anti-government protests⁵ to recruitment for political violence (particularly among the poor and uneducated)⁶ to public outreach campaigns.⁷ How should we understand the power of Muslim clerics to motivate collective action?

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¹ Norris and Inglehart 2004.

² Putnam 2000, 2002.

³ Patel 2007.

⁴ Berman 2009, 133–4. 'Even if you cannot participate yourselves alongside us in the *Jihad*, your [financial] donation to us from the money that Allah gave you is not less important' (Hamas communiqué from November 2002, quoted in Levitt 2006, 66).

⁵ Hassan, Al-Jawoshi, and Arango 2016.

⁶ Al-Kadhimi 2013; Bueno de Mesquita 2005; Fathi 1981.

⁷ Nasir et al. 2014. A researcher in the Nigerian government's polio vaccination campaign remarked, '[...] we didn't figure out how to connect with society [...] From now on, we will maximize the use of traditional and religious leaders as part of the campaign' (Hogan 2014).

Because ‘[a cleric’s] “industry” is, in an important sense, not of this world’,⁸ a cleric may be acting as a religious prime. He may be seen as having a special affiliation with God and therefore reminds his audience of higher moral ideals and/or divine rewards and punishment.⁹ Given the literature that has shown the effectiveness of political elites in cueing behavior¹⁰ and the religious priming literature that has shown higher prosocial behavior in subjects exposed to stimuli as wide ranging as biblical quotes¹¹ to being in a chapel,¹² one would expect clerics to wield this power.¹³ But the empirical evidence testing this theory is quite mixed,¹⁴ with only weak support for the argument that clergy have substantial effects through this channel.

It is critical that the test for the spiritual influence of religious positional authority is isolated from other confounds, which are many. Clerics may be effective mobilizers just because especially charismatic and persuasive individuals (who would have been influential in any profession) select into the clergy. Their influence may also have been aided by the social mechanisms (self-selection and social network dynamics)¹⁵ within their congregation. In addition, they regularly employ tools that are known as religious primes: quoting scripture and interacting with their audience in sacred settings (for example, churches and mosques). At the same time, it is important that the extent of the cleric’s influence is investigated in a setting in which he is actually present, because subtle dynamics that signal relative status are often communicated in face-to-face interactions,¹⁶ and where the behavior being measured is private, costly and empirically relevant to real-world collective action.

To our knowledge, our experiment is the first to test a cleric’s influence independent of these confounds in a setting that satisfies these conditions.¹⁷ We conduct our study in Afghanistan, where religious identity is strong and religious authority is consequential in motivating public goods provision. In our experiment, a Muslim cleric in Kabul appears in person to solicit contributions for a public good (a hospital) from low-income day laborers under three experimental conditions: while dressed as a civilian (*Civilian*), while dressed as a cleric (*Cleric*) and while dressed as a cleric adding a quote from the Qur’an at the end of the solicitation script reminding subjects that God rewards giving (*Cleric + Scripture*).¹⁸ If the cleric motivates behavior through a perceived association with God, his solicitation should result in behavior similar to what is accomplished by direct religious priming: an increase in average contributions, driven by an increase in both the extensive (donation incidence) and intensive (amount conditional on giving) margins relative to *Civilian*. Here, scripture as an additional prime would move contributions in the same directions, or possibly be redundant since the spiritual channel has already been activated.

⁸ Olson 2009, 375.

⁹ Shariff and Norenzayan 2007.

¹⁰ Chong and Druckman 2007.

¹¹ Horton, Rand, and Zeckhauser 2011.

¹² Ahmed and Salas 2013.

¹³ See meta-analysis in Gervais and Norenzayan (2012).

¹⁴ This is true both in Islam (e.g., Masoud, Jamal, and Nugent 2016; McCauley 2014) and within the American Christian congregation (cf. Djupe and Gilbert 2009; Djupe and Hunt 2009; Fetzer 2001).

¹⁵ See Djupe and Gilbert 2003; Guth et al. 1997; Olson 2000; Smidt 2004.

¹⁶ Nohria and Eccles 1992.

¹⁷ A few studies manipulate the identity of the deliverer of a message to be from a religious authority in writing, through video or in the form of a picture (Chhibber and Sekhon 2016; Djupe and Gwiasda 2010; McCauley 2014). The first two (written and video) found no effect of religious authority, while the last one did.

¹⁸ We therefore do not pursue a test of *Civilian + Scripture* because clerics in Afghanistan are trained at seminaries to recite and read scripture in a specific cadence and accent, which we would have had to ask our cleric to attempt to abandon.

What we found was surprising: contributions were 66 per cent more likely when the solicitor was dressed in his clerical garments (83 per cent) compared to when he was dressed as a civilian (50 per cent). However, giving among those who gave at all decreased from 26 AFN to 16 AFN (denominated in Afghan currency; 1 AFN = \$0.02 at time of experiment), resulting in no increase in average contribution between these groups. The drop in the intensive margin was only restored with the quote from the Qur'an, doubling average contributions from that of the *Civilian* and *Cleric* conditions.

These results are strongly suggestive that the power to activate spiritual channels lies in the scripture, not with the human wielding religious authority. However, the clerical garb clearly had an effect. Revisiting the behavioral economics and psychology literatures, we find that the positive effect in the extensive margin (likelihood of giving) coupled with the negative effect in the intensive margin (size of the contribution) can be explained by *motivational crowding out*.¹⁹ This phenomenon refers to how some extrinsic incentives, such as interventions that induce comparison of one's behavior to external norms (self-image concerns),²⁰ drive away intrinsic motivation without offering enough incentives to make up for that deficit. We interpret the clerical garb as activating one's religious identity and, due to the importance of religion in Afghanistan, stronger self-image concerns than in the *Civilian* condition. However, without explicit association with the scripture, conformance to the external norms appears to be a legalistic interpretation of the Islamic *sadaqah* norm of 'give what you can', resulting in 'the minimum will do'. Exploratory analysis reveals that this is especially true among those who feel poor²¹ – who may feel that the opportunity cost of giving is especially high – and the educated²² – who may be better able to discern between human and divine authority in religion and accord different levels of legitimacy to each.

