



# Culture Clash or Democratic Peace?: Results of a Survey Experiment on the Effect of Religious Culture and Regime Type on Foreign Policy Opinion Formation

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We extend the logic of the democratic peace to query whether information about a foreign country's regime type affects US citizens' opinions of that country. We contrast this with the suggestion in other areas of international relations theorizing, such as the "clash of civilizations" thesis and constructivist frameworks, that a country's culture, especially its dominant religious tradition, may be more salient in citizen attitudes toward foreign countries. We designed a survey experiment to test the effects of randomly assigned cues regarding the regime type (democracy/nondemocracy) and religious culture (Islam/Christianity) of a foreign country on respondents' attitudes. Religious cultural cues outperformed regime type cues in determining respondents' perceptions of threat or expressions of trust, but respondents' views did not conform to maximalist claims of either the democratic peace or the clash of civilizations frameworks. These findings suggest that the need for a more synergistic approach to understanding the microfoundations of public foreign policy opinion formation.

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The logic of the democratic peace suggests that knowledge of a foreign country's regime type should condition whether a democratic citizenry supports or opposes the decision to use military force against another country. Accordingly, US elites and decision makers have invoked the democratic peace to both rally support for and justify an array of foreign policy commitments. US leaders have appealed to the American public's democratic preference, for example, by expanding democracy promotion as a goal of US foreign policy. For at least the last two decades, from Presidents H.W. Bush to Obama, America's commanders-in-chief have spelled out the importance of building democracies abroad by

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pointing out linkages between democracy, global well-being, and international security.<sup>1</sup>

In the scholarly literature, less attention has been devoted to drawing out and testing implications of the democratic peace at the individual level, in particular whether regime type cues weigh most heavily in citizen assessment of threat and trust in foreign governments. Public sentiment and preferences are bound up in the various institutional and normative mechanisms underlying the democratic peace, but the determinants of mass opinions have been a separate field of inquiry.

At the same time, other theoretical frameworks in international relations, such as constructivism and the “clash of civilizations” thesis, posit that perceptions of ideological and cultural affinity are more important drivers of foreign policy views than regime type per se. During the Cold War, the rhetoric of US foreign policy divided countries between the “free world” and communism, a distinction that only partially corresponded to the democracy/nondemocracy cleavage that scholars emphasized with the democratic peace.

In the context of post-9/11 foreign policy, US rhetorical commitment to democracy likewise competes with a framing of international politics that underscores discord along cultural, or civilizational, lines (Norris and Inglehart 2002). International terrorism has led to increased interest in the thesis of a clash of civilizations between the West and militant Islamists. For the past decade, the United States has sought to confront these hostile forces, as well as the nation-states which harbor them, in the heart of the Islamic world. Yet, democracy promotion and the democratic peace have been among the stated rationales for US engagement in Afghanistan and Iraq. This foreign policy context begs the question: Does religion, as a proxy for cultural difference, or regime type drive the public’s foreign policy opinions?

In this study, we present the results of a survey experiment on the role that information about regime type and religious culture plays in individuals’ affect toward foreign countries. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of four treatment groups and asked to consider two security scenarios, one relating to nuclear proliferation and the other to terrorism. The first set of treatments provided information on a hypothetical country’s form of government, democratic or nondemocratic. A second treatment concerned the dominant religious culture, Islam or Christianity, of the country described in the scenario. Respondents were then asked to evaluate the degree of threat to the United States and the trustworthiness of the foreign government to resolve the threat.

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<sup>1</sup> Democracy promotion for the purpose of “forging peace” was on George H.W. Bush’s foreign policy agenda. His 1990 State of the Union address asserted, “Today, with Communism crumbling, our aim must be to insure democracy’s advance, to take the lead in forging peace and freedom’s best hope, a great and growing commonwealth of free nations,” (available online as a Penn State Electronic Classics Publication, <http://www2.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/poldocs/poldocs/USaddressGHWBush.pdf>, accessed August 16, 2011). Clinton continued this rhetoric. See, for example, his 1994 State of the Union Address in which he declared, “Ultimately, the best strategy to ensure our security and to build a durable peace is to support the advance of democracy elsewhere. Democracies don’t attack each other, they make better trading partners and partners in diplomacy,” (available online at [http://www.c-span.org/executive/transcript.asp?cat=current\\_event&code=bush\\_admin&year=1994](http://www.c-span.org/executive/transcript.asp?cat=current_event&code=bush_admin&year=1994), accessed March 11, 2011). The so-called Bush Doctrine also included a strong democracy promotion element, as articulated in the 2002 *National Security Strategy*: “We will actively work to bring the hope of democracy, development, free markets, and free trade to every corner of the world,” (available online at <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nss/2002/nssintro.html>, accessed March 11, 2010). More recently, President Obama has continued voicing support for the democratic peace. In his 2009 Nobel Prize acceptance speech, he declared, “I believe that peace is unstable where citizens are denied the right to speak freely or worship as they please; choose their own leaders or assemble without fear. ... America has never fought a war against a democracy, and our closest friends are governments that protect the rights of their citizens,” (available online at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-acceptance-nobel-peace-prize>, accessed August 16, 2011).

Respondents did not conform to a maximalist democratic peace or clash of civilizations framework. In particular, subjects given the Islam treatment did not distinguish between democracies and nondemocracies, and those given the non-democracy treatment did not show pronounced favoritism toward Christian countries. Instead, treatment effects were conditional. We found evidence that respondents who received *both* the democracy and the Christianity treatments ranked threats lower and trust higher than other respondents. In assessing terrorist threats, however, the religion treatments dominated. This finding, furthermore, may be due to the foreign policy context in which respondents took the survey. On the whole, our findings suggest that the need for a more nuanced theory of how individuals develop foreign policy opinions based on perceptions of foreign countries.

This article proceeds in five parts. In the following section, we consider the theoretical support for the proposal that regime type matters in public opinion formation and contrast this view to theories emphasizing cultural or “civilizational” factors. The third section presents hypotheses derived from these disparate research agendas and outlines the design of a survey experiment that was implemented by Time-sharing Experiments for the Social Sciences (TESS) in February and March 2008. Variation in experimental cues on a hypothetical country’s regime type is contrasted with manipulation of cultural cues: in this case, information about a country’s dominant religious tradition. The fourth section presents results from the survey experiment and the conditional effect of each treatment category. The fifth section concludes.

This project makes at least three contributions to research and policy. First, it extends the theoretical scope of democratic peace scholarship and presents a robust empirical test of how individuals may process information about regime type in their affect toward foreign countries. Second, it forges connections between previously separate research agendas and broadens the discussion of what factors may drive public opinion formation. There are interesting areas of overlap in scholarship on public opinion and the democratic peace, and this study presents an attempt to merge concepts and methods. Third, the findings from this experiment offer practical suggestions regarding which factors matter when framing a policy debate. In particular, the findings from our survey experiment suggest that regime type of foreign countries is not necessarily a salient consideration unless juxtaposed with information on the religious makeup of the country concerned.

### Competing Bases for Foreign Policy Opinion Formation

While scholars have established that domestic public opinion influences foreign policy outcomes, there is less testing of the underlying determinants of opinion formation as suggested by existing international relations theories.<sup>2</sup> Researchers have found cleavages across party lines on military-related foreign policy issues

<sup>2</sup> Early scholarship dismissed the US public as “abysmally ignorant of the specifics of international affairs, even at the most elementary level.” (Free and Cantril 1967:59). The public in these analyses is too fickle and disinterested for its foreign policy preferences to matter (Converse 1964; Axelrod 1967; Nincic 1992; Kuklinski and Quirk 2000). More recent scholarship has critiqued this “elitist paradigm” and produced convincing evidence that characterizes public opinion as a more constructive contributor to foreign policy. The divisive politics of the 1970s, in particular those surrounding the Vietnam War, pressed citizens to form more coherent opinions and belief systems with respect to US foreign policy (Nie and Andersen 1974). Subsequent analyses of survey data have coalesced around the finding that public opinion is both stable and coherent (Maggiotto and Wittkopf 1981; Hurwitz and Peffley 1987; Wittkopf 1987; Shapiro and Page 1988; Wittkopf 1990; Herron and Jenkins-Smith 2002). However, scholars have found that Americans are particularly ignorant of foreign affairs compared to British, Canadian, French, and German citizens (Bennett, Flickinger, Baker, Rhine and Bennett 1996). Further, there is a growing body of work suggesting that the foreign policy views of the public influence policy outcomes (Stokes 1966; Aldrich, Sullivan and Borgida 1989; Risse-Kappen 1991; Holsti 1992:452–3; Burstein 1998; Foyle 1999; Sobel and Shiraev 2003).

when testing the effects of individuals' party affiliation (Holsti 2004:165–91) or partisanship as part of a bundle of attributes labeled an "authoritarian personality" (Levinson 1957).<sup>3</sup> Research on the external factors contributing to American public opinion on foreign policies has emphasized citizen assessment of foreign policy goals (Russett and Nincic 1976; Jentleson 1992; Oneal, Lian and Joyner 1996; Jentleson and Britton 1998), the "sensible weighing" of cost-benefit concerns (Larson 1996; Herron and Jenkins-Smith 2002), and general perceptions of "national interest" (Rielly 1987). There has been less attention to whether certain attributes of foreign countries are also drivers of citizens' foreign policy opinions.

