



## God and Country: The Partisan Psychology of the Presidency, Religion, and Nation

**Penelope Sheets**

*University of Washington*

**David S. Domke**

*University of Washington*

**Anthony G. Greenwald**

*University of Washington*

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*Overt love of God and country have seemingly been prerequisites to be president in the United States in recent decades, if not always. Indeed, the 2008 presidential race was replete with campaign messages showcasing such perspectives—that Barack Obama and John McCain were religiously faithful and deeply patriotic. Scholarship demonstrates the potential political power of explicit appeals to America and Christianity; however, little research has examined (a) citizens' perceptions of candidates' ties to faith and nation and (b) how these impressions may be related to electoral attitudes and intended vote. We address this gap, measuring both explicit and implicit indicators of the Christian-ness and American-ness of Obama and McCain. We expected and found that both explicit and—in a final-entry regression position—implicit perceptions of these traits related to voters' overall candidate attitudes and intended vote choice and that they were connected significantly more strongly for our sample of self-described Republicans than Democrats. Results illuminate these partisan differences and raise questions about their implications for U.S. presidential politics in years to come.*

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Love of God and country seemingly have been prerequisites to be president in the United States in recent decades, if not always. Both public opinion polls and work by several scholars make this apparent. For example, roughly 7 in 10 American adults have consistently told pollsters that it is important for a

president to have strong religious beliefs (Pew, 2007). Further, debates over candidates who do not fit the politico-religious molds of their times—recall John Kennedy’s Catholicism in 1960 or Mitt Romney’s Mormonism in 2008—are indicative of the importance among the citizenry of a president’s beliefs. Domke and Coe (2008) show that appeals to religious voters have long been a strategic component of presidential politics, and that since 1980 have become an omnipresent part of the presidency. Similarly, every U.S. president from Harry Truman to George W. Bush has built public ties with evangelist Billy Graham, providing a mutually beneficial relationship for both leaders (Gibbs & Duffy, 2008). Further, Balmer (2009) and Sullivan (2008) contend that the large number of religious voters—especially the sizeable voting blocs of white, evangelical Protestant, and Catholic voters—wield considerable power, making appeals to *and* demonstrations of religious faith by presidential candidates a necessary feature of modern elections.

Just as important for candidates running for the White House is to demonstrate profound national pride. It seems reasonable to assume that any candidate who commits to a rigorous campaign and devotes enormous time, money, and effort to obtaining the highest office in the land must truly love the nation. But *genuine* love of country is a difficult concept to assess politically or to even measure (Dietz, 2002; Huddy & Khatib, 2007; Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989), thereby putting the onus on candidates to overtly portray themselves as patriotic, nation-loving individuals. Sullivan, Fried, and Dietz (1992) examined the differential ability of 1988 presidential candidates George H. W. Bush and Michael Dukakis to convince audiences of their patriotism—and the significant consequences for Dukakis in falling short on that task. Similarly, Fahey (2007) showed how conservatives and Republican Party leaders “French-ified” Democratic candidate John Kerry in 2004, undermining his war-hero status and calling into question his patriotism. Finally, analysis of presidential debates found that candidates regularly tie themselves and their candidacies to the nation, bolstering their image as candidates who love America and will put its interests first (Sheets et al., in press). In short, overt embraces of God and country are widespread and perhaps necessary in today’s presidential politics.

These discourses were on full display in the 2008 presidential campaign. Barack Obama frequently addressed his religious faith, his patriotism, and his loyalty to America, and did so in messages blending national and religious identities. In his Democratic National Convention speech, for example, Obama said, “America, we cannot turn back. We cannot walk alone. At this moment, in this election, we must pledge once more to march into the future. Let us keep that promise—that American promise—and in the words of Scripture hold firmly, without wavering, to the hope that we confess.” At another point, he invoked the Biblical story of Cain and Abel, tying it to the spirit of the American people: “That’s the promise of America, the idea that we are responsible for ourselves, but that we also rise or fall as one nation, the fundamental belief that I am my brother’s keeper, I am my sister’s keeper.”<sup>1</sup> McCain offered a similar blend of faith and

nation in his Republican Convention address, saying at one point, “We believe everyone has something to contribute and deserves the opportunity to reach their God-given potential, from the boy whose descendents arrived on the Mayflower to the Latina daughter of migrant workers. We’re all God’s children and we’re all Americans.” McCain also spent time discussing his prisoner-of-war experiences during Vietnam, using the salvation language of many evangelicals but applying it to America: “My country saved me. My country saved me, and I cannot forget it. And I will fight for her for as long as I draw breath, so help me God.” Thus, despite differing candidacies, policy goals, and campaign platforms, both Obama and McCain overtly demonstrated their love of God and country.

Despite the presence of these messages, however, relatively little research has examined citizens’ perceptions on these matters. Scholars have shown that the salience of religious and national identities can affect citizens’ attitudes toward policies and candidates, often without their conscious awareness (Albertson, 2008; Transue, 2007), but there has been little research examining how voters’ impressions of a candidate’s *American-ness* or *religious faith* are empirically related to their vote choices: To what extent are both traits important, and to what extent do they influence voting choices outside the awareness of voters? With this in mind we examine explicit and implicit associations of the 2008 presidential candidates with these politically important traits through an Implicit Association Test (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998), which explores respondents’ mental associations about candidates in a fashion that distinguishes explicit self-reported attitudes from cognitively embedded ones. In this way, we examine not only what these voters explicitly claimed about candidates’ faith and patriotism, but also the perceptions and biases that may go unnoticed by the voters themselves.

In modern presidential campaigns, in which professional communications consultants are paid millions of dollars (Friedenberg, 1997; Manheim, 1991; Mosk, 2007) and commonly seek to design messages to activate implicit stereotypes and attitudes (Mendelberg, 2001), it is imperative to understand how these messages about faith and nation might persuade at multiple levels. What we find is striking: First, attitudes that function beyond the awareness of voters nevertheless play a role in their voting behavior. Therefore, even those voters who consciously reject criticisms of a candidate’s religious faith or patriotism—either as prejudicial or irrelevant—may still be affected, at an unconscious level, by those lines of campaigning. And such implicit effects have demonstrable outcomes on voting behavior. Second, these perceptions appear much more important for Republicans than Democrats. Voters in both parties assign these positive traits to their preferred candidate, but Republicans assigned American-ness to a much greater degree than Democrats. The implication is that the Republican Party may be a much more difficult place for candidates who do not fit traditional notions of “American-ness,” including being White and Christian.

<sup>1</sup> The referred Biblical passage is in Genesis 4:9, New International Version.