This article makes several contributions to our understanding of how religious authority mobilizes the faithful toward collective action. First, we show that when presented face to face, a Muslim cleric's identity alone can have considerable effects on people's willingness to contribute to a public good, behavior that is extremely meaningful for politics in developing countries.²³ Secondly, we find that – at least in this context – the Muslim cleric's influence comes from his position as a human authority by virtue of the crowding-out effect. Thirdly, we find that formal education mediates one's readiness to follow religious authority, which may provide some context to the Taliban's opposition to formal education.²⁴ Overall, our results suggest that religious authorities' position may be insufficient to mobilize effectively for collective action, that the use of scripture separately invokes God's will and authority to mobilize, and that groups will respond differently to these sources of legitimacy.

LITERATURE AND BACKGROUND

Does being recognized as a religious authority endow an individual with unique powers to motivate collective action? Given the substantial literature showing that political elites

¹⁹ Bénabou and Tirole 2006. See review of empirical evidence in Frey and Jegen (2001).

²⁰ Bénabou and Tirole 2006.

²¹ This is a measure of subjective feeling of deprivation, since income has been controlled for. This adds nuance to cross-national observational research identifying subjective feelings of deprivation as the driver of religious devotion (Delamontagne 2010; Rees 2009).

²² Formal education connotes having been educated in a school with a science-based curriculum as opposed to having been educated in a *madrasah* or not having any education.

²³ Fearon, Humphreys, and Weinstein 2009; Grossman and Baldassarri 2012.

²⁴ Human Rights Watch 2006. In Taliban-dominated provinces, more than half of the schools have been closed or under risk since 2001, especially those with a curriculum perceived to be contrary to Islamic values.

can affect behavior and attitudes through cueing,²⁵ it might seem natural to assume that clerics, as religious elites, could do the same.²⁶ Observational studies show a positive association between religion and activism, volunteering or contributing to public goods, all of which are actions commonly grouped under the umbrella of prosocial behavior,²⁷ but it is difficult to isolate the causal influence of religious authority in such studies.²⁸ Indeed, examination of this question has returned mixed results. Some studies have found evidence that clergy are able to affect congregants' opinions,²⁹ in line with the elite cueing literature, but most have found weak or no support for arguments expecting to see evidence of elites' persuasive power.³⁰ The reason for this divergence in results is unclear, but as Djupe and Calfano argue, the mixed results indicate that 'clergy effects may currently be masked by our choices of design and theory'.³¹

The existing literature on religious priming also suggests that religious authority can have a very powerful impact on behavior. Exposure to a large range of stimuli relating to God induces subjects in psychology and behavioral experiments to act less selfishly.³² For example, in a highly cited study,³³ scrambling sentences with religious content before a dictator game increases the likelihood of giving (the extensive margin) as well as the size of the contribution (the intensive margin). The religious prime doubled overall average giving, partly buoyed by the higher frequency of very generous contributions. Similarly, subjects are much less likely to cheat after reading the Ten Commandments,³⁴ co-operate at a much higher rate in the Prisoner's Dilemma after reading a biblical quote on the importance of charity³⁵ and give significantly more in a public goods game when playing in a chapel.³⁶ It is therefore natural to expect that the mere presence of a religious authority could 'religiously prime' its audience.

The exact mechanism underlying this increase in moral behavior is still highly debated. Two oft-discussed explanations are that religious priming: (1) increases intrinsic generosity by reminding one of the higher ideals associated with God or (2) makes God the audience of one's action, who as an omnipresent agent has the ability to punish or reward actions based on their morality. Several influential studies have advanced this latter explanation, noting that these priming treatments do not appear to affect self-reported empathy for others,³⁷ but result in

²⁵ Zaller 1992. See review of this literature in Chong and Druckman (2007).

²⁶ Campbell and Pettigrew 1959; Guth et al. 1997; Hadden 1969.

²⁷ See review in Bekkers and Wiepking (2011).

²⁸ Causality is hard to establish due to selection problems: association with religion or other variables of interest may be driven by prosocial tendencies.

²⁹ Bjarnason and Welch 2004; Djupe and Hunt 2009; Fetzer 2001.

³⁰ Djupe and Gilbert 2009; Smith 2008.

³¹ Djupe and Calfano 2013, 28. Some have suggested that because these studies focus on within-congregation effects, congregants have had time to develop defenses against persuasive efforts by the clergy, which could account in part for the null findings. Also see Calfano, Oldmixon, and Gray 2014; Djupe and Calfano 2013; Djupe and Gilbert 2009.

³² These studies distinguish between several types of cues: subliminal (Johnson, Rowatt, and LaBouff 2010), implicit (Shariff and Norenzayan 2007), contextual (Ahmed and Salas 2013) and explicit. The latter includes direct quotation from religious texts, as we use in this study (see Carpenter and Marshall 2009; Lambarra and Rieneer 2012; Linardi et al. 2015; Mazar, Amir, and Ariely 2008).

³³ Shariff and Norenzayan 2007. This is replicated by Ahmed and Salas (2011); however, Benjamin, Choi, and Fisher (2010) do not find an effect.

³⁴ Mazar, Amir, and Ariely 2008.

³⁵ Horton, Rand, and Zeckhauser 2011.

³⁶ Ahmed and Salas 2013.