Various international relations theories suggest what information about a foreign country should shape citizen opinions. In this sense, research on the determinants of US public opinion on foreign policies may be integrated with the "second- and third-image" theorizing found in scholarship on the democratic peace, constructivism, and the clash of civilizations thesis. While democratic peace theory asserts the salience of regime type to levels of interstate conflict, both constructivists and the more policy-oriented literature on a present and future clash of civilizations argue that any positive public response to foreign democracies is an artifact of Western cultural affinities. In this view, perceptions of cultural difference determine foreign policy attitudes and opinions; democratic peace theory thus conflates the effects of cultural similarity and democracy.

Concepts from political psychology can inform this merging of international relations theorizing with public foreign policy opinion formation. Political psychologists have long studied how images of other nations inform individual foreign policy preferences (Boulding 1956; Willis 1968). These images include "judgments about another actor's relative capability and culture along with a judgment about the threat or opportunity the other actor represents," (Herrmann and Voss 1997:422). Experimental tests have identified several component parts to image formation, including information about the relative capability, motivations, and political culture of other nations (Herrmann and Voss 1997; Herrmann, Tetlock and Visser 1999).<sup>4</sup> These images of foreign countries operate in combination with individual preferences, for example, party loyalties, beliefs about the role of government, and deeper values such as militarism and nationalism, to shape foreign policy views (Hurwitz and Peffley 1990, 1999; Hurwitz, Peffley and Seligson 1993; Brewer 2004; Brewer, Gross, Aday and Willnat 2004).<sup>5</sup>

With the formation of images, citizens relegate international actors or foreign countries to out-group vs in-group status. These decisions are based on perceptions of "structural relationships between in-group interests and out-group interests" (Alexander, Brewer and Herrmann 1999:80). That is, democratic and culturally similar countries may be given positive image labels based on perceptions of similar goals, while nondemocratic countries and/or those that are culturally dissimilar may be labeled with negative out-group labels.<sup>6</sup> These "enemy" or "barbarian" out-groups are perceived as more threatening and less

<sup>3</sup> However, these differences are not stable over time and across issue areas. Breaks from this partisan-based model of foreign policy opinion formation occurred following the Vietnam and Cold Wars (Chitick, Billingsley and Travis 1990; Rosati and Creed 1997).

<sup>4</sup> Herrmann and Voss (1997) use a regime type manipulation in their operationalization of political culture. Herrmann et al. (1999) expand on this to include both the democratic peace and clash of civilizations thesis in their discussion of political culture, though experimental manipulation focused on contrasting an "advanced democracy" with a "backwards dictatorship."

<sup>5</sup> Among elites, these "enemy images" may be less salient, as elite opinions have tended to remain stable and enduring even through significant global transitions, such as the global collapse of communist regimes, but also because elites may "pay more attention to the public debate" (Shoon Kathleen and Cowden 1999:477).

<sup>6</sup> Less clear is whether the US public perceives other democracies and culturally-similar countries as part of the in-group (which implies positive affect) or as out-group countries with positive image labels.

trustworthy (Riek, Mania and Gaertner 2006). Our present research draws insight from these studies and applies their conceptual frameworks to specific claims made in contending international relations theories as well as the implied role that public opinion plays in them.

*The Democratic Peace and Public Opinion*

Democratic peace theory offers institutional and normative explanations for a very robust empirical finding that democracies tend not to go to war with other democracies (Babst 1972; Doyle 1986).<sup>7</sup> Institutions within democracies prevent the escalation of conflict between democracies to war, while normative affinities serve a similar, reinforcing function. The theoretical foundations for the democratic peace, derived from the writings of Kant, assert that foreign affairs may be shaped by citizen views rather than the “internal authority of special prerogatives held, for example, by monarchs or military castes” (Doyle 1983:208).

That citizens make use of information about the regime type of a foreign country is implied in both mechanisms explaining the democratic peace. Individual-level actors, such as heads of state and legislative members, are implicated in the democratic peace, as is the general population that may hold these public officials accountable for their foreign policy decisions. Institutional explanations of the democratic peace, for example, discuss the variety of horizontal and vertical checks on the decision to go to war. Vertical accountability—that is, public pressure on elected officials—can constrain democratic leaders from entering into war without due deliberation (Morgan and Campbell 1991). Institutional variation within democracies, however, can complicate the degree to which elected leaders are responsive to public opinion (Chan and Safran 2006). Still, that democratic leaders face audience costs for their foreign policy decisions provides one link in a chain that begins by asserting the relevance of regime information for individual-level opinion formation.

It is at the normative level where public opinions based on regime type may matter most. Democratic leaders and publics are more willing to negotiate settlements to conflicts if they believe that democratic opponents share their liberal beliefs and practices, as reflected in a domestic political system based on bounded competition and peaceful conflict negotiation (Dixon 1994; Owen 1994, 1997; Kahl 1998; Risse-Kappen 2005). Because of the dyadic nature of the democratic peace, it is imperative that state leaders and other actors recognize a “democratic affinity” and identify with foreign democracies. At the domestic level, in a political environment where public opinion shapes the foreign policy decisions made by elected public officials, it becomes relevant whether the public is aware of a foreign country’s regime type. Normative theories of the democratic peace thus suggest that the public should be especially opposed to war against other democracies *and* use information on a country’s regime type to form a policy opinion.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Comprehensive reviews of the democratic peace literature include Chan (1997) and MacMillan (2003). The monadic variant of this theory, that democratic states are inherently more peaceful than non-democratic states, has been the subject of greater debate and less ironclad empirical findings (Bremer 1992; Rousseau, Gelpi, Reiter and Huth 1996; Quackenbush and Rudy 2009).

<sup>8</sup> The mechanisms of the democratic peace have also been tested across authoritarian regimes, with interesting findings. Weeks (2008) provides an empirical test of the argument that dictators are also vulnerable to audience costs. While institutional mechanisms are nonetheless weaker in non-democracies, normative affinities may also exist (Peceny, Beer and Sanchez-Terry 2002:19–20). Peceny et al., however, find only partial support for the existence of a “dictatorial peace”. Given limitations in the scope of our survey experiment, we are unable to weigh in on how these authoritarian affinities might operate at the individual level.

*The Cultural Critique of the Democratic Peace*

Two different critiques of the democratic peace literature suggest that it conflates affinity between democracies with affinity among Western countries. First, Huntington's (1993, 1996) clash of civilizations thesis implies that cultural difference drives states' foreign policy, or at least does so in the post-Cold War world. In this view, degree of cultural difference, and not ideology or economics, is an accurate barometer of two states' relationship. Foreign policy views are influenced by cultural context because of the "encompassing" and "basic" nature of civilizational influences (Huntington 1996:42). Huntington further argues that civilizational cleavages significantly predate the rise of democracy. Democracy, in this framework, is a relatively recent development in the broad sweep of the history of civilizations (Huntington 1993:25). The implicit critique is that the democratic peace is an epiphenomenon determined by the high number and influence of Christian democracies in the global system. Despite this theoretical critique, empirical testing of country-level and "intercivilizational" dyads has found little support for the clash of civilizations thesis (Chiozza 2002).

Another body of theorizing in international relations presents a more indirect critique of the assertions in the democratic peace but also points to culture—international, national, and shared between countries—as a primary driver of international outcomes. Scholars in the constructivist tradition posit that "international patterns of amity and enmity have important cultural dimensions," (Jepperson, Wendt and Katzenstein 1996:34). Interstate cooperation is possible through the formation of a "collective identity" across states, hence the diffusion of shared values across nation-states is a desirable process (Wendt 1994). Democracy, in this conceptualization, is one facet of a bundle of social structures and interests in which state "identity" is embedded. State identity formation is a prior and more fundamental process, one that is much broader in scope than the embrace of a particular form of government, and it is bound up with the "cultural-institutional" contexts which together "shape conceptions of actor interest and behavior" (Katzenstein 1996:30).

Because observed actions in the international realm derive from states' "social identities," it is the dense and multilayered affinity shared across Western capitalist democracies, rather than democracy per se, that drives the observed outcome of peaceful relations between democracies.<sup>9</sup> In this light, one implication of these constructivist ideas is the forging of a separate Western democratic peace owing to the many overlapping affinities across these countries. The constructivist view thus has much in common with existing political psychology, which would probably categorize both culture and regime type as information used to distinguish between in-groups and out-groups (e.g., Herrmann et al. 1997).

The constructivist argument, unlike the clash of civilizations thesis, does not posit that cultural difference leads directly to conflict. Rather, constructivists accept the idea that cultural difference influences leaders' and citizens' foreign policy views because of nonrational factors such as intolerance. These biases may lead to conflict even between two democratic states because culture may constitute a barrier to building the normative affinities that are, in the constructivist view, responsible for peaceful resolution of disputes.

