Political Trust

Political Trust and Religion
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Abstract

Scholars have long been interested in the relationship between political trust and the American political system. This investigation has focused on how trust influences political participation, policy choices, and governing. What has not been clearly demonstrated is how religious beliefs influence trust in government. This study examines how the relationship between a doctrinal belief and political trust is influenced by the religious behavior of respondents. The doctrinal belief used in this study deals with the respondent’s belief that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God. Religious behavior is measured by the amount of time a respondent prays, reads the Bible, how many times the respondent goes to church, and how important religion is to the respondent.

The hypothesis being tested is that trust will be highest for those respondents who reject biblical inerrancy but are very religious. Respondents in this category are more likely to believe that the government can be used to improve society. This study demonstrates that to appreciate the full impact of a doctrinal belief on political trust we must first evaluate how inerrancy interacts with religious behavior. It is the interaction of doctrinal belief and religious behavior that reveals the influence religion has on political trust. Citizens who do not believe in the inerrancy of the Bible and are more religious in terms of praying, reading the Bible, and church attendance, or who view religion as an important part of their life, are more trusting of government than those who do believe in biblical inerrancy and are very religious.

Trust in the government (the Congress and the presidency, in particular) has been gradually eroding since the early 1960s (Jennings, 1998:218). This erosion in trust has many in America concerned. Former Senator Bill Bradley wrote, “For nearly a decade, beginning roughly with the repeal of the catastrophic care legislation in 1989, through the erosion of environmental laws, the failure of healthcare reform, and the backlash against the budget in 1995, every major step taken by government has been jeopardized by mistrust, by a deep and wide conviction that politicians are acting in their own individual interests rather than as honest representatives of the democratic will” (Bradley, 1999, xii). Mr. Bradley may have been engaging in ideological hyperbole, but there are many political scientists who agree that the erosion of political trust makes the political system unstable (Parry, 1976: 134). The results could be a government that finds it more difficult to address the basic needs of its citizens or to solve the other pressing problems that challenge society (Hetherington, 1998).

Political scientists have spent a great deal of time exploring the fluctuation of political trust within the electorate (Cole, 1973; Citrin, 1974; Miller, 1974; Lipset and Schneider, 1983; Citrin and Green, 1986). Others have documented the influence of political trust on political behavior and policy performance. Weatherford (1987, 1992) links political trust to the acceptance or legitimacy of political institutions. Hetherington and Globetti (2002) found that political trust among white Americans influenced their racial policy preferences. Hetherington (1999) connects political trust to voter choice in presidential elections. It appears that political trust impacts the American political system in terms of participation, policy output, and popular support of the government.
What scholars have not explored is whether some citizens are inherently more trusting of government than others. Many of us know of a friend or relative who is quite willing to trust a total stranger simply because our friend or relative believes in the fundamental goodness of people. It should not surprise us then that some people are more willing than others to trust in government. But what makes some people more likely than others to trust the government? The implication is that if some people are more trusting in government than others, then policy preferences, voting choice, and the evaluation of government performance is more than just a rational decision on the part of the citizen. Political trust reflects a fundamental orientation toward government and politics that frames political behavior.

I test whether some people are predisposed to trusting government by evaluating religious behavior and the doctrine of biblical inerrancy. A study conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press concluded that religion “has a bearing on political affiliation, political values, policy attitudes and candidate choice. Its increasing influence on the political opinion and behavior rivals factors such as race, religion, age, social class and gender” (Pew, 1996). Sociologists and political scientist also have been able to link moral beliefs to political attitudes (Welch and Leege, 1991; Guth, Green, Kellstedt, and Smidt, 1995; and Corneo, 2002).

More specifically, I test whether a doctrinal belief will influence attitudes toward government. Those who believe in the inerrancy of the Bible believe that man has sinned and lost the image of God. As a result of sin, human beings will engage in selfish, destructive behavior. Because government officials also are sinful and prone to unholy behavior, respondents who believe in the inerrancy of the Bible will be less trusting of government than those who reject biblical inerrancy.