³⁷ See also Gervais and Norenzayan 2012; Shariff and Norenzayan 2007.

behavior similar to studies in which subjects are exposed to stylized images of eyes ('eyespot') when making decisions.³⁸

What would be the ideal conditions in which to test this hypothesis from the literature: that the power of religious positional authority comes from being associated with God, resulting in an audience that behaves as if it is religiously primed? First, the test needs to separate two factors that are difficult to disentangle in real-world religious leaders: (1) the audience's recognition of his position as a religious authority and (2) his use of religious tools (such as scripture) that are already known in the literature to prime religiosity independently of being used by a religious authority. Secondly, the measured behavior has to relate to the real-world setting and tie our investigation to the previous literature. Thirdly, the religious authority should be present in person, as people may respond differently to face-to-face interactions with authority compared to less personal and artificial interaction.³⁹ Fourthly, the environment should be one in which these questions are important, namely, places where the state's provision of public goods provision is weak and religious authority has stepped in to fill this role.

Taking these four conditions together, our experiment takes place in Afghanistan, an administratively weak state where Islam is the religion of almost all citizens. As in most charitable giving contexts, in Islam giving is honorable, and the more generous one can be, the better.⁴⁰ There are clear directives in the Qur'an describing *sadaqah*, a private and voluntary act of giving motivated by charity and sincerity of faith.⁴¹ A believer can offer *sadaqah* in whatever amount they wish, regardless of income or the basis of their wealth. In our experiment, a Muslim cleric, following a neutral (non-religious) script, solicited monetary contributions to a real public good (a hospital) in person in three conditions: when dressed in civilian clothing (*Civilian*), when dressed in clerical garb (*Cleric*), and when a verse from the Qur'an is added to the script while he is dressed in clerical garb (*Cleric + Scripture*). (Scripts are printed in the next section.)

Following other studies on giving, we separately analyze whether people give at all from the contributed amount, since it is well known that 'the willingness to give anything is indeed not driven by the same forces as the choice of the size of the contribution'.⁴² If the *Cleric* functions as a religious prime, his presence should increase contributions in the intensive and extensive margins. The addition of scripture would be redundant, or at the very most would only move

³⁸ The dictator game reported in Haley and Fessler (2005) saw similar increases in the extensive and intensive margins as Shariff and Norenzayan (2007). Similar responses to eyespots are seen with male subjects in Rigdon et al. (2009). Since the 'watcher' in these studies is clearly not actually able to monitor behavior and the studies have taken place in settings with varying degrees of privacy, the interpretation is that the stimuli unconsciously activates cognitive representations of being watched by an omnipresent moral agent entirely separate from human scrutiny.

³⁹ For example, Patel (2012) notes that religious identity features can be revealed through subtle cues of body language and appearance.

⁴⁰ In Islamic sacred texts, giving to charitable causes is linked to being rewarded with sustenance, material blessing, physical healing, avoidance of deserved negative consequences of one's actions, etc. (Al-Ali 2003).

⁴¹ Another giving norm is *zakat*, an obligatory public act that serves as an annual income tax with a fixed percentage. *Zakat* is a 2.5 per cent income tax on Muslims earning above the *nisab* (minimum earnings) threshold, submitted as a donation to the poor to spiritually purify one's yearly earnings. Since our experiment took place outside of Ramadan and involves very poor subjects and a one-time payment, we speculate that this norm may be less relevant. Lambarraa and Riener (2012) argue persuasively that *zakat* is usually planned in advance and is unlikely to be the norm in a one-time donation.

⁴² Engel 2011, 603. Engel's meta study provides many examples of studies that separately analyze the extensive and intensive margins. Field studies of charitable giving also make this distinction (e.g., List and Lucking-Reiley 2002).

subjects' behavior further along the same direction as *Cleric*. However, if *Scripture* and *Cleric* work in opposite ways, then *Cleric* must not be a religious prime.

EXPERIMENTAL SETTING AND DESIGN

Afghanistan provides an ideal setting in which to pursue our research questions. Religion plays a central role in Afghanistan, and self-reported religiosity is extremely high across commonly measured dimensions: 99 per cent of respondents identify as Muslims, 92 per cent report that God is 'very important' in their lives, 91 per cent report praying multiple times each day, and 97 per cent of men report attending mosque for *salah* and *Jumah* prayer.⁴³ Religion is not only a matter of private practice, however. Like many developing and post-conflict countries, civilian institutions in Afghanistan suffer from a deficit of legitimacy, and public goods provision has historically been ceded to communities due to state weakness.⁴⁴ Religious authority has stepped in to fill this void: citizens generally expect them to lend their presence and opinion even on secular issues, and clerics have become very influential in the social and political life of Afghan citizens.⁴⁵ This increased role for religious authorities notwithstanding, however, the Taliban's austere interpretation of Islam during their rule of Afghanistan in the 1990s, coupled with the organization's perceived failure to bring peace and prosperity to the country after the war with the Soviet Union, undermined the credibility of religious leaders and institutions in the eyes of some Afghans, particularly the educated. Some have argued that the uneducated are more prone to radicalization and joining the Taliban, while the educated have become increasingly difficult to mobilize.⁴⁶

We conducted our field experiment in Kabul, Afghanistan in June 2014. As discussed above, our interventions were chosen with an eye toward maximizing connections to 'their real-world modalities'.⁴⁷ The experiment raises money for a widely known and well-regarded hospital, EMERGENCY; studying monetary contributions allows us to tie our experiment most closely to existing empirical results. The solicitor for the public good for the entire experiment is an actual Muslim cleric who leads a mosque in Kabul and teaches students sharia law in an Islamic seminary. As such, the baseline influence of a charismatic, educated leader over our subjects is held constant across all our treatments, with the only difference being whether this individual appears dressed as a religious authority or not.

Our subjects, Afghan day workers, are men without steady jobs who congregate at public markets and wait there to be solicited for employment opportunities for the day. When they are hired, employers transport these men to various work sites, paying them about 500 AFN (\$8.60) for a full day of employment. However, jobs are scarce and day workers often go a few days without being hired. Taking any job and leaving the market area for a few hours means that one has very likely forgone other job opportunities for the day; participants therefore expect to support themselves that day solely on what they earn on that job.