*Political Psychology and the Microfoundations of Foreign Policy Opinion Formation*

While the country- and interstate-level implications of the democratic peace have been subject to rigorous empirical testing, scholars have only begun to turn

<sup>9</sup> Scholars have used the constructivist approach to defend and deepen the theoretical robustness of the democratic peace (e.g., Risse-Kappen 1991; Kahl 1998).

attention to individual-level foundations. Much of this work employs experiments and, in general, is supportive of the democratic peace, that is, respondents are reluctant to support the use of force against democratic countries. The earliest work considered respondents' opinions on the use of force against a democratic vs nondemocratic aggressor in an international dispute (Mintz and Geva 1993). In these experiments, university students in the United States and Israel, as well as nonstudent adults, were not in favor of the use of force against a democratic aggressor. Mintz and Geva reason that this is because democratic publics are not prone to give political leaders "credit" for engaging in military operations against other countries, which in turn creates a disincentive for democratic leaders to pursue military action against other democracies. Subsequent experiments, also employing university students, attempted to separate whether normative vs institutional mechanisms were at play in driving US citizens to oppose the use of force against other democracies (Rousseau 2005:219–232).<sup>10</sup> While Rousseau found general support for the democratic peace argument, he claimed to refute the hypothesis that US citizens apply its normative logic.<sup>11</sup>

Two recent studies, both of which utilize experiments within representative surveys fielded in the United States and United Kingdom, have also found that these publics are reluctant to support the use of force against democracies (Johns and Davies 2010; Tomz and Weeks 2011). Similar to this study, Johns and Davies manipulated regime type and dominant religion treatments within two survey experiments and found more support for the clash of civilizations thesis. Publics in both countries were more willing to use force against Islamic-majority democracies than Christian dictatorships. All of these studies, while providing rigorous tests of micro-foundations, consider a dependent variable that is somewhat different from the ones considered here. The focus across these various other experiments is behavioral, that is, public support for the use of force, rather than measures of affect. While related, the perception-based outcomes used in this study provide a more direct test of the out-group dynamics discussed previously.

Culture-based critiques of the democratic peace have also been applied to experiments in political psychology, and there is some empirical support for the idea that culture drives hostility toward out-groups. For example, when provided with cues suggesting cultural differences between two hypothetical states in a conflict, college students tended to recommend more belligerent action (Schafer 1997). Students also expressed higher perceptions of threat when confronted with non-Western rather than Western countries in hypothetical scenarios (Sulfaro and Crislip 1997; Geva and Hanson 1999). On the other hand, a study based on small-scale experiments found that images of other countries have little or no effect on policy preferences after controlling for militarism and relative vulnerability (Schafer 1999). Still, cultural factors such as religion appear to be key for shaping the (negative) affect of Americans toward out-groups such as Muslims, who are part of a larger "band of others" (Kalkan, Layman and Uslander 2009).

Political psychology suggests two distinct mechanisms that might explain why individuals would factor cultural similarity into their foreign policy views. First, negative reactions to "foreignness" may be driven by the more basic personality trait of social and cultural intolerance. In a sample of white Kentucky residents, Hurwitz and Peffley (1992) found a positive correlation between degree of intolerance and both discriminatory racial attitudes at home and ethnocentric foreign

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<sup>10</sup> In this experiment, Rousseau presented students with randomly assigned scenarios in which they were to assess a dispute with a country that was either a democracy or single-party dictatorship.

<sup>11</sup> This conclusion was based on respondent support for the use of covert action against democracies and non-democracies alike (p. 230–1). One critique of this conclusion is that covert operations do not fall within the definition of "interstate war" articulated by democratic peace theorists such as Russett (1993).

policy attitudes. In the minds of intolerant individuals, they argue, culturally different groups and countries are perceived as more threatening. Second, cultural similarities may influence foreign policy views because nonelites in the United States do not know very much about international affairs. Individuals may apply a “likeability heuristic” to groups of foreign countries as a way to gauge those countries’ potential level of friendliness. Cultural sameness could be a salient cue for likeability (Druckman 1994; Wand, Shotts, Sekhon, Mebane, Herron and Brady 2001).

*Adjudicating Between Democracy and Culture as Bases of Public Opinion*

While disparate studies have considered cues related to capability, interests, culture, and regime type, this study advances existing knowledge by (i) testing the relative salience of the cultural vs regime information emphasized in competing international relations theories and (ii) using an experimental approach to assess respondent perceptions of threat and trust in foreign countries. All three of the international relations literatures that we have considered here—the normative democratic peace, the clash of civilizations thesis, and the constructivist critique of the normative democratic peace—are silent as to the psychological mechanisms by which information about foreign countries (regime type or culture) translate into foreign policy opinions. However, they make relatively clear competing claims about what information regarding foreign cultures the public draws on to form its policy views. Existing political psychology research rarely seeks to adjudicate between these claims.

Furthermore, it is difficult to use existing survey data to determine the extent to which individuals use information about regime and culture to formulate foreign policy opinions. Regime type and culture, as well as region, economic development, language, and migration are highly correlated. For example, a positive disposition of US residents toward other democratic countries does seem plausible based on polling data. Figure 1 plots average feeling thermometer ratings

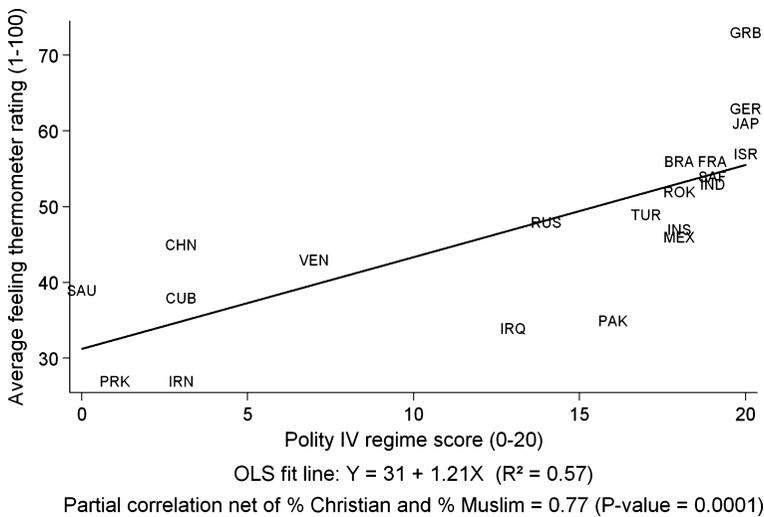


FIG 1. US adults’ 2010 Feeling Thermometer Ratings of Foreign Countries Plotted Against Regime Characteristics. Average Feeling Thermometer Ratings: Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2010. *Constrained Internationalism: Adapting to New Realities. Results of a 2010 National Survey of American Public Opinion*. Chicago, IL: The Chicago Council on Global Affairs. Regime type: Monty, Marshall G. and Ted Gurr, 2010. *Polity IV Data Series version 2010*. College Park, MD: Center for International Development and Conflict Management.

from a survey of US adults conducted in 2010 against the countries' regime type. The scatter plot shows a clear association between democracy and positive ratings.

However, this relationship could also be driven by perceptions of cultural similarities between the United States and Western countries that also happen to be democracies. The same feeling thermometer data are plotted against the percentage of each country's population that is Christian or Muslim in Figure 2. The thermometer ratings are similarly well-predicted by these cultural variables. Figures 1 and 2 also report the partial correlations of the Polity scores and religious demographics with the feeling thermometer data, which are statistically significant for Polity scores and percentage Muslim. These multivariate correlations, therefore, cannot reject either regime type or culture as a predictor of respondents' opinions.

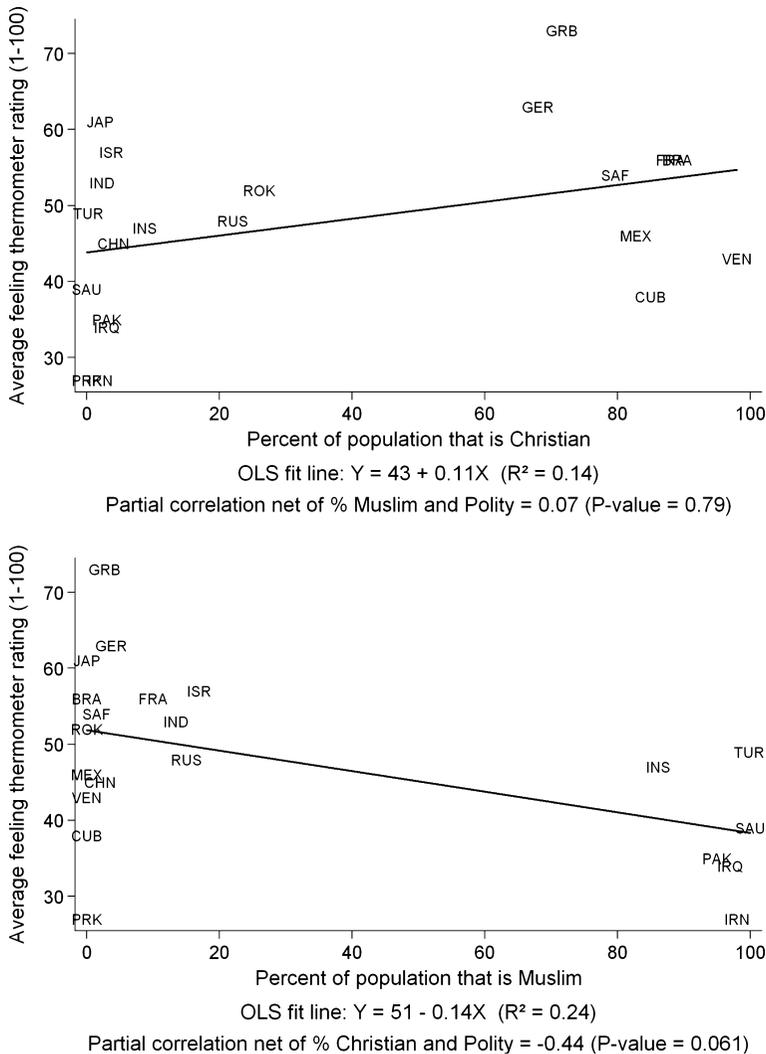


FIG 2. US adults' 2010 Feeling Thermometer Ratings of Foreign Countries Plotted Against Religious Composition. Average Feeling Thermometer Ratings: see footnote to Figure 1. Religion data: Central Intelligence Agency, 2011. *The World Factbook*. Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency.