### National Identity, Religious Politics, and Political Attitudes

Perhaps no campaign messages are more crucial for presidential candidates than those that overtly bind candidates to the idea of America—to engage in what might be called national identity affirmation. The power of such messages can be understood by turning to scholarship on social identity. Social identity theory posits a link between an individual's sense of self and the larger social group(s) within which that individual is embedded (Brewer, 2001). People typically have a favorable assessment of those groups to which they belong, as well as their fellow group members (Tajfel, 1982; see also Dasgupta, 2004; De Cremer & Van Vugt, 1999; Fielding, Terry, Masser, & Hogg, 2008; Tajfel, 1981). Social identity groups can range from small to large, and, among others, include partisan, religious, racial, ethnic, gender, and national groups. National identity is arguably the only collective identity that a presidential candidate could share with every potential voter, and it seems reasonable to expect that by strengthening the perceived association between a candidate and the nation, a presidential candidate would engender more favorable evaluations among American voters. That is, since national identity is the most wide-reaching of the collective identities among a national-scale electorate, a candidate's embrace of the nation's values and representation of oneself as a patriotic, true American can work to build a positive connection with voters (see Fielding et al., 2008), as well as perhaps change voters' attitudes toward policies and other political issues put forth by the candidate (Transue, 2007; see also Dickson & Scheve, 2006).

Further, national identity has important characteristics beyond its functioning, at an individual level, as a self-esteem granting collective identity: specifically, there is distinct emotional and narrative power associated with the "imagined community" of the nation (Anderson, 1983). That is, the idea of the national group provides deep affective meaning and structure for individuals in modern life (Anderson, 1983); in order to do so, however, that group's image needs to be reified for national members—by national leaders and the mass media, among others—through the daily reproduction of the importance and taken-for-grantedness of the nation (what some scholars refer to as an ideology of nationalism; see Billig, 1995; Gellner, 1983). To be clear, such a daily process is not ipso facto positive: however seemingly banal one's motivations or tactics, messages emphasizing national identity exclude and denigrate some in order to bolster the national group (Billig, 1995). Put differently, to define who is "more American" than someone else—or even to suggest that there can be one definition of who is "American"—impacts vast groups of current and future citizens (Stuckey & Hoffman, 2006). This means that, in the end, understanding the psychology of national identity in elections means understanding how national unity, disunity, and international affairs develop—and not always with ultimately humane outcomes.

Just as important in modern politics are discourses that accentuate religious—and specifically Christian—dimensions. We suggest that religious tropes also

“work” psychologically as group identity cues; however, they have the potential to be more divisive, so only certain cues can be used by candidates, and must be used carefully. Certainly, the religious history of the nation tends to favor some degree of publicly, politically enacted and constructed religious faith, or civil religion (see Bellah, 1967). The campaign context is no exception; as Campbell (2007) writes, “Religion . . . has long been a feature in national elections” (p. 1). At the same time, scholarship has shown that patterns of voter identification, emphasis upon religious candidates and moral issues, and other religious considerations have shifted over time, making recent elections much more centrally focused on Christian—and particularly conservative Christian—religious politics (Campbell, 2007; Domke & Coe, 2008). For example, there is ample evidence that contemporary voters prefer religious, and especially Christian (Protestant or Catholic), presidential candidates: according to Pew (2007), nearly 70% of Americans want a president to have strong religious beliefs, but 45% of Americans said they would be less likely to vote for a Muslim presidential candidate, and 25% said they’d be less likely to vote for a Mormon candidate. So, presidential candidates need to emphasize their faith, but these poll data would suggest that the only politically “safe” faiths are Christian Protestantism or Catholicism.

Through these cultural constraints and priorities, we suggest that Christian identity has come to function as a shared group identity for a majority of Americans—even those who may not identify as Christian. Religious attitudes are often formed early in life and are a continual part of an individual’s socialization in American culture (Carroll & Roof, 1993; Steensland et al., 2000). One need only think of the frequency with which Christmas and nativity displays are present in public locations and the commonplace structure of public school vacations around Christmas and Easter. Attitudes socialized early in life, in turn, significantly shape social beliefs and attitudes later in life (Alwin, Cohen, & Newcomb, 1991). This is important, because Albertson (2008) found that among both Christian respondents *and* those who *no longer identify* as Christian, political appeals emphasizing Christian themes exerted influence at an implicit level, tending to increase positive attitudes toward candidates making such appeals. In short, even among Americans who may report that they desire less religious language in politics, and who may say they are open to candidates of non-Christian faiths, these Christian religious appeals can have resonance without their awareness. Just as an appeal to a shared national identity can build positive affect between a candidate and voters (Tajfel, 1982), then, an appeal to Christian identity seemingly can have similar effects across a substantial portion of the population.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> We wish to note that our use of the label of “Christian” and the terms we employ to operationalize the “Christian” attribute later in our study do not attempt to represent the richness and variety within the many strains of Christian religious faith, let alone any religious faith. At the same time, our decisions to use the “Christian” label and to use broad, religiously oriented terms in our study are driven by the breadth with which religion, and Christianity, are used in modern political campaigns.

*Partisan Differences*

When theorizing about national and religious identities in American presidential politics, however, partisan realities must be taken into account. Specifically, we posit a two-fold *partisan differential* in God and country politics: that is, we suggest that Republican Party candidates are perceived as *more* Christian and *more* American than Democratic Party candidates, and that such associations should matter more for Republican voters' attitudes and vote choice than for Democrats. We expect these dynamics for a number of reasons.

First, "God strategy" discourses in recent decades—those that fuse nation and religious faith—have been driven primarily by Republican political leaders in conjunction with Christian conservatives (Domke & Coe, 2008). As Calfano and Djupe (2009) elaborate, white evangelical Christian voters have been largely aligned with the Republican Party at the national level for the last 40 years (but see also Sullivan, 2008). This is, in part because Republicans have perfected a strategy of speaking about faith and nation in ways—what some call "coded" terminology—designed to appeal directly to evangelicals without alienating other groups of Republican voters (Kuo, 2006). Particularly noteworthy is that such rhetorical strategies are so heavily partisan that, upon encountering them, evangelical voters tend to attribute them to Republican candidates, even if the candidate's party is unknown (Calfano & Djupe, 2009). Such emphasis upon religious cues, coupled with the implementation of faith-based initiatives and the centrality to social conservatives of religiously laden issues like abortion and gay marriage, have converged to make the Republican party seem more attuned, or in pollster-speak "friendly" (Pew, 2009b), to a Christian—or at least generically religious—worldview.