Each morning, our Afghan field personnel drove several buses to one or more of the public markets in the city to recruit subjects. We chose different market locations each morning to

⁴³ Bell 2012.

⁴⁴ Beath, Christia, and Enikolopov 2013, 542; Rennie 2008.

⁴⁵ In a 2011 Asia Foundation Survey, 70 per cent of respondents said that religious leaders should be consulted when local problems are addressed (Tariq, Ayoubi, and Haqbeen 2011). See also Barfield 2010, 40.

⁴⁶ Giustozzi 2010; Wahidi 2015. More broadly, in a cross-national study of public opinion in Arab countries, Hoffman and Jamal (2012) find that support for political Islam and Islamic laws declines significantly with college education.

⁴⁷ Paluck and Green 2009, 349.

avoid duplicate recruitment and to maximize the geographic breadth of our sample.⁴⁸ Field personnel approached potential subjects in the markets to participate in a survey about the labor force in Kabul for 500 AFN, an amount that compensates them for their forgone wage for that day; under these circumstances it is unlikely that they consider the survey earnings a windfall. Subjects who provided oral consent were transported to the enumeration location, where they waited in the courtyard once they arrived.

Based on national statistics and our own knowledge, we had good reason to assume that many of the subjects were illiterate and could not complete the survey alone. As such, we paired each subject with an enumerator. At the beginning of every session, five to seven enumerators retrieved their subjects from the courtyard and brought them to the room where the experiment took place.⁴⁹ After each pair was seated behind a privacy partition, the enumerator verbally asked the survey questions and recorded the subject's responses. The survey focused on their work experience and individual background (see the online appendix for details). While it would be natural to inquire about an individual's religiosity, we did not for two reasons: first, it would cause religious priming that might interact with the treatment, and secondly, given Afghans' high degree of self-reported religiosity, it is not clear how to ask the question in a way that would produce meaningful and adequate variation.

When all subjects in the room had completed the survey, the enumerators told them the survey was completed and handed them their payment in an envelope (six 50 AFN bills, five 20 AFN bills and ten 10 AFN bills). A solicitor (the cleric) then requested contributions to the hospital under one of three experimental conditions (described below). The solicitor and all enumerators then left the room to allow subjects to make their decisions in private. Any contribution was to be left in the original envelope and dropped into a box as subjects exited the room.⁵⁰ Outside the room, subjects were then directed to exit the enumeration location; a random sample was asked to guess the identity of the solicitor on their way out.

In all treatments, the solicitor delivered the following neutral script:⁵¹

Thank you for completing this survey. To thank you for your participation, we would like to compensate you with 500 AFN for your time. On the table in front of you there is an envelope with 500 AFN inside. Today you also have the opportunity to donate part of your compensation to EMERGENCY in Helmand Province, in the south. As you know, EMERGENCY is committed to caring for the victims of war. The organization provides treatment to our Pashtun brothers and sisters who are victims of war in the south. We invite you to contribute to the treatment of victims of war in the region. If you would like to donate to EMERGENCY, please leave the money you wish to donate in the envelope. Remove the money you wish to keep for yourself from the

⁴⁸ We also took pains not to recruit near the cleric's mosque so that subjects would be unlikely to know him. Subjects with whom we spoke after the experiment did not know or recognize the cleric.

⁴⁹ Our subject pool reflects the diversity in Kabul: most of our subjects (69 per cent) indicated Dari as their native language and were enumerated in Dari, the official language of Afghanistan, while 31 per cent indicated Pashto as their native language and were thus surveyed in Pashto. To maintain ethnic composition across sessions, we ensured that each group of five to seven subjects always included one to two Pashto speakers.

⁵⁰ Envelopes were unobtrusively numbered so contributions could be matched with the survey.

⁵¹ The script was written in consultation with local Afghans so that it would sound natural when delivered by both civilian and religious authorities. Since Dari is used for official communication, the solicitor read the script in Dari and his words were privately translated to Pashto by the Pashto-speaking enumerators, as necessary. Note that the cleric is Pashtun, but due to his neutral dress and demeanor and complete fluency in both languages, even our enumerators were unsure as to his ethnic identity.

envelope. If you decide not to make any donations, you can leave the envelope empty. Before you leave the room, please drop the envelope in the box by the door.

We conducted three treatments. In the *Civilian* treatment, he wore typical Afghan civilian clothes. In the *Cleric* treatment, he read the same script while dressed in his normal clerical garments, which constitute only the addition of a dark turban and a dark prayer scarf over his civilian clothing. In the *Cleric + Scripture* treatment, the solicitor wore his clerical garments and read the same script with the addition of a verbatim quote from the Qur'an at the end: 'Those who spend [for/in] Allah's cause, in prosperity and adversity, who repress their anger, and who pardon men; verily, Allah loves good-doers' (-Surah 3 (Al-Emran), verse 134).

DATA AND EMPIRICAL RESULTS

Our subject pool consisted of 305 Muslim male day laborers. The average age was thirty years old; 72 per cent of them were married (Table 1). The sample reflects the ethno-linguistic diversity in Afghanistan: 69 per cent of the sample identify with one of the ethnic minority groups (Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks), while 31 per cent identify ethnically as Pashtuns. About half of the day laborers (53 per cent) had no formal education at all. Those who did spent an average of eight years in school: 129 (42 per cent) had formal education with a science-based curriculum, while fifteen (5 per cent) went to Qur'anic schools where the education centers on religious texts.⁵² Subjects had been working as day laborers for about nine years, on average. They are often unable to find work: they reported that they had only been employed for 2.6 days in the previous week, and the majority of subjects (72 per cent) reported feeling poor.⁵³ Their average income is 3,961 AFN a month (about \$69), equivalent to eight full days of employment in a month.