The likelihood that our two key independent variables, democracy and culture, are endogenous to each other only increases the difficulty of using this kind of data to study causal claims. It may be the case, for example, that US citizens evaluate the cultural similarity of a foreign country based on whether it is a robust democracy. On the other hand, previous studies have found that sociocultural similarity, for example, a past colonial–colonizer relationship, ethnic and linguistic overlap, and similar educational institutions, affect respondent perceptions of regime type, even when regime type cues are absent (Geva and Hanson 1999). While not a silver bullet for this issue, our experimental approach helps disentangle the explanatory power of regime type cues, separate from cultural cues.

By employing a survey experiment to gauge how country characteristics influence foreign policy opinions, our goal is to adjudicate between variables found in the democratic peace thesis and its critiques. Through a controlled survey experiment, we can begin to examine more rigorously the relative effects of different types of information on individual political beliefs. By doing so, we test some of the micro-level assumptions made in major international relations literatures.

### Experimental Investigation

A survey experiment presents an ideal means to measure the separate and conditional effects of cultural and regime cues on foreign policy opinion formation among US citizens.<sup>12</sup> Respondents ( $n = 774$ ) participated in an online survey experiment (see Appendix) that probed (i) the perceived threat posed by other countries as nuclear proliferators and harbors for terrorists as well as (ii) expressions of trust in other countries' governments to address these threats. Respondents were asked to read two hypothetical scenarios, presented in random order. Over the course of reading the two scenarios, respondents received two treatments, assigned randomly: a regime-type cue (democracy/nondemocracy) and a cultural cue (Christianity/Islam). For this cultural cue, respondents were told that the "practice of (Christianity/Islam)" was "wide-spread" in the country under analysis.<sup>13</sup>

Religion was chosen as a proxy for culture for several reasons. First, religion and culture are closely equated in the clash of civilizations literature. Huntington begins by defining a "civilization" as "the broadest cultural entity ... the biggest 'we' within which we feel culturally at home as distinguished from all the other 'thems' out there," (1996:43). As such, it includes "common objective elements, such as language, history, religion, customs, institutions, and the subjective self-identification of people" (*Ibid.*). Within this mix, religion holds an elevated position: Huntington notes that "religion is a central defining characteristic of civilizations," (*Ibid.*, p. 47). The dominant religion of a place thus offers some leverage over the more amorphous concept of "civilizations" at the heart of this thesis.

<sup>12</sup> The present study draws on results from an internet-based survey. A growing body of research indicates that internet-based surveys perform as well as, if not better than, random digit dialing phone surveys (Dennis 2001; Malhotra and Kuo 2008). Testing hypotheses through an internet-based survey experiment presents several advantages (Iyengar 2008). First, subjects receive and respond to questions via web-based TV, which avoids potential interviewer bias. Second, random assignment to treatment groups mitigates concern with sampling bias. Third, each treatment group of approximately 200 individuals is drawn from a representative sample of the US population and treatment groups of this size are sufficient to reduce sampling error. Fourth, the design of the survey experiment and manipulation of treatments allows investigators to determine the separate, independent effects of the two treatments across subjects.

<sup>13</sup> We phrased the scenarios to focus specifically on contemporary religious practice rather than on ethnic identity more vaguely defined. In this context, we refer to "Islam" rather than "Muslim" and "Christianity" and rather than "Christian." We chose this wording first to mitigate confusion in the text of the Africa scenario and to stay closer to the kinds of characterizations used by authors of civilizational conflict treatises.

Second, religion does not proxy geographic region—and a corresponding set of geo-strategic concerns—too closely. Geographic regions were also held constant within each scenario to mitigate the possibility that the religious cue would be interpreted as a proxy for a region rather than as a cultural feature of a particular country. If respondents use culture as a means to guess geo-strategic importance, for example, we might overestimate the importance of cultural affinity to public opinion. The geographic regions chosen (Africa and Asia) were used because each possible combination of the treatments (democracy/non-democracy and Christianity/Islam) is actually present in a country in the region and does not uniquely identify a particular country.

Third, the Christianity vs Islam comparison is a prominent feature of contemporary policy discussions and cuts to the heart of the thesis that we live in an age of civilizational conflict, with the historically Christian West pitted against the Islamic world.<sup>14</sup> The attacks of 9/11 and subsequent US-led invasions of two Muslim-majority countries have only strengthened this view. Therefore, religion presents the most important avenue for understanding the cultural determinants of foreign policy in the present period (Warner and Walker 2011).

The treatments were embedded in two randomly ordered scenarios: one on nuclear proliferation and one on terrorism. The scenarios are worded quite differently and do not constitute a controlled manipulation of these two issue areas. Each of these foreign policy issue areas is, again, highly salient. These two issue areas, terrorism and nuclear proliferation, were chosen for two reasons. First, they are relatively high priorities as national concerns in opinion polls.<sup>15</sup> Second, these topics are subject to frequent media coverage and allow us to control somewhat for the effect of media exposure on public opinion formation (Wanta and Hu 1993).

Scholars have made clear claims about the importance of both regime type and culture to the issue areas of nuclear proliferation and terrorism. Research on nuclear proliferation suggests that both regime type and an affinity with the West have been key factors in explaining when countries will pursue nuclear programs (Sagan 1996–97). With regard to terrorism, there is empirical evidence linking terrorism to fundamentalist religious culture (Rapoport 1984) and to opposition to a particular regime type (Pape 2003).

After reading a scenario, respondents were presented with a question about the level of threat perceived. For the nuclear proliferation scenario, this prompt read the following:

On the basis of this description, how would you rate the potential threat that this country is building a nuclear weapon to use against US allies?

For the terrorism scenario:

On the basis of this description, how would you rate the potential threat that this country is helping terrorists who want to attack the United States?<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> The other “civilizations” that Huntington notes are Sinic, Japanese, Hindu, Orthodox, Latin American, and (possibly) African (pp. 45–48), which may be proxied in future experiments with appropriate religious variables.

<sup>15</sup> For example, in a CBS News/New York Times poll conducted on October 10–13, 2008, “terrorism and national security” received the highest number of votes as the most important foreign affairs issue, and it was second to an overwhelming concern with “the economy and jobs,” <http://www.pollingreport.com/prioriti.htm>, accessed October 20, 2008. The Chicago Council on Global Affairs’ Global Views 2008 public opinion survey reported that nuclear proliferation and international terrorism were among the top five most important US foreign policy issues, [http://www.thechicagocouncil.org/UserFiles/File/POS\\_Topline%20Reports/POS%202008/2008%20Public%20Opinion\\_Foreign%20Policy.pdf](http://www.thechicagocouncil.org/UserFiles/File/POS_Topline%20Reports/POS%202008/2008%20Public%20Opinion_Foreign%20Policy.pdf), accessed October 20, 2010.

<sup>16</sup> Whereas the threat assessment in the nuclear proliferation scenario references US allies, the terrorism scenario inquires about the threat of attack on the United States. In the context of both civilizational and democratic peace theories, this difference should not be consequential given the broad affinities that US citizens should feel toward acknowledged allies.

Respondents chose among the following answers: No threat; Slight threat; Moderate threat; Very serious threat; and Extremely serious threat.<sup>17</sup> Except for respondents who indicated that the scenario suggested no threat, participants were then asked about trust in the foreign government to address the threat. For the nuclear proliferation scenario, the prompt was phrased:

How much trust do you have in this country's leaders to stop developing nuclear weapons if ordered to do so by the international community?

The prompt for the terrorism scenario was phrased:

How much trust do you have in this country's leaders to make the maximum possible effort to counter this terrorist threat if ordered to do so by the international community?

Similar to the response categories for the threat perception questions, respondents chose among the following responses: No trust; Slight trust; Moderate trust; Very high trust; and Extremely high trust.

The rationale behind these particular evaluation questions was twofold. Rather than pose questions about a respondent's preference for the use of force, we considered threat perception and trust to be more general, prior affects which shape actual policy opinions. Second, the questions avoid cuing respondents to consider current events. We chose not to query citizens on particular global events or solicit opinions on specific policies. By taking this approach, we abstract away from particular historical events, which contain multiple considerations and priors that may shape a citizen's opinion, and instead conduct a survey experiment for identifying the effect of a single factor on individual-level attitudes.

This survey experiment was conducted through the Time-Sharing Experiments in the Social Sciences program, which bundles multiple researchers' survey experiments and administers them through Knowledge Networks. The panel for Knowledge Networks is recruited through random digit dialing and provided with WebTV equipment and free internet access as compensation for participation in weekly surveys to be completed online. Our sample was drawn from this panel in order to be representative of the US adult population according to Knowledge Network's national database of listed and unlisted phone numbers.<sup>18</sup> Questions were fielded in February and March of 2008. Checks on the success of our randomization indicate that there are no statistically significant correlations between any of the treatments or the order in which the scenarios were presented and respondents' age, ethnicity, education, party identification, gender, or a dummy variable for residence in the US south.

### *Hypotheses*

On the basis of international relations theories discussed previously, we formulated hypotheses about the role of regime and cultural treatments as well as their potential interactive effect on foreign policy opinions. Under a clash of civilizations framework, subjects given the Islam treatment are expected to report higher threat perceptions and lower levels of trust than subjects given the Christianity treatment. The literature on the democratic peace implies that respondents given the democracy treatment will perceive less threat and express more trust than respondents given the non-democracy treatment. Some

<sup>17</sup> A five-point scale was chosen to maximize reliability and validity (Krosnick 1999).

