RELIGION, REDISTRIBUTION AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION:
Evidence from an Experiment in Nairobi, Kenya[*]

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Abstract

Since Marx and Weber, social scientists have attempted to understand the impact or lack thereof of religion on two core domains of political life: whether religion influences attitudes about wealth accumulation, inequality and redistribution; and whether religion dampens or inspires political participation. However, the effect of religious ideas on these domains is difficult to identify, at the very least because citizens often select into religious associations whose messages they find appealing. We shed light on this issue through an experiment in Nairobi, Kenya. Focusing on the effects of two important contemporary Christian messages, we find evidence that exposure to religious messages can reduce egalitarianism in complex distribution decisions, compared to exposure to secular messages. We also find that exposure to self-affirmation messages—both religious and secular—can be politically empowering and motivate activism. We discuss implications of these findings for political mobilization and policy preferences in Sub-Saharan Africa, as well as for the study of religion and politics more generally.

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Despite predictions that religion would retreat from public life with the advance of urbanization and economic development, in many parts of the world religiosity remains extremely high, and new forms of religious practice and theology are growing rapidly (Ingelhart and Norris 2004; Freston 2001). Such trends are certainly apparent in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in places where Pentecostal, Charismatic and Renewalist churches have been growing at extraordinary rates (Miller 2013; Ranger 2008). Yet we still have much to learn about how these and other religious associations are influencing individual behavior in the political realm (Woodberry 2006).

Following a distinguished social science literature, we focus here on two core areas of possible influence: on how exposure to religious ideas[1] might shape attitudes about inequality and redistribution; and on whether exposure to religious ideas dampens or inspires political participation. Do religious ideas act as an opiate for the masses, to paraphrase Marx, distracting them from demanding redress of poverty and inequality and turning them away from political affairs? Or can religious ideas be a stimulant, inspiring people to become involved and to take action to better their own lives and those of others? Do different religious world views have different effects?

The consequences of exposure to religious ideas are difficult to identify. Observational studies have found that religious people are less insistent on redistribution (e.g., Scheve and Stasavage 2006; De la O and Rodden 2008), and that religiosity is associated with higher levels of political participation (e.g., Putnam et al. 2013; Brady et al 1995). Yet, religiosity bundles together a number of causal factors. In addition to regular exposure to religious ideas, religiosity can involve a social identity, rites and practices, a social network, access to social services, organizational resources and skills and more. It can therefore be difficult to separate the effect of exposure to religious ideas from effects of the other elements of religiosity.[2] Second, subject to certain

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[1]We use the term "religious" to refer to the world religions (primarily Christianity in our study, but also Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, Confucianism, Hinduism and their variants). We contrast world religious messages with other social messages. To refer to the latter, we often use the term secular for simplicity, though we recognize that some that we dicuss, such as ideas related to traditional chieftaincy systems, can also involve beliefs about the sacred.

[2]Following Durkheim's (1912) view that religious rituals rather than beliefs shape individuals' connections to society, much important political science research has focused on the organizational, group identity, social network and practice aspects of religion (e.g. Chhibber 2014; Dehejia et al.

constraints, individuals have choice about which religious associations to participate in, and how often to participate. If selection into religious association depends at all on the appeal of ideas espoused by those associations, then the ideas may have little independent impact on political attitudes and behavior (Djupe and Calfano 2013, 173). Individuals' exposure to religious messages may simply reflect their pre-existing social and political values, or their desire to engage in certain actions.

In light of these challenges, we take a novel approach. We implement a laboratory experiment in Nairobi, Kenya and investigate the political influence of two contrasting Christian messages that are highly prevalent there: the "prosperity gospel"—a message that God rewards individual faith and positive thinking with material riches (Kay 2011)—and the "social gospel" —a message that highlights human frailty in creating economic inequality and people's responsibility to care for the poor (Green 2010). Using language from real-world sermons, we randomly assign participants to listen to one of the two religious messages or to secular messages on similar topics and then test for differences in behavioral measures of distributive preferences and political activism across treatment groups. The two religious messages provide divergent interpretations of inequality and appropriate responses to it. They also provide contrasting commentaries on individual empowerment. These two religious messages thus differ in content relevant to our two domains of interest.

Our approach has a number of advantages. We harness the controlled environment of the laboratory to focus more directly on the influence of exposure to religious ideas, apart from the organizational and liturgical context in which they are typically espoused. We also recognize that citizens can select into religious associations whose messages they find appealing (Chesnut 2003; Gaskins et al. 2013; Margolis 2013; Trejo 2009), subject to constraints. By using random assignment, our experiment gives us leverage over the inferential challenges presented by these selection processes. In addition, we collect behavioral measures of distributional preferences and political participation. While recent experiments have examined the influence of religious cueing on generosity in clear-cut dictator games (Shariff and Norenzayan 2007; Shariff et al. 2010), we construct

2007; Gill 2008; Hungerman 2005; Philpott 2007; Putnam et al. 2013; Trejo 2009). In light of Weber's *Protestant Ethic* (Weber 1934), we explore the possibility that theological ideas might also influence economic and political behavior.

our measures of distributional preferences so as to reflect more complex, morally ambiguous choices often involved in formulating attitudes toward inequality and redistribution.