We ran fifty-one experimental sessions with five to seven individuals per session: sixteen *Civilian* sessions, nineteen *Cleric* sessions, and sixteen *Cleric + Scripture* sessions. To assess how subjects perceived the solicitor, we verbally surveyed a random sample of subjects as they were leaving their session. About 35 per cent of subjects across all treatments declined to guess the solicitor's profession. Among those who ventured a guess in the *Civilian* condition, 80 per cent of the guesses involved a high-status profession, with doctor as the most frequent guess, followed by government official. This suggests that the baseline condition is one of civilian authority. In the *Cleric* and *Cleric + Scripture* condition, all guesses were of cleric.⁵⁴

Table 2 presents the summary statistics of the contributions across treatments. In the *Civilian* treatment, 50 per cent of subjects contributed, and the average conditional amount contributed was 26.63 AFN, resulting in an average of 13.45 AFN raised per subject. In the *Cleric* treatment, there was a dramatic increase in the extensive margin as 83 per cent ($p < 0.01$) of subjects made a monetary contribution, however, the average conditional contribution size dropped to 16.13 AFN ($p < 0.01$).⁵⁵ As a result, the amount raised per person remained at 13.39 AFN ($p = 0.98$). Layering scripture over the *Cleric* treatment does not further increase the extensive margin, though with 82 per cent of subjects contributing in *Cleric + Scripture*, we might have hit a ceiling effect. However, scripture was not at all redundant since the intensive

⁵² Those who were in Qur'anic school had an average of four years of education.

⁵³ The question is: 'How wealthy is your household compared to other households in your neighborhood?' Subjects chose between: poor/below average/above average/rich.

⁵⁴ Since subjects were surveyed verbally (due to low literacy rates) as they were leaving the location, we cannot link their guesses to their behavior in the experiment.

⁵⁵ The p -values reported are from two-sided t -tests.

TABLE 1 Summary Statistics on Demographics (All Treatments)

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Age	305	30.31	12.47	18	88
Married	305	0.72	0.45	0	1
Language count	305	1.62	0.66	1	4
Pashtun ethnicity	305	0.31	0.46	0	1
No education at all	305	0.53	0.50	0	1
Formal education	305	0.42	0.49	0	1
Qur'anic education	305	0.05	0.22	0	1
# years in occupation	302	9.20	8.42	0	45
# days worked last week	305	2.60	1.40	0	7
Feel poor	305	0.72	0.45	0	1
Monthly income	305	3,961.36	2,056.09	0	12,000

TABLE 2 Contribution Summary Statistics by Treatment Condition

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
<i>Civilian</i>					
Number of sessions: 16					
Contribute	101	0.50	0.50	0	1
Amount/Contribute	51	26.63	19.79	3	100
Average Contribution	101	13.45	19.36	0	100
<i>Cleric</i>					
Number of sessions: 19					
Contribute	112	0.83	0.38	0	1
Amount/Contribute	93	16.13	12.69	10	100
Average Contribution	112	13.39	13.05	0	100
<i>Cleric + Scripture</i>					
Number of sessions: 16					
Contribute	92	0.82	0.39	0	1
Amount/Contribute	75	27.45	22.78	5	150
Average Contribution	92	22.38	23.16	0	150

margin rose significantly to 27.45 AFN ($p < 0.01$). Overall, the amount raised per person in *Cleric + Scripture* was more than 50 per cent ($p < 0.01$) higher than in the other two treatments.

These findings are robust to different specifications. Appendix Table A1 confirms the findings through Mann-Whitney Wilcoxon tests of session averages,⁵⁶ while Appendix Tables A2a–c do so by conducting ordinary least squares regressions on both treatment dummies for the entire sample.⁵⁷ However, for simplicity we will focus on regression results in which we analyze one treatment at a time using split samples (Table 3). The first three columns include data from *Civilian* and *Cleric* to isolate the effect of the solicitor's clerical garb, while the last three include the *Cleric + Scripture* treatment to isolate the effect of the cleric's use of scripture.⁵⁸ Panel A includes the estimates without controls: the clerical garb increases the likelihood of contribution by 33 per cent (Column 1), but simultaneously decreases the

⁵⁶ This is a conservative test of treatment effects since each session is treated as a single observation.

⁵⁷ See Tables A2a (Models 1–2), A2b (Models 6–7) and A2c (Models 11–12).

⁵⁸ Full results for Table 3 are in Appendix Tables A3 and A4.

TABLE 3 *Summary of Treatment Effects*

	Effect of <i>Cleric</i> on <i>Civilian</i>			Effect of <i>Scripture</i> on <i>Cleric</i>		
	Contribute	Conditional amount	Average contribution	Contribute	Conditional amount	Average contribution
Panel A						
All	0.33*** (0.07)	-10.50*** (3.33)	-0.05 (2.64)	-0.02 (0.07)	11.32*** (2.59)	8.99*** (2.81)
Controls	N	N	N	N	N	N
N	213	144	213	204	168	204
R-squared	0.12	0.1	0	0	0.09	0.06
Panel B						
All	0.38*** (0.08)	-9.54** (3.54)	1.89 (2.60)	-0.04 (0.09)	9.47*** (2.73)	8.28*** (2.99)
Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
N	210	142	210	201	166	201
R-squared	0.24	0.27	0.13	0.13	0.18	0.16

Note: robust standard errors clustered on sessions in parentheses. Extensive controls and enumerator FE included in Panel B. See Appendix Tables A3 and A4 for the full results. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

contribution size by 10.50 AFN (Column 2), thus resulting in no net gain (Column 3). The cleric is unable to further increase the likelihood of contributions by reading scripture (Column 4), but is able to significantly increase contribution size by doing so (11.32 AFN, Column 5), thus raising 8.99 AFN more per person (Column 6).⁵⁹ The inclusion of extensive (individual- and session-level) controls has little effect on these coefficients (Panel B).⁶⁰ All regressions estimate robust standard errors clustered at the session level to account for within-session correlation; session fixed effects are not included, as treatments are administered at the session level.