Second, scholarship suggests that there are perceptions among the public that the two major parties "own" certain political issues, due to perceived philosophical and governing approaches of the parties. That is, political party membership is recognized as one way for voters to discriminate between the values, world views, and issue priorities of competing candidates (Conover & Feldman, 1989; Sanders, 1988), and these judgments generally reflect meaningful perceived distinctions between Democrats and Republicans (Bastedo & Lodge, 1980; Rahn, 1993). Among those differences is the capability of each party to address certain political issues. For example, the Democratic Party is thought to "own"—to be much better equipped to handle—health care, Social Security, and education, whereas the Republican Party is thought to own taxes, morality-related issues, and defense and military matters (Petrocik, Benoit, & Hansen, 2003; see also Benoit & Hansen, 2004; Rahn, 1993). Such issue ownership prompts voters to find candidates more credible when addressing issues owned by their party, so there is advantage for candidates to focus campaigns on "their" issues (Petrocik et al., 2003). With this in mind, we posit that the Republican Party has come to be perceived to own issues related to, and even the trait of, patriotism in American politics—or has at least

done so since the early 1970s when Republican Richard Nixon routed the Democratic Party's antiwar candidate, George McGovern (see Perlstein, 2008). Suggestive evidence comes to mind when considering the struggles of Democratic candidates Michael Dukakis (in 1988) and John Kerry (in 2004) to convince voters that they loved, and were loyal to, their nation as much as their GOP competitors.<sup>3</sup>

Third, turning our specific focus to the 2008 election, Barack Obama was challenged on issues of faith and patriotism—partly, we argue, because he was a Democrat and partly because of his foreign-sounding name and his race. For example, speculation was widespread that Obama attended a *madrassa* as a youth, was secretly a Muslim, covertly was intimately associated with “domestic terrorist” Bill Ayers, and embraced the so-called anti-American sermonizing of his former pastor, Reverend Jeremiah Wright (see Daniel, 2008). These matters were emphasized by Obama's detractors as explicit means to condemn Obama's Christianity and seeming American-ness. Further, scholarship has shown some troubling biases that may have also affected voters at an unconscious level. For example, Devos and Banaji (2005) found that, on an implicit level, non-White faces are perceived to be less associated with the concept “American” than are White faces, even by some non-White participants (see also Devos & Ma, 2008). Devos and colleagues also demonstrated this effect for Obama himself (Devos, Ma, & Gaffud, 2008). We will explain further the notion of implicit attitudes relative to explicit ones, but the important point here is the possibility that, in addition to the general Republican advantages in the realms of Christianity and American-ness discussed above, there may be particular hurdles Obama himself faced in his contest with John McCain, due to his phenotypic characteristics and the way those were emphasized by some political opponents.<sup>4</sup>

Based on our discussion thus far, we offer the following predictions. Because of a general partisan differential and the particular faith and patriotism dynamics in the 2008 campaign, we expected U.S. adults in our sample to more closely associate John McCain than Barack Obama with being American and Christian

<sup>3</sup> In politics, patriotism is typically construed as the expression of an individual's love of, and loyalty to, the nation. This is not a scholarly definition of patriotism, which has multiple, often competing, facets (see Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989; Sullivan et al., 1992), and concomitant measurement difficulties (see Parker, 2009). But in recent presidential campaigns, where flag pins, military service, and saluting the American flag are conflated with expressions of patriotism (*Independent*, 2008), and in turn conflated with love of country, we argue that this is the generic meaning of patriotism in the campaign context of interest to us.

<sup>4</sup> Obama's campaign worked to counteract these claims against him in 2008, of course. Additionally, McCain's religious beliefs were less forwardly espoused than many in his Christian conservative, Republican base would have liked. However, McCain's choice of fundamentalist Christian and social conservative Sarah Palin as a running mate went far to quell concerns among the latter population (Cooper & Bumiller, 2008). Further, polls showed that Obama was perceived as less patriotic than McCain (*LA Times*/Bloomberg, 2008) or Hillary Clinton (Pew, 2008a), and that a robust 10% of Americans continue to say Obama is Muslim (Pew, 2009a; see also Pew, 2008b).

(H1). That is, we expected the convergence of a perceived Republican ownership of patriotism, the centrality of faith and nation discourses for GOP voters and candidates in recent years, and the specific 2008 context to favor McCain relative to Obama on these trait domains. Second, because of the prevalence of nation- and faith-related messages in politics, we expected respondents' explicit impressions of candidates' American-ness and Christian-ness to be correlated with their overall attitude toward the candidates, as well as their vote choice (H2). Put differently, the intensity with which these traits are emphasized in politics suggests that they matter; we expected to see evidence of that in their relevance to voters' attitudes and intended behavior. Third, because of the two-fold partisan differential, we expected these correlations to be stronger for Republicans than for Democrats (H3). That is, because we have argued that Republican candidates and voters tend to rhetorically privilege these political traits more than Democrats, we likewise expect these traits to matter psychologically more to Republican voters than to Democrats.<sup>5</sup>

### *Implicit Attitudes*

These expectations, and the bulk of research on political attitudes in general, treat attitudes as consciously held evaluations of political figures, issues, policies, or other objects (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999). Typical polling questions ask respondents to evaluate, for example, the traits of different presidential candidates, including how trustworthy and likable they are, as well as (occasionally) how patriotic and how religious they are. These overt attitude expressions are certainly relevant to, and presumably reflective of, the extent to which national and religious campaign messages resonate with voters. But that may not be the whole story. Scholarship also has demonstrated that political attitudes can be affected by unconscious processes and considerations, with implicit good or bad evaluations predicting vote choice (Arcuri, Castelli, Galdi, Zogmaister, & Amadori, 2008), and with implicit religious cues affecting attitudes toward candidates and policies (Albertson, 2008; Berger, Meredith, & Wheeler, 2008). The ultimate impact of nation-related and religious attitudes on voters' presidential evaluations, we believe, has strong potential for implicit influence, because the prevalence of God and country in political messages has made these ideas so taken for granted as "normal" by citizens. With this in mind, we were interested in how these attitudes

<sup>5</sup> Political psychology research has generally emphasized political ideology over partisan identification when seeking to understand, or explain, political impressions and behavior (see Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003). In this research, we offer our theoretical arguments through the lens of partisan identification for two reasons: First, the relevant scholarship on religious politics and issue ownership focuses on partisan dynamics more than ideological outlooks; and second, this research was conducted in the final weeks of a presidential campaign, which is the most partisan milieu in U.S. politics. All of the analysis that we present in this manuscript was conducted in parallel terms emphasizing ideology rather than partisanship, and the patterns remained.

in both explicit and implicit ways were related to citizens' vote choices in the 2008 general election.<sup>6</sup>

Implicit attitudes are defined as “introspectively unidentified (or inaccurately identified) traces of past experience that mediate favorable or unfavorable feeling, thought, or action toward social objects” (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). One of the clearest examples of an implicit attitude is the notion of a “halo effect” (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995), in which an attitude about some new attribute of a person is influenced by an existing attitude about another attribute. Take, as an example, the stereotype that attractive people are better and smarter than unattractive people. This stereotype may prompt seemingly unrelated conclusions, such as the impression that a message delivered by an attractive person is more convincing than an identical one delivered by an unattractive person. When asked to explain why the message is perceived as better, people typically will justify the message preference due to its stronger arguments or believability, when in fact there is no difference at all. Recipients do not recognize (or mis-recognize) that it is actually the general positivity from the deliverer's attractiveness that casts a “halo” over the message. Assuming that people are not merely lying when asked to explain their conclusions, it seems plausible that people hold both explicit and implicit attitudes.