But to understand the full impact of biblical inerrancy on political trust we must also consider the role of religion. Religious behavior can influence how the doctrine of biblical inerrancy is interpreted and applied to life situations by the respondent. Those who are more likely to trust government will be religiously active either through prayer, church attendance, viewing religion as important to their life, reading the Bible, or some combination of the four.

Investigating the interaction of the doctrine of inerrancy and religious behavior will give us a more complete understanding of how religion influences political behavior. Generally, political scientists view a doctrinal belief such as the inerrancy of the Bible and religious behavior as separate independent variables or as part of a religiosity index. In this study I demonstrate that in order to understand the relationship between political trust and a doctrinal belief, we must take into account the interaction between the doctrinal belief and religious behavior. I find that the relationship between political trust and the doctrine of biblical inerrancy is conditioned by religious behavior.

My study uses data from the National Election Study (NES) for national elections from 1988–2000. When viewed separately, religion and inerrancy are not very good predictors of political trust. However, when combined, their predictive power is improved.

Religion and Political Values

Tocqueville observed that religion was an important part of American democracy. It placed boundaries on political behavior and created a common political culture that promoted democratic participation in the young country. Elazar (1972) developed a political typology that attempted to link religion with the type of politics being practiced in a particular region of the country. The link between democracy and religion has been strengthened in recent years. Weithman (2002) makes a spirited case for how religion promotes democracy and can influence public policy. Others have found that religion is a source of collective action (Williams, 1996), social change (Yirenkyi, 2000),
and stable political systems (Woodberry and Shah, 2004).

Religion not only influences political systems, but it is a source of political beliefs and values (Williams, 1999). Leege and Welch (1989) were able to establish that the foundational beliefs of American Catholics could be used as a predictor of political ideology, party identification, and attitudinal positions on a variety of policy issues. Foundational beliefs were defined as doctrinal symbols and operating beliefs that allowed the respondent to interpret what was going on in the world. Later, they (Welch and Leege, 1991) demonstrated that evangelical Catholics tended to hold political views that were more conservative than nonevangelical Catholics. A similar finding was found for Protestants. The political values espoused by non-mainline denominational Protestants tend to be more conservative in nature (Reichley, 2001; Hart, 2001), emphasizing moral traditionalism while opposing modernization (Corneo, 2002).

The mechanism by which religion influences and shapes political values also has been widely studied by scholars. Pastors who believe that their religious convictions compel them to become involved in politics are more likely to participate in politics (Guth et al., 2003). For Catholic priests the likelihood of participating in politics is increased if the priest’s position on social issues like abortion closely approximates that of the members of his parish (Jelen, 2003). There is convincing evidence that the local congregation can influence the political participation of parishioners (Harris, 1994; Calhoun-Brown, 1996; Djupe and Grant, 2001; and Beyerlein and Chaves, 2003). Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) demonstrated that being actively involved in a church increases the number of political acts performed by a parishioner. Deckman (2001) made the connection between religious values and the decision by Christians to run for school board.

What is not clear is how parishioners use their religious beliefs to interpret politics. Jelen and Wilcox (1997) could not find a religious-secular dichotomy when examining attitudes on the religious establishment and free exercise clauses of the First Amendment. Even within a congregation, not all parishioners apply their religious beliefs in a way that allows for a uniform set of political attitudes within that congregation (Jelen, 2000). Parishioners who could be described as members of the religious right are more socially and ideologically diverse than first believed (Hood and Smith, 2002). There is even some evidence that suggests the local political culture will influence how respondents apply their faith to matters of politics (DeLeon and Naff, 2004).

While Americans appear to be more religious than those who live in other countries, very few seem to base their voting decisions on their religious beliefs (Hecht, 2001). It also appears that while Americans want people who have strong religious beliefs to hold public office, they do not want religious groups involved in the political process (Hecht, 66,67). Americans believe that religion is an important part of their life but how they apply it to everyday situations is complex and hard to gauge.