The opposing effects of *Cleric* in the extensive and intensive margins, together with the dramatic difference brought upon by scripture, strongly suggest that *Cleric* is not functioning as a religious prime. One might argue that the decrease in the size of contributions is not necessarily incompatible with *Cleric* being a religious prime, since subjects might have viewed fundraising for EMERGENCY as outside the purview of religion, thus creating an environment in which a religious prime has a negative effect.⁶¹ However, this explains neither the positive impact of *Cleric* on the extensive margin, nor the increase in giving resulting from raising the prominence of religion (by adding scripture). Furthermore, the increase in the extensive margin cannot be evidence that the cleric primes religiosity, since it is accompanied by a drop in the intensive margin that is then reversed by scripture. Overall, the spiritual channel does not appear to be activated until scripture is introduced.

⁵⁹ Our *Cleric* treatment increases the extensive margin by 66 per cent, a treatment effect comparable to Haley and Fessler's (2005) (HF) eyespot treatment (60 per cent) and larger than Shariff and Norenzayan's (2007) (SN) implicit religious priming treatment (31 per cent). The addition of scripture increases the intensive margin by 31 per cent, a magnitude that is again comparable to HF (31 per cent) but smaller than SN (79 per cent).

⁶⁰ In all instances, the choice of control variables has only a slight effect on the magnitude of treatment effects and no effect on the direction or significance of the treatments.

⁶¹ We think this is unlikely, however, since the Pew survey results referenced above suggest that there is very little that is perceived to be outside the purview of religious authority.

DISCUSSION

What, then, is the mechanism through which *Cleric* affects behavior? To find out, we revisit the theoretical underpinnings of prosocial behavior. Extensive research on this topic models it as a function of three factors: intrinsic motivation ('warm glow', or the joy of giving⁶² and one's private valuation for the public good), the cost of giving and extrinsic incentives for contributing.⁶³ Extrinsic incentives can be broadly categorized as either rewards/punishment or reputational concerns (shame/honor). Rewards can vary from receiving a token gift in exchange for volunteering to increasing one's chances of salvation in the afterlife. Reputational concerns arise when one's action is judged in light of the norms of a reference group. Importantly, reputation concerns do not require an external audience: a person may judge himself poorly when his private behavior does not meet what is expected of a group with whom he identifies. These 'self-image concerns'⁶⁴ are most relevant to what follows in this article, since subjects in our experiments make anonymous contributions.

Extrinsic incentives, including interventions that heighten one's awareness of external expectations, sometimes result in unintended consequences: a puzzling decrease of large contributions accompanying the expected decrease of small contributions.⁶⁵ This phenomenon is referred to as 'motivational crowding out',⁶⁶ in which extrinsic incentives drive away intrinsic motivation without offering enough incentives to make up for the difference in lost motivation. Because people appear to be more motivated by the desire to avoid the stigma of falling below expectations than by the desire to gain the honor of exceeding it, contributions are often clustered around some norms, as those who were not intrinsically motivated, as well as those who were, are now both giving simply to meet the minimum.⁶⁷

In the course of socialization, humans develop standards that serve as guidelines for behavior in their many social roles. Authority works by making certain roles, and the norms governing acceptable behavior for those roles, more salient.⁶⁸ Recalling that most subjects had perceived the solicitor to be either a doctor or a government worker in the baseline *Civilian* condition, we can construct two potential *post hoc* explanations of the cleric's influence using the framework above. The first assumes that the presence of *any* human authority (be it doctor, cleric, etc.) induces equal pressure on the subjects to conform to the salient norms in their private actions,⁶⁹ but that what constitutes the salient norm varies according to the authority figure (for example, 20 AFN to doctors, 10 AFN to clerics, etc.). In this scenario, since intrinsic motivation is equally crowded out by self-image concerns in both the *Civilian* and *Cleric* treatments, we would expect contributions in both to be clustered around some non-zero amount (since a norm of giving nothing does not exert any reputational motivation to give), though what this specific value is will be different across treatments.

The second explanation assumes that the *Cleric* treatment induces stronger self-image concerns for subjects than the *Civilian* treatment, possibly because religion is more important to

⁶² Andreoni 1990.

⁶³ Bénabou and Tirole 2003, 2006.

⁶⁴ Bénabou and Tirole 2006, 1653.

⁶⁵ See review in Frey and Jegen (2001).

⁶⁶ Bénabou and Tirole 2006; Deci and Ryan 1985; Frey and Oberholzer-Gee 1997. This is entirely different from crowding out in public economics, in which public sector spending drives away private sector spending.

⁶⁷ Jones and Linardi 2014; Linardi and McConnell 2011. This is related to the idea of conformity (e.g., Bernheim 1994).

⁶⁸ Bandura 1986. Also see Milgram (1974), whose experiments show how authority – which can be indicated simply through dress (e.g., a white lab coat) – communicates what is expected of an individual.

⁶⁹ We thank an anonymous referee for suggesting this.