The “halo effect” is, in fact, the means by which we suspect that the evaluations which interest us—about the perceived American-ness and religiosity of presidential candidates—might affect citizens' general candidate attitudes and vote choices. Specifically, we expect that a candidate's perceived associations with America and with Christianity should each engender implicit “halos” over their candidacy as a whole. Scholars have begun to identify these processes at work with religious cues in politics (see Albertson, 2008), building upon work on racial cues (see Domke, 2001; Gilens, 1996; Mendelberg, 2001). In the domains of theoretical interest to us, our expectation is that however voters *explicitly* make sense of potentially sensitive candidate impressions regarding nation and religion, they will simultaneously be influenced by *implicit* attitudes on the same topics. There are several reasons for exploring these dynamics. First, prior implicit attitude research has demonstrated that both explicit and implicit attitudes have predictive validity—each tends to predict variance in the criterion variable that is not predicted by the other (Greenwald, Poehlman, Uhlmann, & Banaji, 2009). Further, implicit attitudes are particularly predictive when research topics are socially sensitive, such as interracial and intergroup attitudes (Greenwald et al., 2009). In our case, our measures fall somewhere between these two—we are assessing political candidates, but along trait dimensions that are centrally invested in

<sup>6</sup> Scholars disagree about the best terminology for the ways in which these attitudes are thought to operate—whether unconscious, implicit, or unaware. Further, scholars are unsettled on the degree to which these attitudes (versus the means by which we measure them) are fully outside awareness (see Fazio & Olson, 2003). These debates are important, but are not our focus here. We use the three terms interchangeably and accept that the IAT is measuring something beyond explicit articulation by participants.

important national and religious groups. We therefore sought to examine the comparative contributions to electoral behavior of explicit *and* implicit impressions of candidates' American and Christian identities. We offer, then, our final expectation: that voters' implicit impressions of the 2008 candidates as "American" and "Christian" would significantly predict candidate attitudes and vote choice, above and beyond their explicit associations (H4).

### Methodology

These relationships were explored via the Implicit Association Test (IAT; Greenwald et al., 1998). The IAT measures individual differences in mental associations between pairs of concepts, such as objects (e.g., flower or insect) and evaluations (e.g., good or bad). The general structure of the test is as follows: Working on a computer, participants are asked to classify stimuli (words, pictures, or symbols) that represent the concepts into two categories, using distinct keystrokes and working as quickly as possible. For example, a participant is told to hit one key (typically the "I" key) if either "flower" or "good" comes up, and a different key (typically "E") if not. In a subsequent stage, the participant must hit the "I" key if either "insect" or "good" comes up and "E" if not (see Lane, Banaji, Nosek, & Greenwald, 2007; Greenwald et al., 1998). Relative association strengths are measured by examining the speed with which participants respond in the various conditions (flower and good with the same key *versus* insect and good with the same key). As Lane et al. (2007) noted, "the underlying assumption is that responses will be facilitated—and thus will be faster and more accurate—when categories that are closely associated share a response [keystroke], as compared to when they do not" (p. 62). That is, longer response times and more errors indicate weaker associations between concepts and evaluations (and thus less impactful underlying attitudes or stereotypes), while shorter response times with fewer errors indicate stronger associations.

#### *IAT Implementation and Procedure*

We employed the online, brief version of the IAT (Sriram & Greenwald, 2009), run through Harvard's Project Implicit demonstration web site (<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>). Our IAT task was randomly rotated through the "featured task" portion of the web site, so that individuals who came to Project Implicit and elected to participate in a featured, election-related task sometimes received ours, and sometimes received other election-related IAT studies. Subjects come to the Project Implicit web site of their own accord, so the sample is neither a probability sample nor nationally representative. However, the advantage of using the Project Implicit website is that samples tend to be more representative and diverse than traditional, university laboratory-based samples, and the anonymity afforded by web-based IATs is particularly valuable in studies related

to sensitive attitudes (see Friese, Bluemke, & Wänke, 2007). Sample demographics are described below.

Participants were first presented with an information and consent page, where they were informed about what to expect when they completed the IAT and agreed to participate in the anonymous study. Then people were presented with two sets of measures, in random order: explicit and implicit. The explicit (self-report) measures asked respondents demographic and political attitude questions, including political party identification, intended vote choice in the 2008 election, the certainty with which they were going to make that choice, their religious affiliation and religiosity (how religious they considered themselves to be, from “not at all” to “strongly”), as well as a series of feeling thermometer questions designed to measure explicit attitudes on relationships of interest in this study. Specifically, individuals were asked to rate, on a 0–10 scale, how strongly they associated the terms “Christian” and “American” with both Barack Obama and John McCain, where “0” meant no association between the candidate and “American” or “Christian,” “5” meant moderate association, and “10” meant strong association between the candidate and “American” or “Christian.” There was also an attention question, asking participants how much attention they were paying to the 2008 campaign. The wording of the questions is in Appendix B.

Participants completed the implicit task either before, after, or in between separate pages of the explicit items. The implicit task was structured similarly to the general description offered above, but with study-specific stimuli. Specifically, the candidate categories were Obama and McCain, and each candidate was represented by four stimuli—three pictures and one campaign symbol that included the candidate’s name. Participants were introduced to these stimuli on an instructions page and also to the evaluative categories of interest: “American” and “Christian.” The “American” attribute was represented by four images—the American flag, Congress, the Statue of Liberty, and the preamble to the Constitution—which were paired with four nonfocal foreign images—the Union Jack, the Great Pyramids, the Coliseum in Rome, and the Eiffel Tower—to which participants were not introduced ahead of time. The “Christian” attribute was represented by four words—Believer, Faith, Church, Prayer—which were paired with four nonfocal politics-related words—Campaign, Election, Congress, Voter—to which, again, participants were not introduced ahead of time.<sup>7</sup> The images used as stimuli are presented in Appendix A.

Participants were asked to focus, in each case, solely on the category of interest to us, American or Christian. For example, in one stage individuals were

<sup>7</sup> These four images and words are of course not meant to indicate the entirety of the concepts “American” or “Christian.” Further, we recognize that three of the terms in the “Christian” category are not explicitly Christian faith-related words. However, the political and cultural electoral climate strongly favors Christian candidates, and 78% of the adult American population currently identifies as Christian (Pew, 2008c), leading us to expect that these religious terms would most commonly be read as relating to the “Christian” faith of the candidates.

told that if pictures of Obama OR American images came up, they were to hit the “K” key; if not, they were to hit the “D” key. Attention was thus focused only on the categories of interest, and not their nonfocal—Foreign or Politics—counterparts. Another stage paired McCain with American. Both candidates were similarly paired, in turn, with Christian. The order of the stages was randomized, with two practice stages provided at the beginning of the task, and each stage being repeated in order to generate estimates of reliability and practice effects. Example screenshots of the task are presented in Appendix A.