Our study reveals several key results. First, individuals exposed to the religious messages in this study were less insistent on equity than individuals exposed to secular messages, instead preferring options that maximized overall payoffs to themselves and others. In other words, individuals exposed to religious messages were more likely to prioritize the size of the pie over the fairness of its distribution. Second, individuals exposed to messages that affirmed their self-worth and individual potential—whether religious or secular—were more likely to participate politically. This politically empowering effect is evident in our study among participants exposed to the prosperity gospel; our findings thus illustrate the ways in which religious messages can act as stimulants, rather than opiates. Indeed, instead of disengaging or refraining from seeking benefits for themselves and others, many participants exposed to religious ideas in this study were inspired to do just the opposite.

This paper's contributions fall into three camps: theoretical, context-specific, and methodological. Theoretically, we point to ways in which religious ideas can inspire action and encourage listeners to prioritize abundance over equity. Context-specific, we explore these issues in a country where religious associations are ubiquitous and gaps between rich and poor large. Against a background of large-scale conversion to Pentecostal churches in Sub-Saharan Africa and throughout the developing world, we also provide specific evidence about the ways in which the prosperity gospel does and does not influence political behavior differently than other Christian and secular messages. Finally, we provide a novel experimental research design for identifying the impact of religious ideas on political behavior. Our empirical approach could easily be extended to study the influence of other religious ideas in other places.

In the next section, we discuss existing literature on how religious messages in general, and the prosperity and social gospels in particular, might influence distributional preferences and political participation. In section 3, we describe the design and execution of the lab experiment in Nairobi. In section 4, we present the main results from the experiment, as well as some robustness checks and analysis of heterogeneous treatment effects. Sections 5 and 6 discuss the implications of these results for the study of religion and politics more generally, as well as for contemporary politics in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Religion, Inequality and Political Participation

Religious messages can affect behavior in at the least the following ways: they can prime in-group/out-group distinctions; they can heighten attention to norms, moral standards, and world views; and they can shift emotive states (Chapp 2012; Djupe and Calfano 2013). In each of these ways, religious messages have the potential to influence individuals' orientations toward inequality and political participation. While a significant body of literature has explored the way in which religious cues function as social identitiy primes (e.g., Blogowska and Saroglou 2011; Chhibber and Sekhon 2013; Graham and Haidt 2010; Djupe and Calfano 2013), the second two mechanisms have received less attention from political scientists. Theoretically and in the design of our empirical study, we focus on these under-explored functions of religious messages.[3]

Religious Messages as Priming Moral Standards

Recent experimental studies have investigated the link between religiosity and prosocial outcomes such as generosity, fairness and honesty (Shariff and Norenzayan 2007; Saslow et al 2013a, 2013b; Henrich et al. 2010). The empirical results have been somewhat mixed: religious cues sometimes inspire generosity, fairness and honesty with others and sometimes they do not (see Preston et al. 2013 for a review; also Carpenter and Marshall 2009). Religiously-inspired prosociality is often strongest within an identity group and in repeat interactions, suggesting that social reputation and in-group bias are significant drivers of any link (Batson et al 1989; Saroglou et al 2005; Albertson 2011). Still, even in anonymous, one-shot dictator games, religious cues can increase generosity toward strangers (Shariff et al. 2014). Shariff and Norenzayan (2007) argue that, at least among those who believe in God, religious cues remind individuals of an omnipotent moral enforcer who is watching them and who can sanction immoral behavior even if other humans cannot.

Yet, in politics, the "morality" of whether and how to address economic inequality is often complex. A moral choice might mean pressing for redistribution and giving the most to the least

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[3]We reference some of the social identity literature in the following sections, but by virtue of the anonymous set-up of our experiment, we do not test for the influence of religious cues through priming in-group/out-group distinctions.

well off, especially if that choice is personally costly. But if redistribution results in any deadweight loss, perhaps the more moral choice is to prioritize a bigger pie for the whole society. Is equity necessarily the more moral choice if it involves both personal and social costs? In dictator games that involve a more straightforward trade-off between personal gain and helping others, cues that simply remind people that they are being watched might decrease selfishness.[4] Around morally ambiguous decisions, however, cues would also have to provide guidance about the moral acceptability of competing options.

Both religious and secular cues have the potential to provide guidance in such decisions. Across the world, religious norms and values exist alongside other forms of authority and socialization, such as state institutions, traditional chieftancy systems, and NGOs (Migdal 2001: 64; Swidler 2013). In Sub-Saharan Africa, it is not uncommon for some of these other authority systems to put heavy emphasis on maintaining and reinforcing equality—for instance, by putting pressure on wealthy members of traditional communities to give back (Swidler 2013; Freeman 2012), by acknowledging the dangers of the evil eye and of social resentment of individual accumulation (Ashforth 2005; Chabal 2009; Meyer 1998), or by treating the broad and equitable redress of poverty as paramount (Ncube et al. 2014).