<sup>18</sup> This panel selection method avoids the limited coverage of surveys which tap only households with internet access. A description of Knowledge Networks' recruitment methodology is available at <http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp/docs/Knowledge%20Networks%20Methodology.pdf>, accessed 27 June 2008. For a detailed review of Knowledge Networks' methodology, see Malhotra and Kuo (2008).

constructivist scholars have suggested that the democratic peace is actually driven by affinities between Western countries and the “collective identity” among Western liberal democracies. If this viewpoint is correct, we would expect to find that the treatment group receiving the Christianity and the democracy treatments will choose lower threat levels and higher trust than all other treatment groups.<sup>19</sup>

### Findings

Table 1 provides the overall results of our survey experiment and Figures 3–6 present histograms of the results by treatment group. When respondents considered the nuclear proliferation scenario, their reported threat perceptions were roughly normally distributed, with “moderate” being the modal answer (41%), “very serious” the second most common (26%), and “slight” threat third (19%). Asked about the terrorism scenario, respondents again categorized the threat according to an approximately normal distribution: 40% judged the threat to be moderate, while the “very serious” and “slight” threat categories were each chosen by 22% of respondents.

Expressions of trust were more skewed. Considering the proliferation scenario, one-third (34%) of respondents indicated they had “no trust” in the foreign government to address this threat and the same proportion expressed “slight trust.”<sup>20</sup> In the terrorism scenario, the modal response was “slight trust” (36%) and the second most frequent response was “moderate trust” (31%).

#### *Assessing Treatment Effects*

We now turn to examining the treatment effects of the randomized regime and culture information embedded in the scenarios. Our response data are in the form of ratings on an ordinal, as opposed to cardinal, scale. Thus,

TABLE 1. Overall Results of the Survey Experiment

Proliferation Scenario	Threat	No threat	Slight	Moderate	Very serious	Extremely serious
		40 (5%)	136 (18%)	315 (41%)	215 (28%)	63 (8%)
	Trust	No trust 252 (35%)	Slight 248 (34%)	Moderate 189 (26%)	Very high 34 (5%)	Extremely high 3 (0.4%)
Terrorism Scenario	Threat	No threat	Slight	Moderate	Very serious	Extremely serious
		55 (7%)	171 (22%)	309 (40%)	176 (23%)	54 (7%)
	Trust	No trust 181 (25%)	Slight 253 (36%)	Moderate 226 (32%)	Very high 34 (5%)	Extremely high 16 (2%)

<sup>19</sup> It is also possible that the effect of the religion treatments is conditional on what regime treatment respondents receive. For example, neo-conservative thinkers have argued that regime type is a mediating factor in the tensions between Western and non-Western countries (Dalacoura 2005:963), suggesting that the Islam treatment would be salient only conditional on receiving the non-democracy treatment. On the other hand, Mansfield and Snyder (2002) argue that when a country is in the process of democratizing, “elites commonly employ nationalist rhetoric to mobilize mass support but then become drawn into the belligerent foreign policies unleashed by this process” (298). If respondents believe that democratization leads to nationalism-driven belligerence, the Islam treatment might be associated with higher threat perceptions and lower degrees of trust only when it is administered in conjunction with the democracy treatment. However, our empirical results do not suggest that regime type conditions the effects of the religion treatment.

<sup>20</sup> As noted previously, respondents who indicated “no threat” in the first question of the scenario were not asked the follow-up question on trust. However, even if these individuals had answered the questions on trust and had all said they had “very high” or “extremely high” levels of trust, the distribution of responses would still have been skewed toward low levels of trust.

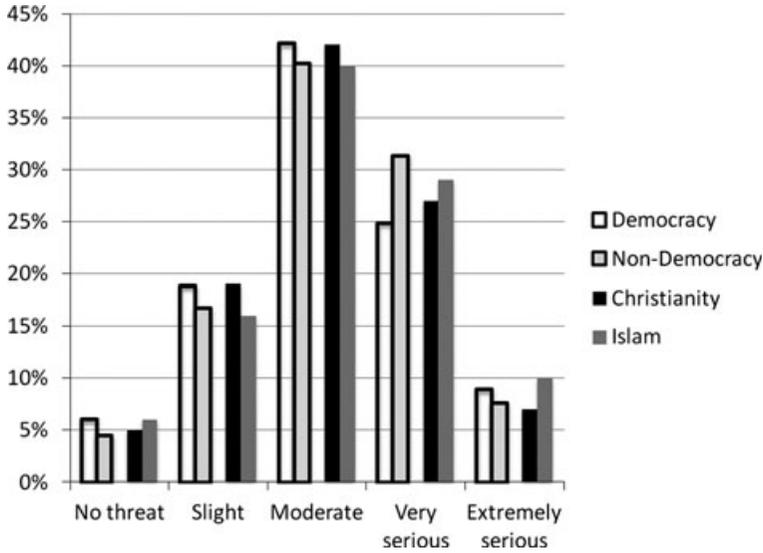


FIG 3. Threat Perceptions for Proliferation Scenario by Regime and Culture Treatments

the data here are not suitable for an ANOVA, *t*-test, or an ordinary least squares regression. Instead, we conduct nonparametric tests designed for ordinal data.<sup>21</sup>

Kendall's rank correlation coefficient assesses the similarity of ranked variables.<sup>22</sup> For a pair of treatment groups, say democracy and nondemocracy, a Kendall's  $\tau_b$  of one would indicate that every person in the second (nondemocracy) treatment group chose a higher level of threat (trust) than every person in the first (democracy) treatment group. A Kendall's  $\tau_b$  of  $-1$  implies that everyone in the nondemocracy treatment group chose lower levels of threat (trust) than everyone in the democracy treatment group. For a binary treatment, the ordering of the treatments is arbitrary. If democracy were to be considered the second treatment group, the resulting  $\tau_b$  would have the same magnitude but the opposite sign as the  $\tau_b$  calculated when democracy is considered to be the first treatment group. When  $\tau_b$  is zero, the treatment groups' rankings are indistinguishable.  $\tau_b$  and *p* values for significance tests of the hypothesis that  $\tau_b = 0$  are reported in the analysis below. We also report results of this test for the effect of the regime treatment after conditioning on the religion treatment and vice versa.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> An alternate possibility would be to use an ordered logit (or probit) regression. Such a regression relies on the assumption of that the log-odds of the treatment moving a respondent from a lower to a higher category is constant across all the categories, although the model allows for varying cut-points between the ordered categories. A Brant test is used to gauge the appropriateness of constant log-odds by comparing a series of binary logistic regressions. For our data, we are able to reject the null hypothesis of equal log-odds with greater than 90% confidence when analyzing two of the four response items, and 88% and 89% confidence for the other two.

<sup>22</sup> Denote the response of respondent *i* in treatment group one as  $Y_{1i}$  and the response of respondent *j* in treatment group two as  $Y_{2j}$ . For any pair of respondents, *i* and *j*, the pair is concordant if  $Y_{1i} < Y_{2j}$ , discordant if  $Y_{1i} > Y_{2j}$ , and tied if  $Y_{1i} = Y_{2j}$ . Goodman-Kruskal's Gamma is how much more likely a pair of respondents is to be concordant than discordant, conditional on the respondents not being tied. It is calculated as  $(C - D) / (C + D)$ , where *C* is the number of concordant pairs and *D* is the number of discordant pairs. Kendall's  $\tau_b$  is a similar statistic but is not as easy to interpret:  $\tau_b = C - D / [(P - t_x)(P - t_y)]^{(-1/2)}$ , where *P* is the number of (unordered) pairs of observations,  $t_x$  is the number of pairs tied on *X*, and  $t_y$  is the number of pairs tied on *Y*. Thus,  $\tau_b$  is the number of concordant pairs minus the number of discordant pairs divided by the number of untied pairs and the number of tied pairs, except that the latter are down-weighted.

<sup>23</sup> The Generalized Cochran-Mantel-Haenszel test can be used to analyze three-way contingency tables (Landis et al. 1978). The results of our hypothesis tests are similar using that procedure.

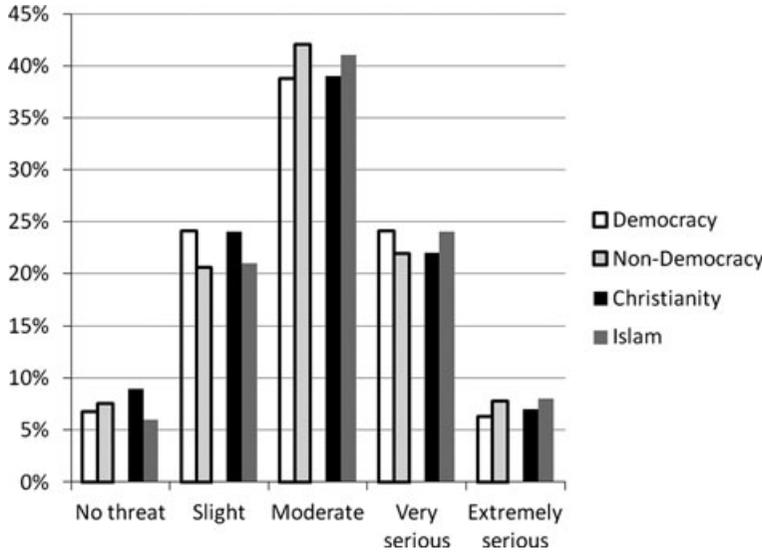


FIG 4. Threat Perceptions for Terrorism Scenario by Regime and Culture Treatments

For the case of binary treatments, a Mann–Whitney/Wilcoxon test will provide a test statistic that is asymptotically equivalent to Kendall’s tests (Agresti 2002:90).<sup>24</sup> The Mann–Whitney  $U$ -test also provides a test statistic that is easier to interpret: the probability that  $Y_{1i}$  greater than  $Y_{2j}$  for a random pair of respondents,  $i$  from treatment group one and  $j$  from treatment group two, where  $Y$  is the response variable. If the ordering of the two treatments were reversed, the Mann–Whitney  $U$ -test would estimate the probability that  $Y_{1i}$  less than  $Y_{2j}$ . That probability, plus the probability that  $Y_{1i}$  greater than  $Y_{2j}$ , would sum to one. Thus, the test statistic ignores the possibility of ties.

