

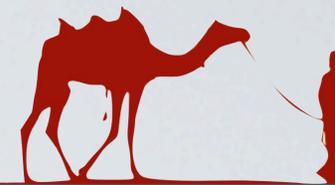


# Azim Shariff

university of oregon

# CaMML

the culture and morality lab



## Research Interests:

### Religion and Prosociality:

PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE  
Research Article

### God Is Watching You

Priming God Concepts Increases Prosocial Behavior in an Anonymous Economic Game

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**ABSTRACT**—We present two studies aimed at resolving experimentally whether religion increases prosocial behavior in the anonymous dictator game. Subjects allocated more money to anonymous strangers when God concepts were implicitly activated than when neutral or no concepts were activated. This effect was at least as large as that obtained when concepts associated with secular moral institutions were primed. A trait measure of self-reported religiosity did not seem to be associated with prosocial behavior. We discuss different possible mechanisms that may underlie this effect, focusing on the hypotheses that the religious prime had an ideomotor effect on generosity or that it activated a felt presence of supernatural watchers. We then discuss implications for theories positing religion as a facilitator of the emergence of early large-scale societies of cooperators.

Sosis and Ruffle (2003) and Ruffle and Sosis (2007) experimentally tested whether religious concepts, who engaged in dilemmas (Batson et al., 1993) have shown explicit willingness to help other people, controlled lab fail to corroborate demonstrate that 1 people, this finding motives such as seen by higher levels of benefit other people. However insight



■ Neutral prime ■ Religion prime ■ Secular prime

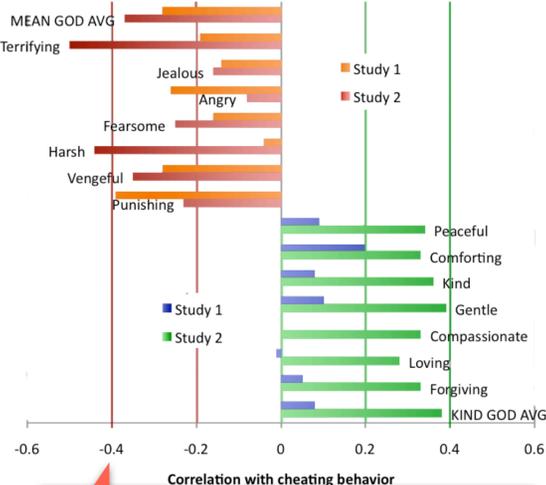
### Divergent effects of supernatural benevolence and malevolence:

#### Mean Gods Make Good People: Different Views of God Predict Cheating Behavior

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Fear of supernatural punishment may serve as a deterrent to counternormative behavior, even in anonymous situations free from human social monitoring. The authors conducted two studies to test this hypothesis, examining the relationship between cheating behavior in an anonymous setting and views of God as loving and compassionate, or as an angry and punishing agent. Overall levels of religious devotion or belief in God did not directly predict cheating. However, viewing God as a more punishing, less loving figure was reliably associated with lower levels of cheating. This relationship remained after controlling for relevant personality dimensions, ethnicity, religious affiliation, and gender.



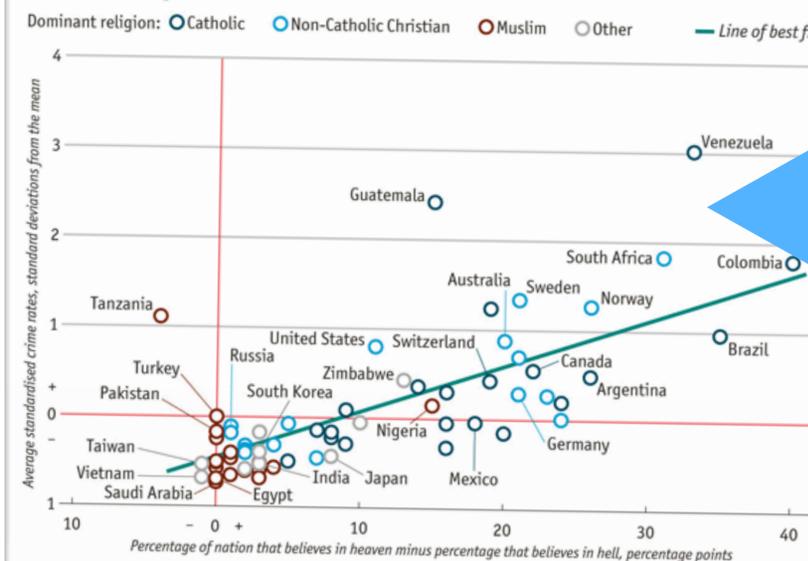
### Divergent Effects of Beliefs in Heaven and Hell on National Crime Rates

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**Abstract**  
Though religion has been shown to have generally positive effects on normative 'prosocial' behavior, recent laboratory research suggests that these effects may be driven primarily by supernatural punishment. Supernatural benevolence, on the other hand, may actually be associated with less prosocial behavior. Here, we investigate these effects at the societal level, showing that the proportion of people who believe in hell negatively predicts national crime rates whereas belief in heaven predicts higher crime rates. These effects remain after accounting for a host of covariates, and ultimately prove stronger predictors of national crime rates than economic variables such as GDP and income inequality. Expanding on laboratory research on religious prosociality, this is the first study to tie religious beliefs to large-scale cross-national trends in pro- and anti-social behavior.

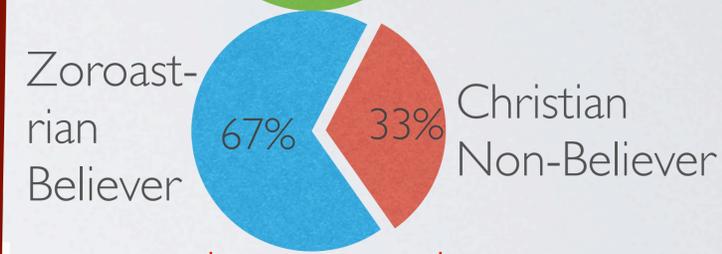
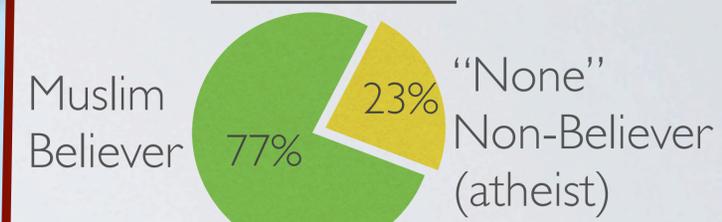
#### Crime and religious beliefs\*



Source: "Divergent Effects of Beliefs in Heaven and Hell on National Crime Rates", by Azim Shariff and Mijke Rhemtulla, 2012 \*Based on data from 67 countries, World Values and European Values surveys from 1981-2007 and UNODC 2003-10

God Belief and Trust:  
Any God is better than  
no God

Who is more trusted by  
Christians?



among those who had never heard of Zoroastrianism

### Next Steps:

Historical analysis of supernatural benevolence and malevolence. Do we see the tone of religions positively shift as secular rule of law increases?