At least in contrast to these norms, religious cues may give different guidance in distribution decisions, providing space for abundance, personal aspirations and morality to go hand-in-hand, without necessarily requiring the curtailing of individual accumulation (Swidler 2013). While encouraging giving to the church and sometimes to the poor, world religions also "provide inspiration and hope for developing a personal life trajectory" and allow individuals "not so much [to] abandon the intricate obligations that bind the relational self as recast them into something more manageable, both symbolically and practically" (Swidler 2010:165, 689; also van Dijk 2001; Meyer 1998). Relatively speaking, Christian messages often promise fruitfulness, encourage individual striving,

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[4]Indeed, Norenzayan and Shariff 2008 find that priming secular enforcement institutions and God decreased selfishness in dictator games by similar magnitudes. Their findings suggest that the selfish option in the dictator game is relatively clear-cut from both a religious and a secular standpoint, at least in some contexts (see, however, Henrich et al. 2010 about cultural variation in play in the ultimatum games).

and provide proscriptions and spiritual protection against envy and resentment. Some civic associations, such as human rights NGOs, may underscore a concept of the autonomous person but provide little assurance that the individual can thrive socially and spiritually in the pursuit of material accumulation. Traditional systems meanwhile can overwhelm individual accumulation and growth with distributive obligations (Chabal 2009: 48). Relative to these cues, religious language has the potential to remind listeners that pursuing blessing and abundance is not immoral and that good fortune for good people need not be punished. In contexts where some secular sources of authority and socialization present norms restraining individual accumulation, religious cues may in contrast provide a moral justification to prioritize greater overall allocations for oneself and others, while secular cues might lead to an insistence on equity.

Indeed, in cueing alternative forms of moral guidance, we hypothesize that this religious-secular distinction might exert a larger effect on distributional choices than any denominational differences in the content of our religious cues. Ethnographic studies have argued that, through the prosperity gospel, Pentecostal churches[5] are particularly focused on encouraging the pursuit of abundance, individual aspirations and material accumulation, while downplaying equity as an end in itself.[6] Yet, mainline Christian theologies also provide striking social and spiritual support for individual aspirations, social mobility and abundance over equity. Weber's *Protestant Ethic* famously argued that mainline Protestant doctrine supports individual economic advancement.[7] Many Catholic and mainline Protestant churches advocate social responsibility for the poor, but,

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[5]Some authors refer to these as Neo-Pentecostal churches, in order to differentiate them from early 20th century American Pentecostal churches.

[6]For example, Gifford (1991) writes, "By advocating the gospel of prosperity, [Pentecostal Christianity] dissuades adherents from evaluating the present economic order, merely persuading them to try to be amongst those who benefit from it ...it diverts attention from the social ills that are crying out for remedy"(65-66). Observing one Pentecostal church in Kenya, Gregory Deacon and Gabrielle Lynch (2013) similarly caution that the prosperity gospel "tends to detract from...opposition to...inequality, corruption, and oppression."

[7]See also Freeman (2012) and Swidler (2013) on similarities between the Protestant Ethic and Pentecostal theology around issues of inequality and personal advancement.

at least in Sub-Saharan Africa these mainline churches, have simultaneously preached personal advancement through education and economic growth (Nduku 2011).[8] Justifications for the compatibility of personal and social advancement can be found within the Christian message across the doctrinal spectrum.

Religious Messages as Shifting Emotive States

Religious messages also have the potential to shift emotive states, and here we propose that differences in denominational content might matter in shaping individual feelings of capability, vitality and self-worth that are in turn important influences on political participation (Blais and Vincent 2011; Judge et al. 2002; Bono and Judge 2003; Gallego and Oberski 2012). Religious messages not only provide moral guidance for behavior; they also can also act as tools of emotional inspiration toward action. We suggest that this may most likely be the consequence where the content itself is emotionally positive and affirming to the self-worth of the individual. Content that highlights the frailty and sin of the human world is potentially disempowering, suggesting that both individuals and systems are weak. In contrast, content that emphasizes self-worth and the God-given potential present in each individual has the potential to be empowering.[9]

These differences in content are apparent across Christian denominations. In a related project (McClendon and Riedl n.d.), we have collected and analyzed texts of church sermons in Nairobi and find that a striking theme within Pentecostal churches there is an emphasis on individual self-worth and empowerment in the here-and-now—that is, a stressing of the God-given potential for

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[8] "Evangelization must promote initiatives which contribute to the development . . . of individuals in their spiritual and material existence. . . in the context of the common and harmonious development of all the members of a nation and of all the peoples of the world." (Pope John Paul II, Ecclesia in Africa, 1995).

[9] Observational studies have found that religiosity tends to correlate strongly with participation in public affairs (e.g. Brady, Schlozman and Verba 1995; Putnam et al. 2013). The link may, however, be through the skills, practices, social ties and organizational resources (Campbell 2013; Jones-Correa and Leal 2001; Martin 1990; Putnam et al. 2013; Brady et al. 1995). We test in this study whether the link might also proceed through exposure to religious messages.

earthly achievement present in each individual listener. This finding of an emphasis on mental self-affirmation and psychological transformation is in keeping with the observations of ethnographic studies of Pentecostal churches elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America (Martin 2002; Marshall 2009; Miller and Yamamori 2007; Kalu (2008). Indeed Martin (2002) remarks that the distinctive feature of Pentecostal churches, in contrast to mainline churches, may be less their fundamentalism or their position on material enrichment than it is their emphasis on "empowerment through spiritual gifts offered to all" (Martin 2002, 2). As one prosperity gospel pastor in Nairobi put it, a distinctive goal of the messages in these churches is to generate enough positive reinforcement to "turn victims into victors."