This raises an interesting question. If religion is important to Americans, but they do not consciously use it to shape their political decision making, then how does religion shape politics? One possibility is that a religious doctrine provides a foundation upon which political decisions are based. Some Roman Catholic bishops, including Archbishop Raymond L. Burke, have announced that they will stop giving communion to public servants who adopt a position that is contrary to church teaching. Wisconsin Representative Dave Obey, a Catholic, replied, “In my view, Bishop Burke attempted to use his interpretations of theology to coerce me into taking specific positions on matters that I believe are matters of constitutional law.” Obey went on to say that “virtually every issue I have fought for in my 35 years of service in the Congress of the United States has been driven by the values I learned from the nuns at St. James elementary school in Wausau, Wisconsin” (Heinen, 2004).

The Obey/Burke dialogue demonstrates that parishioners oftentimes have to struggle to apply their religious faith to current political controversies. In this particular case, the archbishop is concerned
about Representative Obey’s votes on stem cell research and the availability of abortions at military hospitals (Heinen, 2004). It appears that the archbishop equates abortion and at least some forms of stem cell research with the killing of human beings. While the Fifth Commandment condemns killing, how it applies to stem cell research or abortions, especially in the context of a pluralistic, constitutional republic, is not always clear. Even though religious values appear to be the basis for Representative Obey’s decision making, ultimately he looks to the Constitution for guidance on abortion-related votes.

**Doctrine and Religious Beliefs**

A doctrine can be defined as a foundational principle that forms the basis for a religious belief. Political scientists have used doctrinal positions to identify Christians on the religious right. Right-wing Christians are often described as evangelicals or fundamentalists. These Christians share a common eschatological view as well as a belief in original sin, sacraments, and the need for a savior. It is believed that biblical doctrines shape the political attitudes of adherents (Guth, Green, Kellstedt, and Smidt, 1995). Other political scientists measure religious beliefs as a function of denominational affiliation or religious commitment. The problem with denominational affiliation is that there may be significant doctrinal divisions within the denomination that makes reliance on a single measure of religious belief inaccurate (Welch and Leege, 1991; Layman, 1997).

A more common approach to measuring the impact that religion has on political behavior is to use both doctrinal positions and other measures of religiosity, such as reading the Bible, how often one prays, and church attendance, just to name a few. For example, many studies find that doctrinal beliefs and religious commitment predict political behavior (Wald, Owen, and Hill, 1990; Huckfeldt, Plutzer, and Sprague, 1993; and Layman and Carmines, 1997 are but a few examples.).

What scholars miss when they lump doctrinal positions and religiosity together, or even when they include both but as separate independent variables, is the unique relationship that exists between the two variables. People who believe in the inerrancy of the Bible believe that Holy Scripture has been given by inspiration of God and contains no “myths, fables, errors, or antiquated ideas, which must be deleted from its pages” (Koehler, 1971:10). Because sin clouds our understanding of the will of God, the Bible provides sinful humans with the only true and accurate guide.

Government is needed because of the inherent sinful nature of all mankind. Without government, it will be impossible for man to live together peacefully. “Governments, therefore, are to protect the lives, property, the honor and reputation of the people, to safeguard them in the pursuit of their liberties, and to preserve order and discipline in the commonwealth” (Koehler, 280). In Romans chapter 13 the apostle Paul wrote that God ordained government and that Christians must honor, obey, and support it (Romans 13:1-7). A literal translation then would lead believers in the doctrinal position of biblical inerrancy to conclude that the government is a divine institution that Christians owe obedience and support.

The doctrinal belief used to study political behavior also must be more than one based on eschatology or the need for a personal savior. While these are important doctrines that certainly define Christians, they are too narrow when it comes to the everyday life of Christians. A Christian’s life is shaped by all doctrines within the Bible and not the few “major” doctrines identified by secular scholars. The doctrine of biblical inerrancy forces adherents to accept the Bible in its entirety. It does not allow these adherents to add or subtract from what God has caused to be written.