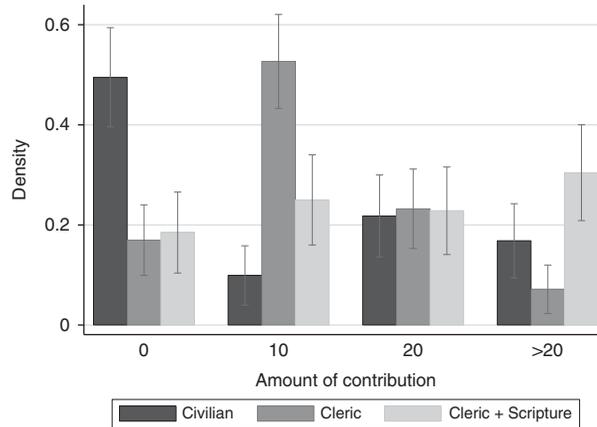


Fig. 1. Amount contributed to EMERGENCY hospital (all subjects)

our subjects' identity than public health awareness or civic duty. If the Islamic *sadaqah* norm of 'give what you can' is observationally indistinguishable from non-religious voluntary contribution norms in our setting, this would suggest that the differences across treatments do not come from the salient norms. Here, the intrinsic motivation present in *Civilian* is crowded out in *Cleric* by self-image concerns, clustering the contributions of those who were not intrinsically motivated, as well as those who were, around the norm.

The second explanation also assumes that while the *Cleric* treatment induces norms ('give what you can') that are observationally indistinguishable from non-religious voluntary contribution norms, self-image concerns are stronger in the *Cleric* treatment than in the *Civilian* treatment. This could be due to how important religion is for identity in Afghanistan. Here, the intrinsic motivation present in *Civilian* is crowded out in *Cleric* by self-image concerns. As a result, the contributions of those who were not intrinsically motivated, as well as those who were, cluster tightly around the minimum donation level.

Examining the histogram of contributions in Figure 1 suggests some support for the second mechanism.⁷⁰ There do not appear to be any non-zero modes in the *Civilian* condition (black bars) that are comparable to the dramatic 10 AFN mode (53 per cent) in the *Cleric* condition (dark gray bars).⁷¹ Additionally, large contributions (>20 AFN) drop from 17 per cent in *Civilian* to 7 per cent in the *Cleric* condition ($p < 0.05$).⁷² A counterfactual simulation in the online appendix further suggests that the prevalence of small contributions in *Cleric* is indeed made up of both people who are not expected to contribute and those who are expected to contribute more. Overall, the distribution suggests that the *Cleric* treatment, but not the *Civilian* treatment, induces norm convergence. Interpreting this behavioral framework as a phenomenon commonly observed in studies of religion, we are reminded of legalism, which the Oxford Dictionary defines as: 'Attribution of great importance to law or formulated rule; strict adherence to the letter rather than the spirit of law.'

⁷⁰ Capped lines in Figure 1 illustrate estimated 95 per cent confidence intervals.

⁷¹ Recall the denominations are in multiples of ten, and hence 10 AFN is the minimal amount. Five subjects (out of 305) contributed their own cash; these amounts are rounded to the nearest multiple of ten in the figure. Again, note that a norm of giving zero is observationally equivalent to a lack of pressure to give.

⁷² Contributions of more than 20 AFN are distributed across 30, 40, 50 or 100 AFN. See Appendix Table A1 for session averages.

Moving on to the distribution of contributions in the *Cleric + Scripture* condition (light gray bars), we see that there is no longer evidence of norm convergence, as the mode at 10 AFN disappears and contributions become equally spread across all levels: 18 per cent give nothing, 23 per cent give 10 AFN, 22 per cent give 20 AFN and 17 per cent give 50 AFN. Large contributions not only recovered, but rose above those in *Civilian*, with 30 per cent giving more than 20 AFN ($p < 0.05$). Interpreting this within the religious priming literature, quoting the Qur'an could have either refocused attention on the public good or reminded people that 'God is watching', and that God rewards generous behavior, counteracting the legalistic response.⁷³ Either mechanism can explain why religious priming works. In mechanism 1 (reminder of ideals associated with God), the focus is returned to one's intrinsic motivation to support the public good. In mechanism 2 (God as audience), the external incentive (for example, afterlife punishment or salvation) is large enough to overcome any drop in intrinsic motivation due to social pressure. In other words, these two mechanisms are observationally equivalent.

We also explore whether the treatment effects are mediated by demographic characteristics. The full discussion and analysis is in the online appendix: Heterogeneity. In summary, we find that while the effect of the treatments on the extensive margin appears consistent across demographic variables, the opposing changes of *Cleric* and *Cleric + Scripture* in the intensive margin affect those who are formally educated and those who feel poor. One possible interpretation of this result is that, due to the importance of religion in Afghanistan, all subjects recognize the cleric's religious authority as well as scripture's reminder that a Muslim should contribute in this context (extensive margin). But the cleric, on his own, is unable to overcome the legalistic behavior among those who feel poor – who have a large opportunity cost associated with contributing – and the educated – who may be better able to distinguish between human and divine authority in religion and accord different levels of legitimacy to each. Our results also suggest that religious authorities have to employ additional tools of justification and persuasion to engage these two groups, and that using scripture to make explicit associations between God's will and the behavior they are advocating is one effective way to do so.

CONCLUSION

We test the effect of a Muslim cleric's authority on contributions to a public good by low-income Muslim men. We find that, holding constant our 'civilian's' perceived educational and charismatic qualities, the donning of clerical garments induces dramatic changes in subjects' willingness to support a public good. This is noteworthy in itself, given mixed results in the literature on the ability of clergy to affect behavior, particularly outside the congregation. The evidence strongly suggests, however, that the cleric's effect on behavior is not accomplished by connecting people to God.