By contrast, some religious messages in Nairobi, as elsewhere in the world, do not place this same emphasis on reinforcing listeners' sense of self-worth and earthly potential. They may remind people of salvation in the afterlife (McCleary and Barro 2006); they may stress that God cares about them (Lane 1959); they may help individuals cope with earthly suffering and obstacles (Campante and Yanagizawa-Drott 2013; Pergament 1997; Scheve and Stasavage 2006). But, relatively speaking, they do not emphasize the ways in which each individual can *triumph* over those obstacles in the here-and-now.

Research in social and political psychology argues that self-affirmation can encourage pro-active, self-helping behavior, even in areas unrelated to the source of self-affirmation (e.g. Hall et al. Forthcoming). A positive focus on the self can increase openness to new areas of action (Correll et al. 2004), can mitigate negative stereotypes that inhibit performance (Hall 2012), and can lower avoidance of intimidating situations and activities (Cohen et al. 2006). Interaction with the government is one such intimidating activity. Therefore, we argue that exposure to positive, self-affirming messages can boost political engagement, particularly for the purposes of self-help. The prosperity gospel is a religious message that often incorporates this call for mental self-affirmation, but secular self-affirmation messages might have the same effect. Non-self-affirming messages may offer psychic benefits that function like Marx's metaphorical opiate, and they are less likely to act as stimulants toward action. Exposure to religious messages thus has the potential to stimulate or to dampen political participation depending on content.

In sum, we expect that, apart from the organizational, identity, practice and other aspects of religiosity, exposure to theological messages might influence both distributional preferences and

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political participation. At least in the context in which we conduct our experiment, we expect religious cues to influence individuals to prioritize the size of the pie over equity, in contrast to secular messages on similar topics. We also expect self-affirmation messages, both religious and secular, to stimulate political participation.

Exposure to Religious Ideas and Self-Selection

Before testing these hypotheses, however, it is worth briefly discussing the ways in which identifying the effects of exposure to religious messages faces inferential challenges, because these problems have implications for our design. Religious identity is not completely fluid (Horowitz 1985, 50). The boundaries between major faith traditions can be quite strong; conversion is unthinkable in some contexts or at least has significant costs (Barro et al. 2010). And yet, the barriers to switching denominations and congregations within major faith traditions is often quite low (Iannaccone 1990). In the presence of more permeable boundaries, individuals have some discretion over the kinds of religious ideas (if any) to which they are exposed.

The challenge then is that, if individuals choose to attend a religious service based at all on whether they find its messages appealing, then exposure to the messages may actually have little independent impact on political attitudes and behavior. Just as people sort into media consumption and partisan social ties (e.g. Goldman and Mutz 2011; Iyengar and Hahn 2009; Levendusky 2009; Stroud 2011), they are likely to sort into religious communities that reflect their values, beliefs and action tendencies.

In light of these inferential challenges, we randomly assign study participants to listen to different messages, and we focus on the effects of exposure to particular Christian and secular messages on Christians. The two religious messages—the prosperity gospel and the social gospel—provide contrasting content relevant to our behavioral domains of interest. The social gospel calls attention to wealth disparities and emphasizes a social responsibility to care for the unfortunate. The prosperity gospel, by contrast, does not emphasize this social responsibility but instead emphasizes that material riches come to those with strong faith. The two messages thus differ in content related to inequality. Likewise, the two messages take different approaches to individual empowerment. The prosperity gospel places a clear emphasis on self-affirmation and individual potential. The social gospel, by contrast, does not.

But the messages also make theoretical sense as randomly assigned treatments, at least to Christian participants. Boundaries between churches delivering the prosperity gospel and the social gospel are soft in Sub-Saharan Africa and in many other countries (Gifford 1994; Marshall 2009; Ngong 2014). While churches try to encourage loyalty from congregants (McCauley 2013), Christians still have discretion over which churches to attend, and can switch between them, or not attend frequently and thus be more frequently exposed to the secular messages we examine (Van Wyk 2014). In this context, a potential outcomes framework makes sense (Holland 1986). One can *imagine* a Christian being assigned to any of the treatment conditions, even if they are not necessarily in practice.[10] Of course, the empirical strategy we use is not limited to the study of these specific religious messages. It could be used to study the effects of any theological messages to which each research participant has some possibility of being exposed.

Experimental Design

In the Busara Center for Behavioral Economics in Nairobi, we randomly assigned Christian residents to listen to different pre-recorded religious messages, based on real Christian sermons being delivered in the city. To test whether religious rather than secular cues would influence individual behavior, we also created messages that addressed the same topics but omitted any Christian references. We pre-tested these messages in Nairobi to ensure that all messages were realistic and that listeners could clearly differentiate among them in terms of content and between them as either Christian or secular.