By forcing adherents of biblical inerrancy to accept the Bible as an unalterable truth, believers in inerrancy are less likely to believe in the inherent goodness of man. The Bible teaches that all have sinned and will be eternally damned unless they repent. Certain lifestyles (i.e., homosexuality) and
legally protected rights (i.e., abortion) that run counter to God’s will as spelled out in the Bible can
never be viewed as acceptable by adherents of biblical inerrancy. This doctrinal belief provides the
lens by which adherents view society. These adherents will be more likely than others to believe that
man can do nothing on his own to earn salvation. Respondents who accept biblical inerrancy will
even question whether people can ever create a “just” society. Instead, government policy is more
likely to condone the sinful desires of man than to reflect the will of God. For this reason believers
in the inerrancy of the Bible will tend to be less trusting of government.

What is needed in research that is designed to measure the influence of religion is a more
sophisticated measure of religious behavior and doctrinal influence. The measure must combine the
influence of a doctrinal belief and religious behavior. Biblical inerrancy will be linked to religious
practice via an interaction term. Such a measure allows us to gauge the influence of both religious
beliefs and doctrinal positions on political values.

Political Trust, Doctrine, and Religion

Stokes (1962, 67) defined political trust as a “basic evaluative orientation toward the... government.”
People will evaluate government performance based on what they expect or believe the government
should be doing. The NES (National Election Survey) measure of political trust used in this study
asked whether the people in government can be trusted to “do what is right.” This definition of
political trust has a distinctly normative quality that is not without controversy. It is very possible
that this question may be measuring a number of different interpretations and definitions of political
trust (Citrin and Green, 1986; Lipset and Schneider, 1983; Miller and Listhaug, 1990; Erber and Lau,
1990). Muller and Jukam (1977) and Abramson and Finifter (1981) both point out the weaknesses
inherent within the standard NES measure of political trust. The question addressing political trust is
hard to interpret because it is not clear whether the question is measuring individual or system level
performance. The question also ignores other factors, such as economic or social variables that
might influence trust in government.

Despite the limitations of the NES measure of political trust, adopting a normative definition as
described by Stokes makes sense for this study. Religion does not always provide Christians with
clear answers to all the questions facing society. Trying to do what is in the public good is not easy.
Many Christians struggle to apply their faith as demonstrated by the O’bey/ Burke controversy. The
process of trying to apply biblical principles to moral quandries is a normative process.

Williams (1999) identified three models that can be used to explain how religion helps define what is
in the public good. The covenant model describes a belief that an almighty God has established
moral standards that the community should work to achieve. Individual rights and desires are
subjugated to the public good. Government is the agent by which man is made to conform to divine
mandates. The other two models that Williams described (stewardship and contractual) place less
emphasis on divine mandates and more on the inherent goodness of man and his innate desire to
improve his community by reaching out to others in that community. These different models
suggest that people of different religious persuasions will have different views of government.

In this paper I argue that people who believe in the inerrancy of the Bible are more likely to adhere
to the covenant model as described by Williams. These people will believe that people are
inherently sinful and will naturally try to satisfy their own sinful urges. Government has a divine
mandate to promote a moral and civil society. But because men are sinful, people will try to use
government to further their own sinful interpretation of a moral and civil society and not an
interpretation that is guided by the inerrant Word of God. Believers in the inerrancy of the Bible will
be less trusting of people in government. Based on this literature review, the following hypotheses
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are tested:

Hypothesis 1: People who believe in the inerrancy of the Bible are less likely than others to trust government.

Hypothesis 2: People who demonstrate high levels of religious behavior are more likely than others to trust government.

Hypothesis 3: Trust in government is determined by the interaction of belief in the doctrine of biblical inerrancy and religious behavior.