As for the mechanism through which the cleric affects behavior, the results suggest that clerical garb activated participants' religious identity and, due to the importance of religion in Afghanistan, self-image concerns were strong enough to shift the reason for contributing away from private valuation of the public good toward religious norms. Unfortunately, without

⁷³ This may also be related to the literature on authority and process cues: describing the decision-making process that produced the argument increases the acceptance of the argument (Djupe and Calfano 2009; Djupe and Gwiasda 2010). The same has also been observed in public goods experiments with penalties: while a penalty appears to induce contributions to cluster at the minimum, an explanation of a penalty as something that benefits everyone appears to increase its acceptance among subjects and restore larger contributions (Schnedler and Vadovic 2011; Silverman, Slemrod, and Uler 2014).

explicitly bringing in the Qur'an, this norm appears to be a legalistic interpretation of *sadaqah*: 'give what you can', which results in 'the minimum will do'. We reason that scripture acts as the religious prime and a justification for the cleric's solicitation, restoring intrinsic motivation and generosity by reminding subjects that God approves of and rewards charitable giving. The negative (positive) effects of the cleric (scripture) are particularly acute among the educated and those who, controlling for income, feel poor, suggesting that religious authorities may need to employ additional religious reasoning to mobilize these two groups.

The study's experimental design lends confidence to our estimates of these effects over and above observational studies, quasi-experimental studies or even ones that employ near-random assignment, at least in terms of their internal validity.⁷⁴ Our experiment is conducted in a way that addresses common concerns about issues of external validity in lab and field experiments, including critiques of the artificiality of the setting and intervention. Rather than playing a game, our subjects have the opportunity to contribute to a real public good by participating in the familiar and relevant activity of charitable giving. Our subjects were taken from the population – low-income Afghans – about which we wish to make inferences and were enumerated in a neighborhood setting familiar to them. This is in stark contrast to other studies, particularly in the United States, which often use university students as their subjects and cannot readily generalize their findings beyond that sample. More importantly, our intervention was designed and delivered in co-operation with an actual cleric, taking advantage of his relevant professional expertise and everyday experience in communicating to believers.

These advantages notwithstanding, we note two particularly important scope conditions in considering how to generalize our framework and findings beyond this experiment. The first is that there is a relevant norm in this context that religious authority and scripture can cue, which then guides the faithful's behavioral choices. In our experiment, religious authority cues self-sacrifice through *sadaqah*, a norm that allows freedom in choices about contributions, and positional and scriptural authority affect those choices in different ways. This is less of a restrictive condition than one might think, however, as there are many other norms in Islam (as well as other religions) through which authority can influence relevant behavior, such as the sanctity of human life (Qur'an 5:32, 17:33), honesty (Qur'an 26:181–3), forgiveness (Qur'an 42:37) or the use of violence (Qur'an 4:74).⁷⁵ While we have shown evidence of the effects of religious authority when such a norm exists, this may not even be a necessary condition.

The second scope condition involves the degree of authority over behavior that people accord to scripture in other contexts.⁷⁶ Adherents to the faith must hold their scripture as authoritative or else it is unlikely to have any power. 'Religions of the Book' – Judaism, Islam and Christianity – meet this criterion, while this distinction is likely to be less relevant for religions – like Hinduism and Buddhism – that do not view scripture as 'revealing divine, eternal truths and laws'.⁷⁷

Bearing these conditions in mind, our theoretical framework that separates the power derived from a religious leader's position as an authority and his use of scripture or other direct

⁷⁴ Paluck and Green 2009.

⁷⁵ A reasonable assumption, reinforced by recent evidence from survey experiments conducted in Egypt (Masoud, Jamal, and Nugent 2016), is that the impact of scripture-based appeals on opinions may vary depending on the issue in question, particularly how easily a religious value or norm can be applied to a given political context (Djupe and Calfano 2013).

⁷⁶ We thank Chris Berry for raising this issue.

⁷⁷ Davis and Robinson 2012, 11. Even within the Abrahamic faiths there is variation in the degree to which scripture is authoritative for believers (e.g., Catholics and Protestants), and so our emphasis on scripture's authority as distinct from clerical authority will be more or less salient as a result.

references to the supernatural may be applicable to other religious and geographic contexts. Consider Djupe and Gwiasda's study of American evangelical Christians' reaction to public policy against which they are predisposed: pro-environmental government policies.⁷⁸ When told that a reverend leader (instead of just a leader) supported the position, evangelicals' support for the controversial position actually decreased. However, when evangelicals were told that the reverend leader had arrived at that position after careful reflection on scripture, their support for the policies increased dramatically, showing that elites are judged based on their decision-making processes.⁷⁹ This example illustrates that even in a setting that is very different from our experiment, a backlash can be observed when positional authority is wielded without the backing of scriptural authority. The two authorities must be combined in order to effect a change.

Finally, our explanation of the experimental results takes seriously the fact that religion has a powerful effect on behavior, especially where it can be a tool that elites use to outbid one another⁸⁰ and where elites act as issue and interest entrepreneurs in mobilizing people for collective action on the basis of religious identity.⁸¹ The implications across relevant policy domains are intriguing but require more research to develop them fully. In the context of public goods provision, for example, development practitioners, trying to enhance 'good governance' outcomes in weak states, seek 'to implement interventions designed to increase a community's collective capacity'.⁸² This study shows how religious authority affects such capacity in the environment of interest for this policy domain. Elites' use of religious authority for mobilization is important in other areas of politics, as well. One is the production of violence, such as recruitment to terrorist organizations⁸³ and suicide terrorism,⁸⁴ or even the 'de-radicalization' of terrorists using religious authority;⁸⁵ we know extremely little about how that authority affects behavior in either case. Our findings show that the way in which religion generally (and religious authority in particular) affects social and political mobilization is underspecified in current scholarship, and needs much more careful empirical testing in order to determine how it affects behavior in different contexts.

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⁷⁸ Djupe and Gwiasda 2010.

⁷⁹ Djupe and Calfano 2009.

⁸⁰ Toft 2007.

⁸¹ Patel 2007; Wald, Silverman, and Fridy 2005, 129.

⁸² Humphreys and Weinstein 2009, 371.

⁸³ Hegghammer 2013, 10–1.

⁸⁴ Berman 2009; Berman and Laitin 2008.

⁸⁵ Raddatz and Netter 2010; Stern 2010; White and Wright 2007.

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