We use a 2x2 design, varying on the one hand whether the message a participant hears contains religious references or not, and on the other hand whether the message focuses on self-affirmation and the potential for individually-achieved prosperity or on human frailty and a social responsibility for caring for the poor. Full instructions for the experiment are in an available appendix, and the

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[10]Holland (1986) wrote, "For causal inference, it is critical that each unit be potentially exposable to any of the causes." For a useful discussion see also Sen and Wasow (2013). Note that our approach treats subjects with *exposure* to religious ideas, instead of trying manipulate individual belief systems, which might not be plausible. See Djupe and Calfano (2013) for a similar argument.

full text of the messages presented below.[11]

Following similar studies in which the theoretically interesting comparisons are between different primes, rather than between a prime and a control condition (see Chong and Druckman 2007 and Druckman et al. 2011 for discussions),[12] we evaluate competing frames and do not employ a condition with no recording or with a recording totally unrelated to our domains of interest. The different treatment conditions approximate real-world messages whose behavioral consequences are primarily interesting relative to one another, as discussed in the previous section. Individuals are constantly exposed in Nairobi to secular and religious frames, and the absence of either is a situation that is theoretically and substantively more difficult to interpret than the treatment conditions themselves. Because we are interested in assessing the effect of elevating one set of moral standards above others that are also constantly in play in the general context, the comparison to investigate is whether individuals exposed to the four different treatment conditions behaved differently from one another.

Context

Besides being home to a behavioral economics laboratory, Nairobi serves as an appropriate location for this study for several reasons. First, it is representative of broader trends in conversion to Pentecostal and Charismatic churches across Sub-Saharan Africa.[13] It is thus typical of the kind of places in which the effects of prosperity gospel messaging may be most consequential.

Second, the extremely high level of religiosity in Kenya is typical of the continent,[14] such that

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[11]Full sessions took place in January of 2014. Pilot sessions and debriefings were conducted in December 2013.

[12]As Chong and Druckman point out, the "best" standard of comparison for a given study varies with the study's assumptions and purpose (109).

[13]Pentecostals currently make up over 15% of the population in Kenya, and the total number continues to rise with an average growth rate of approximately 11% per year. A 2006 Pew survey reports that the number of Pentecostal churches in Nairobi has more than doubled since the 1970's.

[14]In the 2010-2012 round of the Afrobarometer, 84% of respondents said that religion is "very important" in their lives. In Kenya, the percentage was 88%.

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exposure to religious messages is a meaningful and realistic part of the lives of our participants. This point does not mean, however, that secular messages are uncommon. As we discuss below, Nairobian informants on the experimental design thought the secular messages were very typical of secular NGO or traditional messages, or of self-help books widely available in Nairobi. Our informants could easily distinguish between secular and religious contents and thought both were realistic. Nairobi is a context in which our treatments are plausible and meaningful.

Third, gaps between rich and poor in Nairobi are large[15] and citizens' willingness to insist on equity important. A recent content analysis of Kenya's four daily newspapers demonstrated the prevalence of public debates about inequality (AWCFS 2006). In Nairobi's public discourse and in electoral campaigns, inequality debates are common[16] and are framed as public policy and political action issues (World Bank 2008). The drivers of citizens' willingness to prioritize equality over other trade-offs are thus important to understand in this context. Finally, Kenya's current, competitive, yet sometimes volatile, multi-party system means both that there is space for political engagement (such that our behavioral measures of participation are meaningful) and that understanding the drivers of political activism is theoretically and practically important (Knighton 2009).

Subject Pool

382 Christian adult residents of Nairobi participated.[17] Again, we sought to limit our participants to Christians, because Christians are the ones who can most plausibly be exposed to either of the two messages or to secular ones. We did not want to alert individuals to the focus of our study

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[15]The family income Gini coefficient (2008) in Kenya is 42.5, comparable to that of Nigeria and the U.S. Despite strong macroeconomic growth rates over the past decade, Kenyan citizens still overwhelmingly indicate that the living standards of the poor have not improved and that there are rising gaps between rich and poor (Dulani, Mattes and Logan 2013; Hofmeyr 2013).

[16]The controversy over increasing salaries for MPs is a recent example (BBC 2013), but debates have also revolved around taxation of the rich and distributions of government spending.

[17]The laboratory maintains a subject pool of about 5300 individuals, recruited primarily from two low-income areas of Nairobi (Kibera and Viwandani).

by asking them for their religious affiliation or religious practice during recruitment,[18] and unfortunately the laboratory does not maintain ongoing data on these variables. However, a telephone survey of a small random sample of non-Nubians in the subject pool showed that the group is 94% Christian. So we excluded Nubians from our recruitment pool in order to maximize the number of Christian participants in our study.[19] At the end of the experiment, we asked participants for their religious affiliation. 92% of the 415 participants who attended experimental sessions reported being Christian. Treatment assignment did not predict answers to the religious affiliation question.[20] In the following analyses, we exclude the 33 participants who reported being non-Christians. Future research could explore heterogeneous treatment effects by denomination and intensity of previous religious practice as we discuss in the conclusion.

We also restricted recruitment to subjects who had participated in three or fewer previous studies since the laboratory's founding in 2012 so as to weed out "professional" experiment subjects.[21] Participants were recruited by cell phone text message and were compensated financially for transportation and for time spent participating.[22] During the study, participants sat at pri-

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[18]Doing so could have introduced significant experimenter-demand effects. We are thus not able to assess heterogeneous treatment effects by religiosity, but we generally assume that our Christian subjects believe in God. Afrobarometer and Pew Survey data both confirm that most Kenyans view world religious beliefs and service attendance as very important in their lives.