Model

In this paper I am going to demonstrate that a respondent's trust in government is influenced by the doctrinal belief in biblical inerrancy and religious behavior. To that end, I model political trust in the following equation as the log odds ratio: \(Y_i = 1, 2, 3, \) or 4. In the function

\[ p(Y_i = Y) = a + b_1X_1i + b_2X_2i + b_{1,2}X_{1,2}i + \ldots + bnX_{ni} + ei, \]

"i" indicates respondent \(i\), \(Y = \) respondent \(i\)'s political trust, \(X_1i = \) respondent \(i\)'s religiosity, and \(X_2i = \) respondent \(i\)'s inerrancy, \(X_{1,2}i = \) interaction between religiosity and inerrancy, \(X_{ni} = \) all other control variables. A list of the control variables and the values that all values can assume are listed in the next section. Religiosity will be treated as the moderating variable. This means that the relationship between trust in government and inerrancy varies by religiosity. If the doctrine of biblical inerrancy influences political trust, I should find at least one of the estimates for \(b_1, b_2, or b_{1,2}\) will be different from zero for each year.

An ordinal logit technique will be employed to estimate the impact of each independent variable on political trust. My dependent variable, political trust, is an ordinal variable because the distances between each value are not equal but can be ordered. Because having an ordinal dependent variable violates the assumptions of the linear regression model, I will use a logit model in this study. The model was run using Stata, version Seven.

Data


I treated the three surveys as independent cross sections. The 1990 NES survey was not used because a number of the religious behavior questions and the inerrancy question were not asked of all respondents.

These elections represent pronounced changes in the political climate of the country. The 1988 election provides us with a chance to measure the impact of the Iran-Contra Scandal on political trust. The 1992 election was held during an economic recession. Republicans won control of the House of Representatives in 1994 for the first time in approximately 40 years. With the shutdown of the government in 1995, the 1996 presidential election gave voters a chance to respond to the increased political partisanship that seemed to define the relationship between the Congress and the White House. 1998 found the country in the middle of a strong economic recovery and an unfolding affair between President Clinton and Monica Lewinsky. Finally, since President Clinton could not run for reelection in 2000, voters had an opportunity to choose new political leadership. In each
case, I expect to find that voters who reject biblical inerrancy but are religious will be more trusting of government than voters who accept biblical inerrancy and are religious.

**Variables**

My dependent variable is the question taken from the NES survey that asks, “How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right — just about always, most of the time, or only some of the time?” This variable is labeled `govtrust`.

The independent variable of primary interest is the interaction term between the view of biblical inerrancy (`inerrancy`) and religious behavior. Religious behavior (`religiosity`) is an index that reflects the following individual variables: church attendance (`attend`), the importance of religion (`important`), how much guidance religion provides (`guide`), how often the respondent prays (`pray`), and how often the respondent reads the Bible (Bible). Multiplying inerrancy and religiosity together created an interaction term labeled `relxinerr`. It is important to remember that doctrinal beliefs and religious practice interact to shape religious beliefs. In addition, I created interaction terms for each of the individual variables that comprise the religiosity index. This was done to see if a specific aspect of religiosity was important. Finally, I created variables so that I could control for the effects of belonging to a Protestant church (`Protestant`).

Political trust is influenced by a number of other factors. Citrin and Green (1986) linked presidential performance to political trust. Trust tends to increase when public approval of the president (`presapproval`) is high. A similar argument can be made for the Congress. Support for the Congress (`conapproval`) should translate into higher levels of political trust.

As discussed previously, political efficacy (`govresponse`) is related to political trust. When people feel that government is not responsive to their needs, political trust suffers. Political efficacy also can refer to whether the respondent believes he has a voice in government. This variable was labeled `sayingov`. It is my belief that the level of political trust will improve when citizens feel that the political system is responsive to their needs.

Moral attitudes can influence political trust. The variable reflecting morals, `tolerate`, reflects whether the respondent espouses traditional values. A variable measuring the respondent’s view of abortion (labeled `abortion`) was included because of the political salience of the issue. I would expect that people who hold traditional or more conservative values to be less trusting of government.

Some people may simply be more trusting than others. To account for this possibility, I included a variable labeled `peopletrust` that measured whether the respondent trusted other people. If the respondent generally trusts other people most of the time, that respondent probably will be more trusting of government.