### *Sample Characteristics*

The study was on the Project Implicit web site from September 17 to October 19, 2008. Participants come to the Project Implicit site of their own accord and may be attracted to it through news coverage (e.g., Kristof, 2008) or through academic or personal references; in our case we did no active recruiting for participants. Consistent with previous IAT studies, we filtered out subjects whose performance indicated that they did not cooperate sufficiently with the IAT instructions—those, for example, whose response latencies were too fast, indicating random guessing, or too slow, indicating too much time spent on each classification. We also eliminated subjects from our analyses who did not respond to all measures. This gave us usable data for 4,618 individuals. The mean reported age of this sample was 30.7, older than the average undergraduate laboratory sample, and while 61.7% of the sample was aged 30 and younger, nearly 11% were over 50. Fully 61.2% were female, and education was skewed toward the more educated, with 33% reporting they had attended some college, 19.1% reporting a BA degree, and 23.2% reporting a graduate or professional degree. In terms of racial background, 83% were White, 5.2% were African American, 1.2% were multiracial African American and White, 3% were Asian, 0.4% were Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, 0.5% were American Indian/Native American, 3.5% were other multiracial, and 3.1% were of other or unknown racial groups. The sample was heavily weighted toward Democrats, who comprised 70.5% of the sample; 21% were Republicans, and 8.5% were Other. The heavy partisan skew was expected and fit with the analyses we undertook. Finally, 36% of the sample indicated that they were not at all religious, 28% said they were slightly religious; 24.9% said moderately religious, and 11.1% said strongly religious—a pattern that skewed less religious than the general population (Domke & Coe, 2008).

Because respondents self-select to participate in the study, we recognize that the sample is not representative of any definable population. That said, the sample was sizably larger and more diverse than a typical undergraduate research sample; further, the sample’s large size allows for enough statistical power to examine the relationship among variables of interest. Additionally, our sample allowed us to examine a large number of voting American adults in the weeks preceding the 2008 election; the timeliness of the survey is a significant advantage. Scholarship

acknowledges that statistical procedures, particularly regression, can serve multiple purposes—not only the prediction of effects in a larger population, but also the explanation of the relationship between variables in a sample (Epstein, 2008; Pedhazur, 1973). Therefore, while we acknowledge that our sample is not representative, our ability to explain the relationship between implicit and explicit perceptions and voting behavior provides a solid foundation not only for understanding these variables more clearly, but also for future studies that replicate our research in a representative sample.

### *Computed Measures*

People's implicit and explicit associations of McCain and Obama with Christian or American were the primary independent variables of interest in this study. For the implicit items, the response latency data were transformed into "D-scores" indicating relative preference for one candidate over another on each of the implicit measures, consistent with prior IAT studies (Greenwald, Nosek, & Banaji, 2003; also Sriram & Greenwald, 2009). Specifically, the D-scores had a potential range from  $-2.0$  to  $+2.0$ , with mean scores hovering around  $.2$ , which is typical for politics-related IATs (Nosek et al., 2007). The explicit measures corresponded to the implicit ones; American and Christian thermometer scores were combined for each respondent into two thermometer difference scores, with positive numbers showing a lean toward viewing Obama as more American or more Christian. These were then standardized, and the overall explicit measures ranged from about  $-3.0$  to  $+3.0$ .

There were two primary outcome variables: an explicit overall candidate attitude measure and a composite measure of vote certainty. The attitude measure was computed in the same way as the explicit American and Christian difference measures, based on explicit evaluations of Obama and McCain as "good" or "bad." Positive scores on this attitude difference measure ranged from about  $-3.0$  to  $+3.0$ , again with positive numbers showing a lean toward assessing Obama more favorably than McCain. "Votecertainty" was computed from (a) respondents' reported intended vote choice and (b) their reported certainty about that choice. This computed measure ranged from  $-5.0$  to  $+5.0$ , in which positive scores indicated an intention to vote for Obama, and negative scores indicated an intention to vote for McCain. The larger the absolute value of the score, the more certain the respondent was; therefore,  $-5.0$  represented a certain McCain vote, and  $+5.0$  indicated a certain Obama vote.

### **Analysis**

Our first expectation was that respondents' associations of John McCain as American and Christian would be stronger than their associations of Barack Obama as American and Christian. We investigated this expectation in two ways.

**Table 1.** Mean Scores for McCain and Obama on American and Christian Explicit Measures

	McCain American	Obama American	McCain Christian	Obama Christian
Mean	7.93	7.56	6.16	6.11
( <i>N</i> ; Std. Dev.)	( <i>N</i> = 4618; <i>SD</i> = 2.39)	( <i>N</i> = 4618; <i>SD</i> = 2.66)	( <i>N</i> = 4618; <i>SD</i> = 2.70)	( <i>N</i> = 4618; <i>SD</i> = 2.72)

**Table 2.** Mean Scores, by Party, for McCain and Obama on American and Christian Explicit Measures

	McCain American	Obama American	McCain Christian	Obama Christian
Republicans	9.12** <i>n</i> = 970	4.57** <i>n</i> = 970	6.71** <i>n</i> = 970	4.06** <i>n</i> = 970
Democrats	7.57** <i>n</i> = 3254	8.46** <i>n</i> = 3254	6.02** <i>n</i> = 3254	6.75** <i>n</i> = 3254
T-test ( <i>df</i> )	<i>t</i> = 18.35** ( <i>df</i> = 4222)	<i>t</i> = 50.35** ( <i>df</i> = 4222)	<i>t</i> = 7.04** ( <i>df</i> = 4222)	<i>t</i> = 29.55** ( <i>df</i> = 4222)

\*\*Differences in means, between parties, are significant at  $p < .001$ .

First, we calculated mean scores on the four explicit 0 to 10 thermometer assessments of how American and how Christian each candidate was, for the entire sample of respondents. The means are presented in Table 1. The data in Table 1 indicate that the mean scores on American and Christian explicit measures were, indeed, higher for McCain than for Obama. However, the means were close and well within the range of the standard deviations, so it is unlikely that these are robust differences. It is important to note, though, that these means arise from a sample composed substantially of Democratic Party identifiers (more than 70% of the sample); even with that population skew, the participants evaluated McCain as more American and more Christian than Obama on these explicit assessments of American and Christian identity.

To better understand these dynamics, we broke the sample according to Republican and Democratic identification and compared respondents' mean scores on these measures. These data are presented in Table 2 and shows some interesting patterns. In each case, individuals rated their party's chosen candidate as more American and more Christian than the opposing candidate. Looking at the left two trait columns, for example, we see that Republicans rated McCain as more American (9.12) than Obama (4.57), while Democrats rated Obama as more American (8.46) than McCain (7.57).