[19]Nubians make up only a small percentage of Nairobi's population. They are a mix of Muslims and Christians.

[20]An F-test for the null hypothesis that treatment assignments are jointly uncorrelated with whether or not a subject reported being a Christian at the end of the experiment has an associated p-value of 0.511.

[21]Frequent participants might have tried to draw inferences from previous studies about how they should behave in ours. Since subjects were not told that the study was about political behavior, we have no reason to believe that non-professional respondents were more politically engaged than professional respondents would have been (Hillygus et al. 2014).

[22]On average, participants earned roughly 500Ksh (about 5.80USD) from the tasks during the experiment and to cover transportation costs.

vate, individual cubicles and made their choices through touchscreen computers. Following the laboratory's standard protocol, language on the screens was in English while oral instructions were delivered in Swahili.

Table 1 presents demographic statistics for participants in our study. Compared to the Nairobi population as a whole, our subject pool is somewhat over-representative of certain categories: e.g., women (Nairobi=48.9%; ours=61%), single people (Nairobi=31.9%; ours=50%), and those with secondary education or more (Nairobi=51%; ours=58%). Relative to Kenya as a whole, the pool over-represents all ethnic groups except the Kalenjin (Kenya=8.45%; ours=1.1%).[23] Otherwise, on the measures we had from the laboratory pre-experiment, our subject pool was not very different from the urban Kenayn population as a whole. The laboratory does not keep records on household income, but we asked participants in the study whether they own a car, a motorcycle and a television. Sixty-five percent said they own a television, 3% a motorcycle, and just less than 2% a car.[24]

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[23]Data on Nairobi and Kenya from the 2008-2009 round of the Kenya DHS survey and https://www.opendata.go.ke.

[24]These percentages are typical or slightly lower than those of urban Kenyans more generally. In the 2010-2012 Afrobarometer, 59% of urban respondents in Kenya said that they own a television. However, 16% reported they own a car or motorcycle.

Table 1: Subject Pool Demographics

Variable	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max	No. Obs.
Female	0.61	0.49	0	1	379
Education	12.0	3.37	1	24	382
Secondary Education or More	0.58	0.49	0	1	382
Age	33.5	10.69	20	76	379
Married	0.50	0.50	0	1	382
Number of Children	2.1	1.99	0	13	382
Number of Prior Studies	1.50	0.93	0	3	382
Owns a TV	0.65	0.48	0	1	382
Luhya	0.33	0.47	0	1	379
Kikuyu	0.22	0.41	0	1	379
Pentecostal	0.30	0.46	0	1	382

Treatments

Participants were randomly assigned to listen to one of four audio recordings, one of which incorporates language from real-world prosperity gospel sermons and one of which incorporates language from real-world social gospel sermons, and two that address the same topics but use secular instead of religious phrasing. We designed the study to assess the relative impact of the treatments against one another.[25]

We drew the phrases for the two religious recordings directly from sermons that have been delivered in Nairobi.[26] We shared the treatment texts with theologians and scholars of religion and politics and received feedback that the two religious texts were a fair reflection of ideal-type social gospel and prosperity gospel sermons.[27] Any religious phrasing explicitly evoking God, Jesus, the

[25]http://e-gap.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/20140110-MR-Religious-Messages.pdf.

[26]Authors' survey of Nairobi churches (McClendon and Riedl n.d.).

[27]We are particularly grateful for feedback on this point from Greg Deacon at the University of

Bible or the spiritual world was then replaced with non-religious language in order to create texts on the same topics for the secular treatments. We had Nairobi residents read the English texts in random order and tell us if they could imagine hearing these messages in Nairobi and, if so, in what context. The prosperity gospel message was consistently identified as such. The social gospel message was consistently identified as a church sermon with a focus on social responsibility. The other two messages were consistently identified by informants as realistic and clearly secular. The social gospel without religious phrasing was identified as an NGO or traditional or secular political messages advocating social and communal responsibilities; the prosperity gospel without religious phrasing was identified as a self-help radio message. These types of secular self-help and social responsibility messages are common in Nairobi, where secular self-help books are ubiquitous and where radio, newspaper and billboard advertising are laden with secular, NGO or traditional campaigns advocating varying approaches to inequality.

Churches in Nairobi regularly deliver sermons in Swahili or in English, or in a mix of both. We thus had each of the messages translated into Swahili and back-translated into English. The English versions of the treatments appear below. All audio messages (both English and Swahili) were then recorded by a male research assistant who is a life-long resident of Nairobi.[28] The research assistant read each message with similar cadence and emotion.[29]

In the lab, each participant could listen to her assigned message in Swahili or in English, or sequentially in each (whichever order she chose). Participants listened to audio recordings on individual headsets. They did not know that other participants were listening to different messages than they were. To minimize experimenter demand effects, the computer screens looked identical

Oxford.

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[28]That research assistant was not present for any of the lab sessions so as to minimize experimenter-demand effects that might occur were subjects to recognize his voice.