There is ample evidence to support the finding that people do engage in retrospective economic voting (Kinder and Kiewiet, 1979; Markus, 1988). I believe that deteriorating economic conditions will lower the level of political trust in the country. Conversely, if the electorate believes that the economy is improving or is about to improve, then political trust should be strengthened (Hibbing and Patterson, 1994). The retrospective view of the economy is `economylast` and the prospective view labeled `economynext`.

A final variable measured the respondent’s view of America’s position in the world (`usstrength`). Respondents who believe the country’s position in the world is weakening should exhibit less trust in
the government relative to those who believe the country is getting stronger. I have included a number of other standard control variables in this study, including ideology, party identification, age, education, income, gender, marital status, and race.

Results

It is possible that multicollinearity is affecting my model. For example, because the theory predicts a correlation between inerrancy and government trust, it would not be surprising if there was a correlation between inerrancy and congressional approval and inerrancy and presidential approval. To test whether these and other independent variables were highly collinear, each independent variable was regressed on the remaining variables and the R(2) and corresponding F statistics were calculated. While the results are not included in this paper, there is evidence of multicollinearity in the model.

Just when multicollinearity becomes a “serious” problem is not clearly defined in the literature (Gujarati, 1999:326). While describing the general relationship between inerrancy and trust in government should not be adversely affected by the presence of multicollinearity, forecasts that estimate individual parameters need to be interpreted with some caution.

The first model I ran did not include interaction terms. The coefficient estimate for prayer in 1994 was significant and negative meaning that the log odds of trusting government increased for respondents who prayed frequently. Religious behavior as represented by the variable religiosity exhibited a statistically significant negative relationship with political trust in 1996. People who exhibited less religious behavior such as praying, attending church services, and viewing religion as important to their life were relatively less likely to trust government. The inerrancy coefficient estimate was statistically significant and positive in 1998. It appears that in 1998 people who believe in the inerrancy of the Bible are relatively less likely than those who reject biblical inerrancy to trust the government. The religious behavior coefficient estimate was significant (and negative) in 2000. The log odds of trusting government were improved for people who engaged frequently religious behavior.

Because church affiliation might influence the level of trust, I controlled for broad religious affiliation. More to the point, I controlled for whether the respondent was a Protestant, Jew, or Roman Catholic. The results, which I do not report, were insignificant. Stopping at this point would lead me to conclude that the independent influence of inerrancy and religious behavior on political trust is weak to non-existent.

The most consistent predictors of trust between 1988 and 2000 include trusting people (Peopletrust), presidential approval (presapproval), congressional approval (con approval), government responsiveness (govresponse), and political efficacy (sayingw). When respondents trust people, believe that the government is sensitive to their needs, and approve of the way the president and the Congress are performing their respective jobs, the log odds of trusting in government goes up. People who do not believe they have a say in government are relatively less trusting of government.

It should be noted that in 1988 and 1994 the question for whether respondents trusted people was not asked. I dropped this question from each of the other years but it did not change the results in any meaningful way. For this reason I included the question for each year it was asked.

Residuals for each model also were evaluated. Outliers were not deemed to be exerting undue influence.
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The second model addressed the possibility that inerrancy and religious behavior of the respondent condition each other. To understand the true impact of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy on political trust, I need to take into account the simultaneous influence of religious behavior. I ran a second model that included the interaction term for the religious behavior index and inerrancy labeled relxinerr. (I created a similar interaction term for each of the individual variables that comprised the religiosity index.) I will address the meaning of the coefficient estimate in more detail later.

In each election the interaction between inerrancy and the religious behavior variable becomes statistically significant. What is interesting is that the operationalization of religious behavior varies throughout the years. For example, in 1992 the religious variable of interest was attending church while in 1998 the variable that reflected religious behavior was a measure of whether religion was an important influence to the respondent. The inerrancy variable achieved statistical significance in each year except 1998.