Consider the example of the Christianity (which we will arbitrarily assign to be treatment one) vs Islam (treatment two) groups’ responses to the question of threat perceptions. If the estimated probability that  $Y_{1i}$  greater than  $Y_{2j}$  is exactly one, every respondent in the Christianity treatment group choose a threat ranking as high or higher than every ranking chosen by the respondents in the Islam group.<sup>25</sup> If the estimated probability that  $Y_{1i}$  greater than  $Y_{2j}$  is exactly zero, no one in the Christianity treatment group chose a threat ranking higher than anyone in the Islam treatment group.<sup>26</sup> The latter result would be the strongest possible finding in favor of the hypothesis that the Islam treatment induces higher threat perceptions than the Christianity treatment. If the estimated probability that  $Y_{1i}$  greater than  $Y_{2j}$  is 0.5, there are even odds that a randomly chosen respondent from the Christianity treatment group ranked the threat as more or less severe than a randomly chosen respondent from treatment the Islam treatment group. Such a result would suggest no treatment effect from the religion cues.

<sup>24</sup> Unlike Kendall’s  $\tau_b$ , the Mann–Whitney/Wilcoxon test assigns numerical scores to the ordinal responses. An ordinal category’s score is equal to the average rank of the observations in that category, if all the observations in the data were ordered 1 to  $n$ . Kendall’s  $\tau_b$  and the Mann–Whitney/Wilcoxon test only produce asymptotically equivalent test statistics in case of a binary treatment.

<sup>25</sup>  $Y_{1i} \geq Y_{2j}$  for all  $i$  and  $j$ .

<sup>26</sup>  $Y_{1i} \leq Y_{2j}$  for all  $i$  and  $j$ .

*Threat Perceptions*

Tables 2 and 3 examine the treatment effects of the regime and culture cues on threat perceptions for each scenario, which are also presented graphically in Figures 3 and 4. The histograms show that across both scenarios threat perceptions were higher among those who received the Islam treatment compared with the Christianity treatment. According to the Kendall's rank coefficient, under the nuclear proliferation scenario this difference was statistically significant only among those who also received the democracy cue (Table 2). There is a 44% chance that a respondent from the Christianity and Democracy treatment group rated this threat as more severe than a respondent from the Islam & Democracy group and, correspondingly, a 56% chance that the Islam and Democracy treatment group respondent rated this threat as more severe. The difference between the Christianity and Nondemocracy and Islam and Nondemocracy treatment groups is not only statistically insignificant, it is in the opposite direction (i.e., the Islam treatment is associated with lower threat rankings) and substantively tiny.

In the terrorism scenario, the religion treatment was statistically significant without conditioning on regime type (Table 3). There is a 46% chance that a respondent in the Christianity treatment group rated the threat as more severe than a respondent in the Islam treatment group, and a 54% chance that the respondent in the Islam treatment group rated this threat as more severe. Unlike the nuclear proliferation scenario, the religion treatment effect does not appear to be stronger among those given the democracy treatment vs the nondemocracy treatment. The measured effect of the religion treat-

TABLE 2. Treatment Effects on Threat Perceptions for the Nuclear Proliferation Scenario

<i>Proliferation Scenario: Threat Perception</i>					
<i>Treatments</i>	<i>No Threat</i>	<i>Slight</i>	<i>Moderate</i>	<i>Very Serious</i>	<i>Extremely Serious</i>
Christianity & Islam					
Democracy (Row%)	23 (6%)	72 (19%)	161 (42%)	95 (25%)	34 (9%)
Non-democracy	17 (4%)	64 (17%)	154 (40%)	120 (31%)	29 (8%)
Christianity Only					
Democracy	11 (6%)	46 (24%)	81 (42%)	41 (21%)	16 (8%)
Non-democracy	7 (4%)	28 (15%)	81 (43%)	61 (33%)	10 (5%)
Total	18 (5%)	74 (19%)	162 (42%)	102 (27%)	26 (7%)
Islam Only					
Democracy	12 (6%)	26 (14%)	80 (42%)	54 (28%)	18 (9%)
Non-democracy	10 (5%)	36 (18%)	73 (37%)	59 (30%)	19 (10%)
Total	22 (6%)	62 (16%)	153 (40%)	113 (29%)	37 (10%)
<i>Tests of the effect of the treatments</i>					
	<i>Kendall's <math>\tau_b</math></i>	<i>p-Value</i>	<i>Mann-Whitney Test</i>		
Christianity vs Islam	0.049	.144	Pr[ $Y_{\text{Christianity}} > Y_{\text{Islam}}$ ]		0.472
Christianity vs Islam Democracy	0.097	.038			0.440
Christianity vs Islam ~Democracy	-0.0007	.988			0.502
Democracy vs ~Dem.	0.047	.154	Pr[ $Y_{\text{Democracy}} > Y_{\text{Non-Democracy}}$ ]		0.471
Democracy vs ~Dem. Christianity	0.101	.032			0.442
Democracy vs ~Dem. Islam	-0.003	.949			0.500
Christianity & Democracy vs ~ (Christianity & Democracy)	0.0838	.012	Pr[ $Y_{\text{Christianity}\&\text{Democracy}} > Y_{\text{Christianity}\&\text{Democracy}}$ ]		0.442

TABLE 3. Treatment Effects on Threat Perceptions for the Terrorism Scenario

<i>Treatments</i>	<i>Terrorism Scenario: Threat Perception</i>				
	<i>No Threat</i>	<i>Slight</i>	<i>Moderate</i>	<i>Very Serious</i>	<i>Extremely Serious</i>
Christianity & Islam					
Democracy (Row %)	26 (7%)	92 (24%)	148 (39%)	92 (24%)	24 (6%)
Non-democracy	29 (8%)	79 (21%)	161 (42%)	84 (22%)	30 (8%)
Christianity Only					
Democracy	17 (9%)	52 (26%)	69 (35%)	53 (27%)	9 (5%)
Non-democracy	16 (9%)	39 (22%)	81 (45%)	29 (16%)	16 (9%)
Total	33 (9%)	91 (24%)	150 (39%)	82 (22%)	25 (7%)
Islam Only					
Democracy	9 (5%)	40 (22%)	79 (43%)	39 (21%)	15 (8%)
Non-democracy	13 (6%)	40 (20%)	80 (40%)	55 (27%)	14 (7%)
Total	22 (6%)	80 (21%)	159 (41%)	94 (24%)	29 (8%)

	<i>Tests of the Effect of the Treatments</i>			
	<i>Kendall's <math>\tau_b</math></i>	<i>p-Value</i>	<i>Mann-Whitney Test</i>	
Christianity vs Islam	0.062	.063	$\Pr[Y_{\text{Christianity}} > Y_{\text{Islam}}]$	0.463
Christianity vs Islam Democracy	0.031	.277		0.469
Christianity vs Islam ~Democracy	0.043	.124		0.457
Democracy vs ~Dem.	0.013	.698	$\Pr[Y_{\text{Democracy}} > Y_{\text{Non-Democracy}}]$	0.492
Democracy vs ~Dem Christianity	-0.0002	.997		0.50
Democracy vs ~Dem. Islam	0.0214	.648		0.487
Christianity & Democracy vs ~ (Christianity & Democracy)	0.0363	.273	$\Pr[Y_{\text{Christianity \& Democracy}} > Y_{\sim(\text{Christianity \& Democracy})}]$	0.475

ment is actually slightly larger among those who received the nondemocracy treatment.

As expected, respondents also rated threats lower if given the democracy rather than nondemocracy treatment. This difference was not statistically significant in either scenario. However, the difference between democracy and non-democracy is statistically significant for the proliferation scenario among the subpopulation that also received the Christianity treatment. Recall that the Christianity treatment is only statistically significant for this scenario among those given the democracy treatment. Thus, what stands out in this scenario is that the group given the Christianity and democracy treatments gave markedly low threat rankings. If we compare the responses of the Christianity and Democracy treatment group to those of all the other respondents, the Mann-Whitney *U*-test estimates that there is a 56% chance that a respondent from the Christianity and Democracy group ranked the threat as less severe than a respondent from any other treatment group. Thus, threat perception in the nuclear proliferation scenario appears consistent with the constructivist hypothesis that publics in Western democracies have a special affinity for each other.

The treatment effects in the terrorism scenario are not reducible to a distinction between the Christianity and Democracy treatment group vs all other groups, however. The substantive differences between the Christianity and Democracy treatment group and all other respondents are smaller than those between the Christianity and Islam treatments and statistically insignificant ( $\tau_b = 0.036$  vs 0.062). Thus, in contrast to the proliferation scenario, regime type

had no statistically significant effects, alone or among the sub-group given the Christianity treatment. Thus, the clash of civilizations appears to be a relevant framework for understanding US adults' threat perceptions in the terrorism scenario.