[29]Of course, religious messages might also influence individual behavior through charisma and oratorical flare. By removing these differences in delivery, we create a tough test for the causal influence of religious cues and self-affirmative content alone. The audio recordings are all roughly the same length (about 1 minute, 30 seconds long).

during this part of the experiment (showing simply two touchscreen buttons, one reading "English", the other "Swahili"), so lab staff delivering instructions and supervising the sessions did not know to which message each participant was listening.

Social (Gospel)Treatments [**Religious**]/*[Secular]*:

Do you ever wonder at the arrogance, greed or irresponsibility of some Kenyans with money? Do you wish they wouldn't seem so unbothered by the plight of others? The world is moving away from [**godly morals and obedience to the teachings of the Bible**]/ *[common decency and concern for others]*. Poverty, crime, violence, family breakdown, myriad of social economic and political problems people face, corruption, exploitation of one by the other are on the increase. Do you ever wonder whether, when and how people with money will wake up to the poverty around them? [**God is**]/ *[We should be]* concerned with the quality of human life, about the way we live, eat, speak, think, treat each other, and care for the world around us. We must work with and care for the poor, sick and suffering. Both the world's and Kenya's economic crises were brought forth by greed, [**un-godly**] greed for riches and power. But [**our Lord Jesus was**]/*[some people are]* compassionately touched by human physical needs. [**He healed**]/*[They heal]* the sick and fed the hungry. Let us be a friend to widows and widowers, not forgetting the less privileged. And for ourselves, we should become rich by making our wants few. [**Through Jesus**], we must deal with greed and selfishness in the human heart.

Prosperity (Gospel) Treatments [**Religious**]/*[Secular]*:

Do you ever wonder at the difficulty of being financially successful like some other Kenyans with money? Do you wish you could end the years and years of just trying to make ends meet, the years of trying to get by? Poverty, crime, violence, family breakdown, the myriad social economic and political problems people face are on the increase. Do you ever wonder whether, when and how you'll ever get the kind of lifestyle you deserve? [**God is**]/*[You are right to be]* concerned with the quality of your life, and you must know that [**He will reward the faithful with prosperity**]/*[people who succeed are those who believe in themselves]*. Financial problems are brought forth [**by**

lack of faith, by striving for wealth and power without faith in God]/*[by lack of confidence and lack of self-discipline, by striving for wealth and power without believing in possibility for yourself]*. **[But our Lord Jesus wants true Christians to be rich.]** Those who do not reconfigure their minds **[to what God has promised]**/*[to personal possibilities]* lack and suffer hunger, but those who **[seek the Lord]**/*[reconfigure their mindset]* shall not lack in anything. So let us be a friend **[to God]**/*[to ourselves]*, not forgetting that our efforts, our sacrifices **[to Him will be richly rewarded]**/*[will find success if we have the right mindset]*. You don't need to find money, make money. You don't need to find success, make success. We have not because we **[ask]**/*[try]* not. **[Jesus will give you what you seek if you give to Him and have faith]**/*[You will get what you seek]*.

Behavioral Outcome Measures

We sought to assess the differential impact of the treatment messages on individuals' preferences and behaviors in two core domains: (1) their distributional preferences (specifically their preferences for a bigger pie for themselves and others, versus an insistence on equity), and (2) their willingness to participate in politics. We focused on costly forms of these revealed preferences and behaviors so as to minimize social desirability bias, experimenter demands, and cheap talk.

To measure distributional preferences, we had subjects play two games in which they decided on distributions of earnings involving two other anonymous players. Before making any decisions, participants had to answer several comprehension questions about the games and could not continue until they had given correct answers. In each game, players were randomly and anonymously assigned into groups of three.[30] They then had to decide between two ways of distributing money between the two other players in their group. Either they could give 75 Kenyan shillings to one player and 25 shillings to the other (for a total of 100 Ksh distributed), or they could give 50

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[30]Again, the anonymity of the games should remove explicit in-group/out-group distinctions that are sometimes primed by religious cues. Each player was assigned to be the red, yellow or blue player. Colors were used only for visual clarity. The structure of the games was identical for all colors.

Kenyan shillings to one player and 30 shillings to the other (for a total of 80 Ksh distributed). In other words, players had to choose between a more unequally-split but larger pie and a more equally-split but smaller pie. The second option represented redistribution with deadweight loss. In the first distribution game, each player faced this choice about the income of the other two players in his group but whichever option he chose had no implications for his own earnings. Each player then played a second distribution game in which he faced the exact same choice, but this time he would also personally earn more if he chose the unequal split between the other two players. In other words, this time, if players were to insist on equal outcomes, they would be choosing not only a smaller pie for others but also lower payoffs for themselves.[31] Players did not learn about the choices of other members of their groups until the end of the experiment.

Whereas survey questions solicit individuals' aversion to inequality in the abstract, these two distribution games allowed for measurement of revealed preferences over significant trade-offs. Because the unequal option was always paired with another good (a larger pie, a larger personal payoff), it was not obvious to us *ex ante* which should be the more socially desirable, moral, or experimenter-demanded, choice.[32] The choice of equal outcomes also involved trade-offs (deadweight loss, lower personal payoffs) that people might actually face when calling for redistribution in the real world. The game was played anonymously, so as to approximate individuals' revealed preferences about broader economic distribution. In debriefings during pilot sessions, participants were very capable of articulating their adjudication among these tough choices.