Notably, the partisan differentials in perceptions of the candidates were sizeable: Democrats said McCain was slightly less American and less Christian than Obama, whereas Republicans evaluated Obama as far less American and Christian than McCain. In numerical terms, the perceptual gap across candidates was five times larger among Republicans on perceptions of American-ness, and more than three times larger among Republicans on perceptions of Christian faith. These data

**Table 3.** Correlations Between Explicit American and Christian Difference Measures, and Overall Candidate Attitude and Votecertainty

	Obama More American	Obama More Christian
Obama More positive	.741** ( <i>N</i> = 4618)	.455** ( <i>N</i> = 4618)
Certain Vote for Obama	.665** ( <i>N</i> = 4618)	.413** ( <i>N</i> = 4618)

\*\*Correlations are significant at  $p < .001$  level.

provide support for our expectation that McCain, as the Republican candidate, had a cultural advantage over Obama on these trait domains.

Our second prediction was that respondents' explicit impressions of the candidates' American and Christian identities would be correlated with their overall attitude toward the candidates, as well as with vote intentions. For this analysis, we first used the American and Christian explicit measures to create a candidate difference measure on each, with negative scores indicating a rating of McCain as more American or more Christian than Obama, and positive scores indicating the inverse. Next we computed an explicit overall attitude difference measure, with negative scores indicating a rating of McCain as more "good" than Obama, and positive scores indicating the inverse. Finally, we use the computed votecertainty measure, in which more positive scores indicated a more certain vote for Obama and more negative scores indicated a more certain vote for McCain. With these data, correlations were run between the American and Christian difference measures and first, the explicit overall attitude measure, and second, the votecertainty measure. These correlations are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 shows significant, large correlations between both American and Christian explicit measures and our two outcome variables of interest, candidate attitude and votecertainty. The positive sign of the correlations indicates that the difference measures and the outcome measures go in the same direction: if a respondent said McCain is more American than Obama, his or her overall attitude and votecertainty also favored McCain. Because all measures were scored in the same direction (positive numbers for Obama, negative for McCain), correlation coefficients are positive even for McCain supporters. Notably, the correlations between American and the outcome measures were higher than those for Christian, suggesting that embraces of America may be more relevant to overall attitude and vote choice than expressions of religious faith.

Our third prediction—that these correlations should be higher for Republicans than for Democrats—entailed breaking these identical analyses down by party. Our prediction was supported, and results are presented in Table 4. The Fisher's  $r$ -to- $z$  transformation allowed us to test the significance of the difference between the  $r$  values for Republicans and Democrats, and in each case the differences were robust and statistically significant. These data suggest that

**Table 4.** Correlations, by Party, Between Explicit American and Christian Difference Measures, and Overall Candidate Attitude and Votecertainty (with Difference Significance Statistics)

	Obama More American		Obama More Christian	
	Democrats	Republicans	Democrats	Republicans
Obama More positive	$r = .458^{**}$ ( $n = 3254$ )	$r = .683^{**}$ ( $n = 970$ )	$r = .199^{**}$ ( $n = 3254$ )	$r = .490^{**}$ ( $n = 970$ )
Difference Statistic	$z = 9.28^{**}$		$z = 9.13^{**}$	
Certain Vote for Obama	$r = .260^{**}$ ( $n = 3254$ )	$r = .467^{**}$ ( $n = 970$ )	$r = .141^{**}$ ( $n = 3254$ )	$r = .326^{**}$ ( $n = 970$ )
Difference Statistic	$z = 6.56^{**}$		$z = 5.36^{**}$	

\*\*Correlations and  $z$ -scores are significant at  $p < .001$  level.

perceptions of the candidates' American-ness and Christianity were much more strongly related to overall candidate attitude andotecertainty for Republicans than for Democrats.

Our final prediction introduced our implicit measures, because we believe that discourses about faith and nation—particularly when they are about the candidates themselves—have great resonance, perhaps even beyond people's awareness. We expected respondents' implicit associations between candidates and these traits to significantly predict overall attitude and vote choice, even after accounting for explicit associations. To test this prediction, we first created a composite attitude measure comprised ofotecertainty and candidate attitude. We joined these measures together because of our conceptual argument that implicit attitudes cast a positive "halo" over the candidate, engendering more favorable attitudes overall, as well as greater support; further, the two measures are highly correlated (at  $r = .87$ ,  $p < .001$ ), both performed well in the previous correlational analyses, and because previous work has often examined attitude toward a candidate or party in addition to stated vote intention, as both are thought to offer different indications of actual future behavior (e.g., see Friese et al., 2007).

Our second step to test our final prediction was to run a linear regression model, incorporating relevant demographic variables as well as our four key attitude measures. We used the standardized, joint criterion variable just created. We opted for hierarchical entry of variables, because of our desire to test our expectation that implicit attitudes would predict criterion variance even after factoring in explicit attitudes. Also, because of our expectation of partisan differences, we built four interaction terms, interacting Republicanism (versus any other partisan identification) with each of the four attitude measures. Each continuous variable was standardized before entry by dividing it by its standard deviation, which allows us to examine and compare the size of unstandardized B coefficients in the model as well as the dummy variable coefficients. We entered demographic variables in the first block, with campaign attention and religiosity, followed by explicit measures in

**Table 5.** Hierarchical Linear Regression Model, with Composite Candidate Attitude + Votecertainty as Criterion Variable

	Unstandardized Coefficients		R <sup>2</sup> (Change per Step)	Zero-Order Correlations when Entered
	B	Std. Error		
Constant	.917**	.043	.782**	
Female <sup>1</sup>	.018	.015		.073
Nonwhite <sup>1</sup>	.108**	.021		.143
Republican <sup>1</sup>	-2.029**	.018		-.881
Religious <sup>1</sup>	-.095**	.016		-.276
Attention <sup>2</sup>	.067**	.008		.169
Obama more American (explicit) <sup>2</sup>	.263**	.008	.843 (.061**)	.732
Obama more Christian (explicit) <sup>2</sup>	.075**	.007		.454
Obama more American (implicit) <sup>2</sup>	.128**	.008	.857 (.014**)	.697
Obama more Christian (implicit) <sup>2</sup>	.049**	.007		.527
Repub* AmerExpl	.123**	.017	.865	.807
Repub* ChrExpl	.049*	.015	(.008**)	.577
Repub* AmerIAT	.110**	.019		.687
Repub* ChrIAT	.058**	.017		.443

\*B or R-square change is significant at  $p < .01$  level.

\*\*B or R-square change is significant at  $p < .001$  level.

<sup>1</sup>Variable coded as dummy, 1 = yes, 0 = no.