#### *Trust in Foreign Governments*

Respondents who indicated that they perceived any degree of threat from a scenario were asked how much trust they felt in the foreign government to address that threat. As noted earlier, respondents indicated very low levels of trust under both scenarios (Figures 5 and 6). The results of these questions about trust, broken down by treatment group, are presented in Tables 4 and 5.

As expected, levels of trust were higher among respondents given the democracy treatment as compared to the nondemocracy treatment. Religion treatments were not in the expected direction for the proliferation scenario, however. Instead, the Christianity cue was associated with slightly *less* trust than the Islam treatment, although these differences were statistically insignificant. For the terrorism scenario, the cultural cue's treatment effect is in the expected direction, with higher trust expressed by respondents who received the Christianity cue.

For the nuclear proliferation scenario, there were no statistically significant treatment effects overall or within any subpopulation. However, the terrorism scenario shows an effect from both the cultural treatment and the democracy treatment. Fifty-four percent of the time, a respondent given the Christianity treatment expressed more trust in a foreign government to address a terrorist threat than a respondent who was given the Islam treatment. The estimated effect of the Christianity treatment is slightly stronger in the group that was given the democracy treatment than the nondemocracy treatment ( $\tau_b = -0.072$  vs  $-0.066$ ).

Regime type also produced statistically significant differences in trust when respondents considered the terrorism scenario. A respondent in the democracy group ranked higher on trust than a respondent in the nondemocracy group 54% of the time. This is the strongest piece of evidence in our survey experiment that regime type influences US public opinion on foreign policies. The estimated effect of the regime treatment was somewhat weaker in the group given the Islam treatment ( $\tau_b = -0.053$  vs  $-0.059$ ).

We can also test whether the religion and regime treatment effects just noted may be a single Christianity and Democracy treatment effect, as seemed to be the case in the threat rankings with regard to proliferation. The respondents given both the Christianity and democracy treatments, compared with all the other respondents, had relatively high rankings of trust in a foreign government to address a terrorist threat. The probability that a respondent from this group would give a higher trust score than a respondent who received a different treatment was 55%, a similar separation to that found in the comparison of the two religion treatments ( $\Pr[Y_{\text{Christianity}} > Y_{\text{Islam}}] = 54.2\%$ ) or the two regime treatments ( $\Pr[Y_{\text{Democracy}} > Y_{\text{Non-Democracy}}] = 53.5\%$ ). The difference between the Christianity and Democracy group and other groups is statistically significant, as well. By contrast, there was no statistically significant effect of democracy conditional on Islam or of Christianity conditional on non-democracy. However, smaller sample sizes might be to blame for the lack of conditional results.

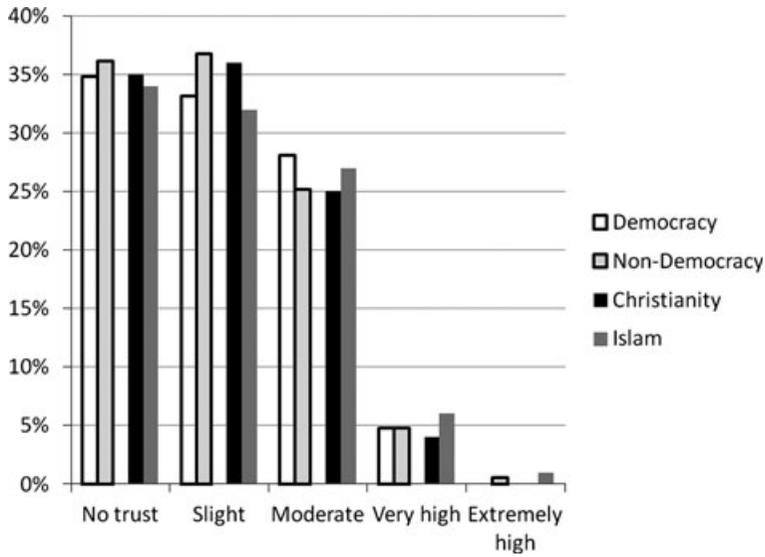


FIG 5. Levels of Trust for Proliferation Scenario by Regime and Culture Treatments

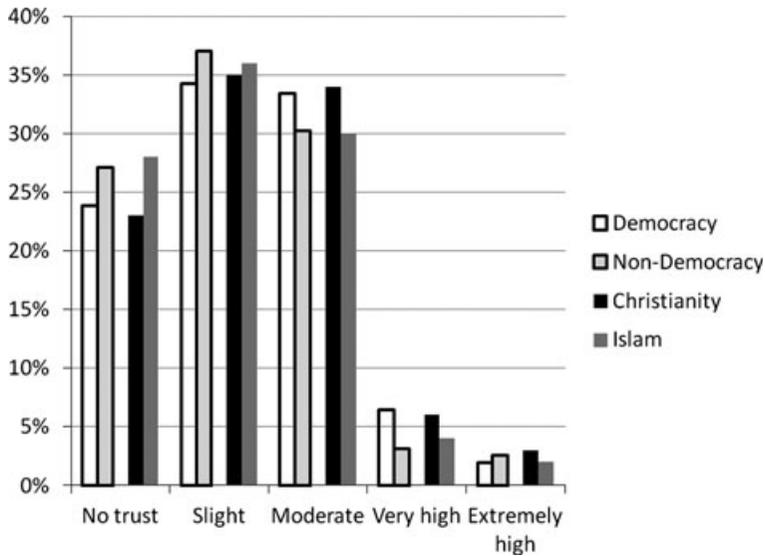


FIG 6. Levels of Trust for Terrorism Scenario by Regime and Culture Treatments

### Summary and Discussion

The results of our survey experiment are summarized in Table 6. The first column of results reports whether we found an affinity for Christian-majority countries, as predicted by the clash of civilizations hypothesis. At the time of this survey experiment, respondents were no doubt aware that the United States was waging war in two countries where Islam is the dominant religion. That timing should have stacked the deck in favor of the clash of civilizations hypothesis. For

TABLE 4. Treatment Effects on Trust for the Nuclear Proliferation Scenario

<i>Treatments</i>	<i>Proliferation Scenario: Trust</i>				
	<i>No Trust</i>	<i>Slight</i>	<i>Moderate</i>	<i>Very High</i>	<i>Extremely High</i>
Christianity & Islam					
Democracy (Row %)	124 (35%)	118 (33%)	100 (28%)	17 (5%)	1 (0%)
Non-democracy	128 (36%)	130 (37%)	89 (25%)	17 (5%)	2 (1%)
Christianity Only					
Democracy	65 (36%)	60 (33%)	49 (27%)	7 (4%)	1 (1%)
Non-democracy	62 (34%)	71 (39%)	41 (23%)	6 (3%)	0 (0%)
Total	127 (35%)	131 (36%)	90 (25%)	13 (4%)	1 (0.28%)
Islam Only					
Democracy	59 (33%)	58 (33%)	51 (29%)	10 (6%)	0 (0%)
Non-democracy	66 (35%)	59 (32%)	48 (26%)	11 (6%)	2 (1%)
Total	125 (34%)	117 (32%)	99 (27%)	21 (6%)	2 (1%)

	<i>Tests of the effect of the treatments</i>			
	<i>Kendall's <math>\tau_b</math></i>	<i>p-Value</i>	<i>Mann-Whitney Test</i>	
Christianity vs Islam	0.0353	.307	$\Pr[Y_{\text{Christianity}} > Y_{\text{Islam}}]$	0.479
Christianity vs Islam Democracy	0.0329	.5027		0.481
Christianity vs Islam ~Democracy	0.0373	.4446		0.478
Democracy vs ~Dem.	-0.0192	.5789	$\Pr[Y_{\text{Democracy}} > Y_{\text{Non-Democracy}}]$	0.511
Democracy vs ~Dem. Christianity	-0.0222	.6516		0.513
Democracy vs ~Dem. Islam	-0.0161	.7412		0.510
Christianity & Democracy vs ~ (Christianity & Democracy)	0.0077	.824	$\Pr[Y_{\text{Christianity\&Democracy}} > Y_{\text{~(Christianity\&Democracy)}}]$	0.495

both scenarios, threat perceptions were higher among those given the Islam treatment compared with those given the Christianity treatment. However, for the proliferation scenario, that difference was statistically significant only in the subpopulation that also received the democracy treatment. Responses to that scenario seem best explained by the constructivist suggestion that democracy, like religion, is a component of cultural affinity between different populations. In the scenario dealing with the threat of terrorism, there was an overall treatment effect from the religion cue. Even in that case, however, there was never a statistically significant difference between those given the Christianity treatment and those given the Islam treatment conditional on receiving the non-democracy treatment. Thus, the strong claim that religious affinity should hold regardless of political system is not borne out.

We also found limited support for the maximalist claims of the normative democratic peace; these results are in column 2 of Table 6. Information about regime type did not create consistent, large movements in perceptions of threat and expressions of trust. Respondents did express more trust in democracies in the terrorism scenario. However, we did not find statistically significant treatment effects of regime type when we compared the group receiving the Islam and democracy treatments to the group receiving the Islam and nondemocracy treatments. The maximalist democratic peace claim that democracies have an affinity even across cultural divides was not in evidence in our data.