To assess the contribution of the interaction term to the explanatory power of the model, I subtracted the Pseudo R(2) of the model that had the interaction term from the model that did not have the interaction term. The interaction term adds from .2 points to .5 points to the predictive power of the model. While the explanatory power is not great, the fact that religious behavior conditions the relationship between trust and inerrancy is important. The results are consistent with the theory that a doctrinal belief is the foundation upon which other beliefs are built. We should not necessarily expect to see a large R(2) given the subtlety of the predicted relationship and the available data.

Just what impact the doctrinal belief has on political trust must be interpreted in light of the interaction effect. Because of the interaction, the coefficients for inerrancy and religiosity do not represent a constant effect on political trust, but their effects are conditional. In order to estimate the partial effect of belief in biblical inerrancy, I will insert the lowest and highest values for each variable. For example, in the 2000 national election, when the value of inerrancy is three (rejects inerrancy) and the value of religiosity is a five (not very religious) the effect of inerrancy on trust is - .7604(3) + .2667(3) = - .947. This means that when a respondent rejects the Bible as the inerrant Word of God and is not very religious, the log odds of not trusting in government are reduced by a factor of .947. Of course, this does not tell us if the result is statistically significant. Standard errors and the Z value must be calculated as described in the footnote.

I have calculated other values for inerrancy and religious behavior. The log odds were converted to an odds ratio to help with interpretation. A graphical representation of the odds ratios and their relative magnitudes are presented in Chart 1. The chart reflects the odds of trusting in the

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2 The 1996 election results are not included in tables 5 and 6 because the interaction term failed to achieve statistical significance.
3 To calculate the impact of inerrancy on political trust, we must take into account the interaction term. The impact of inerrancy is not revealed by the coefficient of inerrancy as listed in Table 2, but by [inerrancy + (interaction of inerrancy and religiosity)(religiosity)]. This means that the relationship between inerrancy and political trust is dependent upon the value of the religiosity variable.
4 Whether the results are statistically significant cannot be determined from Table 2. To calculate the standard error, I utilized the following equation: \( s(b_1 + b_3X_2) = \sqrt{X^2\text{var}(b_1) + X^2\text{var}(b_3) + 2X^2\text{cov}(b_1b_3)} \), Where \( b_1 \) is the estimate for inerrancy, \( b_3 \) is the estimate for the interaction term (inerrancy x religiosity), and \( X_2 \) is the coded value of the response (one is equivalent to accepting inerrancy or being very religious while a three means that inerrancy is rejected and the respondent is not very religious).
5 Converting the coefficient estimates into an odds ratio was done using the following equation: \( e^b \) where \( e = 2.71828 \) and \( b \) is the coefficient estimate. This gives us the multiplied odds. To compare the magnitude of the positive and negative effects requires that we compute the inverse of the negative effect.
government if the respondent rejects biblical inerrancy and exhibits some level of religious behavior. For example, in 1994 the odds of trusting the government for respondents who reject inerrancy but attend church regularly are increased by a factor of 9.17, ceteris paribus. It appears that at least in 1988, 1992, 1994, and 2000 the odds of trusting government are increased for respondents who reject biblical inerrancy but are very religious.

The results are not quite as dramatic for respondents who believe in the inerrancy of the Bible. There is some evidence to suggest that respondents who accept biblical inerrancy and are religious are relatively more trusting of government as compared to respondents who accept the inerrancy of the Bible and are not very religious. For example, the odds of trusting government increased by a factor of 1.4 in 1992 and 1.49 in 2000 for respondents who accept biblical inerrancy and are very religious. However, in 1988, 1998, and 2000 the odds of not trusting government increased by a factor of 1.46, 1.76, and 1.91 respectively for respondents who believe in the inerrancy of the Bible but are not very religious. When comparing respondents who accept biblical inerrancy and are very religious to those who reject inerrancy and are religious, we find the odds of trusting government are relatively stronger for the latter group (see Chart 2).

Discussion

One interesting finding of this study is that the importance of religious behavior varies over time. In some years prayer is the important measure of religious behavior while in other years it might be attending church or reading the Bible. Perhaps it is the context in which they are answering the question that matters. What is important is that while the variable that captures religious behavior may change, being religious conditions the relationship between biblical inerrancy and political trust. These findings confirm the complicated role religion plays in the political lives of citizens.