<sup>2</sup>Variable standardized by dividing scores by SD of distribution.

the second block, implicit measures in the third block, and interaction terms in the fourth block. This approach provided a strict test of the contribution of the implicit measures. The results for the model are shown in Table 5.<sup>8</sup>

Table 5 shows several interesting patterns. First, our expectation was supported: the third block—entailing only the implicit, IAT-measured associations between the candidates and American and Christian traits—explained a significant amount of additional variance in the outcome attitude/votecertainty variable. Both the American and the Christian implicit measures had significant coefficients,

<sup>8</sup> We have a theoretical justification for running our regression hierarchically—in order to clearly demonstrate the contribution of implicit attitudes after explicit attitudes are taken into account. Nonetheless, we also ran it simultaneously, and found that all predictors remained significant, and the four Republican interaction terms likewise remained significant. Further, we also ran the regression with justotecertainty as the criterion—while we are interested in the joint criterion of attitude andotecertainty, for consistency’s sake we ran the same analysis with justotecertainty. All four key attitude predictors (implicit and explicit American and Christian) remained significant; the only changes were that the attention variable dropped from significance, as did the Republican\*ExplicitChristian interaction term. This suggests that the explicit Christian measure directly performed better for Republicans insofar as their attitude toward the candidates was concerned, but not so for their vote choice. The implicit Christian interaction term, as well as both American interaction terms, remained significant and positive in the model for Republicans.

which indicated that, for non-Republican respondents, implicit ratings of a candidate as more American or more Christian was related to a better overall attitude toward and a more certain vote for that candidate. That pattern is not altogether surprising; what is important is the additional contribution of the implicit measures even after accounting for participants' explicit perspectives. Second, in the final block, all four interaction terms are positive and significant—this indicates that each attitude measure explains significantly more variance for Republicans than it does for non-Republicans.<sup>9</sup> Put differently, the combination of explicit and implicit impressions of candidates' American-ness and Christianity accounted for much more of the overall attitude and vote intention for Republicans than it did for other respondents. This supported our findings for prediction 3, that these perceptions are more important for Republicans than they are for Democrats. Furthermore, we see across the final three blocks that the American measures had much larger coefficients than the Christian measures. Therefore, although all are significant, it appears that perceptions of American-ness explain more variance in the criterion than perceptions of Christianity.

Before moving to the discussion, it is worth briefly addressing the relationship between explicit and implicit measures. In general, the IAT measures showed robust correlations with the two criterion measures, and the implicit-explicit attitude correlation for American (.539,  $p < .001$ ) is greater than that for Christian (.375,  $p < .001$ ). Typically, low implicit-explicit correlation leads to lower independent predictive validity of the IAT measure, but the Christian coefficient is still robust.<sup>10</sup> These high correlations indicate that both implicit and explicit measures relate to voters' attitudes and votecertainty—and raise important questions for the predictive validity of both implicits and explicit. As the regression models showed, the implicit measures had predictive validity above and beyond the explicit measures. Detailed analyses pitting explicit against implicit are beyond our focus, but future studies should seek to replicate these findings among a representative sample, as well as to parse the predictive validity of implicit and explicit attitudes, especially for groups of respondents, i.e., those that identify as Christian versus not, Democrats versus Republicans, etc. These are important questions.

<sup>9</sup> We also ran the regression models with religious and Christian dummy variables interacted with the explicit and implicit Christian measures—these terms had positive, significant coefficients, suggesting that these measures performed better for respondents who self-identify as either Christian (regardless of their level of religiosity) or, more generally, as religious (regardless their denomination). While not directly on point to our interests, this finding suggests future research on how voters of different religious faiths and commitments respond to these measures.

<sup>10</sup> It is also worth noting that the "American" category stimuli consist of pictures and the "Christian" stimuli consist of words. One reviewer of this manuscript noted that it is possible that the pictures triggered stronger relationships among variables than the words, thereby accounting in part for the stronger relations among the American perceptions. We did not include measures to address the stimuli differences in our data, but we do note that previous IATs have tested word and image stimuli against one another and found that findings remain similar—with if anything a slight lean in power to word stimuli rather than images (Nosek, Greenwald, & Banaji, 2002). This research, then, is suggestive that our findings are not due to the differing forms of stimuli.

## Discussion

Scholarship has documented ample faith- and nation-centric messages in American politics (Campbell, 2007; Domke, 2004; Stuckey, 2005), whether to support a specific policy proposal (Hutcheson, Domke, Billeaudeau, & Garland, 2004) or to bolster a candidacy (Sheets et al., in press). We know that U.S. voters want their presidents to be patriotic, religious Americans, and that Protestant or Catholic branches of the Christian faith are privileged above others. This research explored the extent to which individuals' perceptions of those traits—both within and outside their awareness—correlate with overall attitudes toward presidential candidates and certainty of intended vote. We utilized a nonrepresentative, nonrandom sample, but at the same time our sample size engenders confidence that the differential partisan patterns are not likely due to chance; and the strong patterns among partisan, national, and religious identity are, if anything, likely muted by the nature of the respondents. That is, Project Implicit tends to attract a sample of interested and engaged, as well as relatively more liberal voters within each party, and very few on the more conservative end of the spectrum, especially among Republicans (Nosek et al., 2007). Research has shown that low-interest voters respond more consistently to peripheral political cues and decision short-cuts in politics (see Petty & Cacioppo, 1996), while popular and scholarly work suggests more conservative citizens might place especially high premiums on overt love of God and country among political candidates (Balmer, 2009; Kuo, 2006; Sullivan, 2008). Therefore, the relationships we found here may be yet more pronounced among a broader cross-section of the electorate, a point for a subsequent study to examine.

Several important patterns were present in this research. First, our results suggest that the traits of "American" and "Christian" are not remotely fixed within candidates but are largely campaign and psychological constructions. Respondents tended to see their preferred candidate as more American and more Christian than his opponent. This was especially the case for Republicans, who were far more likely to disassociate Obama from the nation and from Christianity than Democrats did with McCain. The advantage on these culturally valued characteristics, then, goes to Republicans, even to McCain in the 2008 campaign, who seemed largely uncomfortable with overt displays of religiosity. This Republican trait advantage is consistent with the historically close rhetorical ties between the Republican Party and the Christian Conservative movement (Domke & Coe, 2008), as well as Republicans' ownership of patriotism-related issues like the military and national security (Petrocik et al., 2003). That these traits might be assigned even to candidates who, at best, loosely embody such traits (i.e., McCain and Christian), is more surprising. If a Democratic candidate who was overtly Christian were to face a largely nonreligious Republican, the implication is that the Democrat's faith will not be enough to reach across the aisle to religious Republicans; instead, those

voters will still tend to perceive the Republican candidate as more “Christian” than the Democrat.

Second, we found that perceptions of these traits were correlated with overall attitude toward the candidates and were so to a greater degree for Republicans than Democrats. The correlations were higher for the American impression than for Christian, suggesting that perceptions of American-ness may be more relevant to overall attitude and vote choice than the perceptions of Christian-ness. Such a pattern is exactly what a social identity perspective (Huddy & Khatib, 2007; Tajfel, 1982) would suggest, since a national identity can apply to a greater number of Americans (albeit with some variation; see Huddy & Khatib, 2007) than a religious one, even in a highly Christian milieu. Therefore, we would expect all citizens to find the trait of “American-ness” to be important in a candidate, whereas a smaller number of citizens may prize Christianity in a candidate. On the other hand, the Christianity correlation is still quite robust, which confirms the general preference for Christian candidates in American politics (Pew, 2007). The implications for non-Christian candidates are stark: how will the inconsistency between this politically valued trait and the candidate’s faith play out for voters? This is a point to which we will return momentarily.