The constructivist contention that there is an affinity specifically between Western democracies had support in our results, as shown in the final column of Table 6. Respondents receiving the democracy and Christianity treatments had

TABLE 5. Treatment Effects on Trust for the Terrorism Scenario

<i>Treatments</i>	<i>Terrorism Scenario: Trust</i>				
	<i>No Trust</i>	<i>Slight</i>	<i>Moderate</i>	<i>Very High</i>	<i>Extremely High</i>
Christianity & Islam					
Democracy (Row %)	85 (24%)	122 (34%)	119 (33%)	23 (6%)	7 (2%)
Non-democracy	96 (27%)	131 (37%)	107 (30%)	11 (3%)	9 (3%)
Christianity Only					
Democracy	39 (21%)	63 (34%)	61 (33%)	16 (9%)	4 (2%)
Non-democracy	41 (25%)	58 (35%)	57 (35%)	4 (2%)	5 (3%)
Total	80 (23%)	121 (35%)	118 (34%)	20 (6%)	9 (3%)
Islam Only					
Democracy	46 (27%)	59 (34%)	58 (34%)	7 (4%)	3 (2%)
Non-democracy	55 (29%)	73 (39%)	50 (26%)	7 (4%)	4 (2%)
Total	101 (28%)	132 (36%)	108 (30%)	14 (4%)	7 (2%)

	<i>Tests of the Effect of the Treatments</i>		
	<i>Kendall's <math>\tau_b</math></i>	<i>p-Value</i>	<i>Mann-Whitney Test</i>
Religion	-0.0711	.041	Pr[ $Y_{\text{Christianity}} > Y_{\text{Islam}}$ ]
Religion Democracy	-0.0715	.145	
Religion Non-Democracy	-0.0664	.180	
Democracy	-0.0589	.090	Pr[ $Y_{\text{Democracy}} > Y_{\text{Non-Democracy}}$ ]
Democracy Christianity	-0.0594	.232	
Democracy Islam	-0.0528	.281	
Christianity & Democracy vs ~ (Christianity & Democracy)	-0.0756	.030	Pr[ $Y_{\text{Christianity\&Democracy}} > Y_{\text{~(Christianity\&Democracy)}}$ ]

significantly lower threat perceptions under the proliferation scenario and higher expressions of trust under the terrorism scenario. These results are not entirely consistent with either the maximalist claims of the normative democratic peace or the clash of civilizations approach to international relations.

Limitations in our chosen experimental setup should also be taken in consideration when assessing these results. First, because of differences across the two scenarios, it is not possible to compare results across the two issue areas. Particular information provided in each of the scenarios may also explain some of the findings. For example, there are nonstate actors in the terrorism scenario, and this may account for the lower respondent perceptions of threat by the state itself, regardless of regime type. Furthermore, in our experiment, we are unable to determine whether respondents discounted the democratic nature of the Islamic democracies, which would explain why subjects given the Islam treatment did not distinguish between regime types.

An additional concern with experiment-based research is the problem of external validity. It is difficult to know whether respondents would react in the same way to information presented in experimental scenarios vs the real world. While careful historical analyses provide the strongest external validity, they are less well suited to sorting through the causal mechanisms uncovered through controlled experiments (Tomz 2007). Surveys of experiments in international relations have also pointed to the advantages of data generated from experiments, given the problem of confounding variables in uncontrolled settings (McDermott 2011). In assessing the problem of external validity, we echo Tomz and

TABLE 6. Summary of Hypotheses and Findings

	<i>Theory of International Relations</i>		
	<i>Clash of Civilizations</i>	<i>Democratic Peace</i>	<i>Western Democratic Peace</i>
Theory predicts lower threat & higher trust in case of	Christianity treatment	Democracy treatment	Christianity & Democracy treatments
Findings			
Proliferation Scenario			
Threat	—	—	**
Trust	—	—	—
Terrorism Scenario			
Threat	*	—	—
Trust	**	*	**

(Notes. \*\* $p \leq .05$ , \* $p \leq .10$ , —Statistically insignificant treatment effect.)

Weeks (2011), who view experiments “as complements to, rather than substitutes for, historical analysis,” (p. 19).

### Conclusion

Insofar as there is increasing evidence that public opinion shapes international policy, the individual-level determinants of views on global affairs deserve further study. Furthermore, the recent and protracted involvement of the United States in conflicts in Muslim-majority, nondemocratic nations illustrates the relevance of disentangling whether the US public weighs democracy vs cultural difference more heavily in supporting particular foreign policy positions. This study has taken one step toward sorting through the determinants of threat perception and trust in foreign governments. It has done so by looking for the effects of randomized information about regime type and culture on respondents to a survey. Given this start, there remain many lines of inquiry for future research.

The research design here does not examine the political psychology mechanisms behind how respondents used regime and cultural information to formulate threat and trust perceptions. For example, the experiment here cannot distinguish to what extent regime and cultural information are heuristics that are useful primarily because of limited knowledge about foreign affairs or in order to assign actors to out-group categories. One way to study this possibility in an experimental setting would be to design a set of treatments that varied the amount of information respondents had about other characteristics of the country in question. Taking cues from other studies, additional manipulations might concern military capabilities, alliances, and trade relations, among others. The experiment here also does not distinguish whether responses to the cultural and/or regime treatments were stronger among individuals that have intolerant or authoritarian personality traits. Other studies have pointed to religious affiliation of respondents as a source of variation in opinions (Baumgartner, Francia and Morris 2008; Johns and Davies 2010).<sup>27</sup> Moreover, it may be useful to consider the effects of cues that present more nuance than the two religious tradi-

<sup>27</sup> Johns and Davies (2010) find stronger support for the use of force against Islamic states among respondents who identify as Christians. This was true across British and US publics, though American Christians were more strongly in favor of use of force.

tions tested here. Respondents may perceive differently the nature of democracy in an Islamic vs Christian nation, for example.

Future studies could also explore variation in other aspects of the experiments presented here. Additional surveys might assess public perceptions and opinions on other issue areas. While public awareness of headline issues such as terrorism and nuclear proliferation remains high, responses may differ for international problems that grace the front pages of newspapers less frequently. Alternate manipulations of the “culture” variable should also be explored. Owing to data constraints, we were only able to select one measure for culture, but manipulations of “sociocultural similarity” have been tested in other experiments and found to affect public approval for the use of force (Geva and Hanson 1999). While religion most directly tested the clash of civilizations thesis, the constructivist framework suggests a broader range of measures for cultural affinity.

It should also be noted that this study focuses on citizen responses to queries about threat and trust in international actors; as such, it provides a partial glimpse of the noisy process of decision making on foreign policy. Whether elites share these perceptions is a subject for future inquiry, though existing opinion surveys of policymakers demonstrate that elites believe in carving out deliberative arenas for the public to shape foreign policy (Page and Shapiro 1983; Powlick 1991).<sup>28</sup>

Our results shed light on what kinds of claims about public foreign policy views are empirically defensible. Should future studies also find that there are consistently contingent relationships between regime type and culture in influencing perceptions of foreign countries, there may be a need for a more sophisticated theory of public foreign policy opinion and the role it plays in systems-level theorizing.

## Appendix: Questionnaire for Survey Experiment

### *Scenario A*

It is US policy to treat any country that gives help to international terrorists as a major security threat. It is not always easy, however, to determine which governments give help to terrorists. Please read the following scenario and then answer the questions below. NEXT.

Members of the African Union are pledged to fight terrorism. The Union has accused a member country of helping terrorists in exchange for weapons. The (democratic/nondemocratic) government needs arms because it is threatened by extremist religious groups that oppose the wide-spread practice of (Christianity/Islam) in that country. The government argues that it would not support international terrorists because that would hurt its efforts to fight local rebels. The country is very poor and there are high levels of corruption.

1. On the basis this description, how would you rate the potential threat that this country is helping terrorists who want to attack the United States? Please choose one of the options below:

<sup>28</sup> By the mid-1980s, a consideration of public support became an explicit component of the White House decision-making process in matters of military use of force. Reagan’s Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger declared in 1984 that “before the US commits combat forces abroad, there must be some reasonable assurance we will have the support of the American people.” The Weinberger doctrine is embedded in a speech available online at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/military/force/weinberger.html>, accessed February 17, 2010. This reflects the place that public opinion has claimed as an “essential domino” in the chain of decisions leading to the use of force (Klarevas 2002).

No threat  
Slight threat  
Moderate threat  
Very serious threat  
Extremely serious threat

*If respondent does not indicate "No threat," please ask the following question:*

2. How much trust do you have in this country's leaders to make the maximum possible effort to counter this terrorist threat if ordered to do so by the international community?

No trust  
Slight trust  
Moderate trust  
Very high trust  
Extremely high trust

*Scenario B*

An important security consideration of the United States is the development of nuclear weapons by countries that do not already have them. Please read the following scenario and then answer the questions below. NEXT.

Several of the United States' Asian allies claim that a certain country is building nuclear weapons to use against them. This wealthy and (democratic/non-democratic) country has the resources necessary to build nuclear weapons. The country's government feels threatened by its neighbors because it is one of the few countries in the area where many people practice (Christianity/Islam). The country also might want nuclear power in order to generate electricity. The United Nations has inspected most of the power plants in the country but says the government is not always cooperative.

3. On the basis of this description, how would you rate the potential threat that this country is building a nuclear weapon to use against US allies? Please choose one of the options below:

No threat  
Slight threat  
Moderate threat  
Very serious threat  
Extremely serious threat

*If respondent does not indicate "No threat," please ask the following question:*

4. How much trust do you have in this country's leaders to stop developing nuclear weapons if ordered to do so by the international community?

No trust  
Slight trust  
Moderate trust  
Very high trust  
Extremely high trust

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