What does not change over time is the relationship between believing in the doctrine of biblical inerrancy and trusting the government. As the hypothesis predicted, respondents who reject the inerrancy of Scripture are relatively more trusting of government. This supports the view that conservative and evangelical Christians tend to have a negative view of human nature and its ability to do anything good in the eyes of God.

Religious behavior does influence the relationship between believing in biblical inerrancy and political trust. Going to church and making religion an important part of everyday life may make the doctrinal beliefs of parishioners manifest. In denominations that reject biblical inerrancy, it appears that engaging in various types of religious behavior leads members to believe that government has a positive role to play in society. The link between trust and accepting biblical inerrancy is more tenuous. Religiously active respondents that do accept biblical inerrancy also tend to be more trusting of government. The odds of not trusting government are greatest for respondents who accept biblical inerrancy but are not religiously active.

What does this mean? These results reaffirm our perceptions of religiously conservative voters. I would expect that doctrinally conservative voters would be ideologically conservative. This would suggest to me that people who believe in the inerrancy of the Bible see a fundamental contradiction between what God commands and what government tolerates. This contradiction would lead these people to view government with some suspicion. For example, people who believe in the inerrancy of the Bible probably believe that abortion is wrong. Yet, after Roe v. Wade, state governments have not been allowed to ban the procedure. Adherents of biblical inerrancy would see the state's inability to obey God's Word as troubling. This may lead them to conclude that the government is out of step with their moral beliefs so all other government polices must be viewed with suspicion.
People who do not believe in the inerrancy of the Bible and are religious are more likely to trust government. These respondents seem to be more willing to believe that government has a positive role to play in society. Since the 1960s mainline Protestant churches have adopted incrementally more liberal views based on the goodness of man (Reichley, 2001). The emphasis on equal rights for homosexuals, the importance of diversity in the workplace, abortion and reproductive rights, along with other moral issues indicate that all political and moral viewpoints will be tolerated in society. Respondents who reject inerrancy seem to be more willing to adopt this view and are more willing to trust government to carry out such policies.

The role of religious behavior is important when it comes to understanding how respondents with opposing views of biblical inerrancy view government. It would seem that church leaders can influence how their parishioners view government. For both groups, trust in government was relatively more likely if the respondent was religiously active. Church leaders can shape how respondents apply their doctrinal beliefs to problems that confront them every day. Church leaders can use the pulpit to shape the opinions of their parishioners. The clergy does have a role to play in the political socialization process and improving the level of trust in government. It appears that the role is more important for those denominations that do not subscribe to the inerrancy of the Bible.

Conclusion

The evidence does support hypotheses one, two, and three. Initially, it would appear that when taken separately, inerrancy and religiosity are poor predictors of political trust. Inerrancy as an independent variable really only achieved statistical significance in 1998, albeit weakly in 1996. Religiosity was important in the 2000 election.

However, to understand the true impact of inerrancy and religiosity on political trust, we must examine the interaction effect. Religiosity conditions the doctrinal views of respondents when it comes to political trust. The church appears to shape the doctrinal belief system of parishioners. The odds of trusting in government are stronger for respondents who are religiously active and reject biblical inerrancy. Our understanding of religion in political life must take into account the mutual influence of doctrinal beliefs and religious practices.

Bibliography


Appendix

Chart 1: Comparison of the magnitude of odds ratios 1992, 1994, and 2000 (based on respondents who reject biblical inerrancy but exhibit different levels of religious behavior).

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<th>Year</th>
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<td>2.72</td>
<td>2.15</td>
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<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>9.17</td>
<td>6.45</td>
<td>4.52</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
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<td>3.29</td>
<td>2.2</td>
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Chart 2: Comparison of the magnitude of odds ratios for 1992 and 2000 (based on respondents who accept/reject biblical inerrancy but exhibit high levels of religious behavior).

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<th>Odds Ratio</th>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>4.9</td>
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