Further, we expected and found that for Democrats, perceptions of American-ness and Christian faith were important parts of their candidate evaluations; for Republicans, these perceptions *dominated* candidate evaluations. These differences are consistent with research in political psychology suggesting that partisanship is not merely a collection of political beliefs, but a substantive force that shapes partisans’ understanding of, and attitudes about, the political world (Bartels, 2002). Scholars have also documented substantial differences in the cognitive structures and motivations of voters of liberal and conservative political ideologies (Jost et al., 2003), which often, though not always, are associated with Democratic and Republican partisanship in the United States (Sharp & Lodge, 1985). In this case, whether due to these cognitive-structural differences, or the Republican roots of emphasis upon these traits in politics, or the widespread speculation in 2008 about Obama or his phenotypic characteristics, the results here suggest that for candidates seeking to maintain their partisan electoral bases, it will likely remain more important for Republican candidates in the future to demonstrate their patriotism and Christian faith. The implication is that it may be more difficult for Republican candidates who do not as easily embody these traits to succeed politically, whereas Democrats may have more of an opening among their partisans; Democratic voters’ perceptions of these traits do not matter *as much* to their vote choice. Indeed, calculations derived from the data in Table 5 suggest that for an average respondent, a shift from the lowest to highest values on these trait perceptions corresponds to a 7% larger shift in outcome attitudes for Republicans than for non-Republicans. Put differently, if a Republican’s perceptions of a candidate’s American-ness and Christian faith decreased to their lowest levels on these scales, their attitude toward and certainty in voting for that candidate would drop by 7% *more* than it would drop for

non-Republicans. Considering that the margin of the popular vote between Obama and McCain in 2008 was 7.3%, it appears these perceptions have the potential to be significant for presidential elections.

Finally, we found that, even after respondents' explicit attitudes were taken into account, their implicit perceptions of the candidates' American-ness and Christianity significantly predicted their candidate attitudes and vote choices. This suggests that, on election day, respondents may not be fully aware that these perceptions are casting a halo—for better or worse—over the candidates, and affecting votes. Just as other implicit influences have been shown to affect voting behavior (Arcuri et al., 2008; Berger et al., 2008) and attitudes (Albertson, 2008; Mendelberg, 2001), our results suggest that implicit evaluations of the American and Christian identities of the candidates affects voters' attitudes. The implication is that nationalistic and religious politics almost certainly *profoundly* resonate with the general public and merit the kind of scholarly attention devoted to racial politics. We found that this is especially the case for Republicans, for whom the four explicit and implicit American and Christian traits predicted significantly more variance. But it is imperative to note that these patterns held across partisan lines, albeit at differential magnitudes.

These findings portend much for American presidential politics. To an extent, the finding that perceptions of a candidate's American-ness matter confirms the conventional wisdom—indeed, a presidential candidate who does not love America is unthinkable. However, two key pieces emerge here. First, implicit perceptions predict attitudes *above and beyond* those predicted by explicit perceptions. This means that those attitudes that function and change beyond the awareness of voters may nevertheless play a role in their voting behavior. It is not hard to imagine that explicit attacks on Obama's patriotism, and the concomitant implications that he was, in fact, un-American because of his foreign-sounding name and suspected Muslim faith, may have affected some voters at an unconscious level—even if they consciously rejected such arguments. Having seen, therefore, that unconscious perceptions do play a role in vote outcomes, it is important for candidates and scholars to recognize the potential significance of even explicitly controversial attacks that may nevertheless raise implicit doubts. Second, these perceptions were significantly more important for Republicans than non-Republicans. Voters in both parties assign positive traits to their preferred candidate, but Republicans assigned American-ness to a much greater degree than Democrats. The implication is that the Republican Party may be a much more difficult place for candidates who do not fit traditional notions of "American-ness," including being White and Christian.

Our findings about the "Christianity" of candidates are more straightforwardly far-reaching. If the perceived association between a candidate and "Christianity" is crucial for public attitudes and intended votes, candidates who are not Christian face a daunting hurdle. How might voters deal with an inconsistency between the candidate's faith outlook and the citizenry's desire for political

leaders who are Christian? Future research should examine this possibility, perhaps with high profile, non-Christian political figures—such as Joe Lieberman or Keith Ellison—and with similar measures to those used here. Given more favorable opinions toward Jewish candidates than other non-Christian candidates among U.S. adults (Pew, 2007), we might expect that hurdles for Jewish candidates may not be as high as for others; some voters may even perhaps extend the trait of “Christianity,” at least as measured here, to Jewish candidates. For example, scholarship suggests that Lieberman benefited from positive public opinion during his candidacy, even among groups who were expected to display anti-Semitic attitudes (Cohen, 2005). At the same time, scholars have also demonstrated the detrimental influence of implicit stereotypes against Jewish candidates, even among voters who do not consciously endorse such stereotypes (Berinsky & Mendelberg, 2005). Perhaps there are other traits that can effectively replace Christian identity as equally politically valuable for non-Christian candidates, although the demonstrated cultural context that favors Christian candidates might make that difficult. From an egalitarian standpoint, one would hope that a candidate of any faith (or non-faith) could run with equal success, but these findings raise doubts in an as-yet-unanswered matter.

Further, there are other troubling implications of the way these traits appear to be valued in politics both discursively and psychologically. Scholarship has shown that what it means to be “American” is contentious and differs widely within the population (see Huddy, 2001), and the public incorporates multiple, often conflicting creedal notions of American-ness (Schildkraut, 2007). But if the political climate privileges candidates who are particularly American, that necessitates that they define what being “American” means—a move with severely divisive potential (Stuckey & Hoffman, 2006). If war records and flag pins are taken to be indications of love of country, of true “American-ness,” and if *that* definition of the trait is privileged in politics, what happens to other conceptions of American-ness and patriotism that may not fit the mold: are citizens who have not served in war necessarily less patriotic? Further, we must question the cyclical nature of these attitudes and political language—it may be that the only way for candidates to express their love of God and country is to engage in strategic messaging to do so, which further privileges these traits, and by implication denigrates other, competing traits, such as curiosity, competence, integrity, intellect, or even other religious faiths and more critical forms of patriotism. The American political system—voters and candidates alike—seemingly has some distance to go to open the door to a wider range of viewpoints, faiths, and interpretations of national identity.

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All correspondence should be addressed to Penelope Sheets at the University of Washington, Department of Communication, Box 353740, Seattle, WA 98195. Email: sheetsph@uw.edu

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