Table 2 illustrates the choices in the distribution games and the goods weighing in favor of each option. In the first game, the options reflect only differences between the size of the pie and the

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[31]The difference in personal payoffs was 5Ksh. In pilot session debriefings, we found that this amount constituted a salient difference in payoffs for the participants. Several explained that 5Ksh would help them better cover a bus ride home or cover the cost of a tea.

[32]For contrast, we later asked participants a simple survey questions about whether it is okay to have larger gaps in between rich and poor (no trade-off). Almost everyone stated an unwillingness to accept large gaps in wealth in society when faced with no trade-offs (mean=.89, st.dev=.32). In the distribution games, by contrast, 43-60% of participants chose the more equal option, depending on the whether it was the second or first round of the game.
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equality of the distribution of the money between other, anonymous players. The second game adds implications for the decision-maker's personal income.[33]

Table 2: Possible Motivations in Two Distributive Games

	First Game		Second Game	
	75/25 split	50/30 split	75/25 split	50/30 split
Maximize Total Pie	✓		✓	
Maximize Overall Equity		✓		✓
Maximize Own Income	–	–	✓	
Maximize Own Relative Position	–	–	✓	

To then measure willingness to participate in the politics, we partnered with two non-governmental organizations in Nairobi that promote political activism. One group is called the Youth Agenda and works to get younger people (under 40) involved in politics, to promote clean governance and to conduct civic engagement sessions. The other group, the Community Focus Group, performs plays and holds deliberative discussions around issues of human rights and democracy. Participants were told about each civic organization and their respective missions. Both organizations maintain lists of mobile numbers of people who want to be informed of their outreach events and performances, so participants in the experiment were then asked to indicate whether they would like to add their mobile numbers to the membership lists of each organization. Pamphlets about upcoming Community Focus Group events were placed on each participant desk in the lab, and participants were told they could take the pamphlet if they were interested. They were also told that if they were not interested, the lab would be happy to keep the pamphlet for others.

The Youth Agenda runs a free, anonymous SMS campaign to encourage Nairobi residents to report their views on government performance and policy priorities. Participants in the experiment

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[33]If the player also wants to maximize his own relative position (approximating relative personal advancement), he should choose the 75/25 option in the second game. See Kuziemko et al. (Forthcoming) on relative position concerns and last-place aversion.

were told about this campaign. At the end of the experiment, participants were each individually invited into a private room where a laboratory staff member[34] confirmed the participant's monetary compensation from the experiment and reminded him/her about the Youth Agenda's free SMS campaign.[35] The staff member said the participant could take a moment to send a message only if she wanted to and if she were not in a rush—thus providing participants a good excuse not to do so if they felt any pressure. The staff member then stepped out of the room so that the participant could decide privately whether to send a text message.

The SMS campaign provided a real form of political participation in Nairobi.[36] It required time, concentrated effort and an articulation of priorities from participants. The measure is also not as susceptible to experimenter demand effects. Participants were free to leave the Center as soon as the staff member exited the interview room and were not observed directly sending the text message. After the experiment, we collected data from the Youth Agenda on all mobile numbers from which they received SMSes in December 2013 and January 2014. In the end, 34% of the participants in our experiment sent an SMS expressing their political views to the Youth Agenda.[37]

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[34]Again, because the computer screens of the audio recordings were identical, these Laboratory staff were not aware of the treatment assignment for participants in the private room.

[35]There was also a flyer with the Youth Agenda's text number in the room.

[36]While designing the experiment, we canvassed experts in Nairobi about common forms of individual political participation. Petitions, campaigning, donations, rallies and marches were deemed less common.

[37]We have some missing data on this measure since, in some instances, participants appear to have sent a message from a phone belonging to the laboratory, which was left in the private room, rather than from their personal phones. In these instances, we can narrow down the sender to no less than a few participants in a given session. In these instances, the behavioral measure for all participants who *might* have sent the text is coded as missing.

Results

Randomization checks revealed that treatment assignment did not correlate with pre-treatment demographic characteristics. In one check, we used a likelihood ratio test to compare the fit of two models: the first was a multinomial logit regression on pre-treatment individual-level variables[38] the second is the same regression with the pre-treatment variables restricted to zero. The p-value associated with the test statistic comparing the log-likelihood ratio of the two models is 0.370, indicating that adding the full set of observable pre-treatment variables as predictors does not result in a statistically significant improvement in the model fit.

Overall, 23.3% of subjects were assigned to the social gospel treatment, 25.7% were assigned to the religious prosperity treatment, 24.3% were assigned to the social secular treatment, and 26.7% were assigned to the secular prosperity treatment. All p-values reported below for tests of differences in means are from two-sided Welch t-tests unless otherwise specified. We discuss multiple comparison corrections. All results, including for tests listed in our pre-analysis plan but not discussed below, are also presented in tables in an available appendix.

Distributional Preferences

The cleavage that emerged in the distribution games was between those exposed to religious messages and those exposed to the secular messages. Those exposed to the religious messages were more likely to choose the larger overall payoffs for themselves and others; those exposed to secular messages were more likely to insist on equity, even in the face of trade-offs. In the first distributive game, for instance, 64.1% of those assigned to secularly-worded treatments insisted on equity, while only 54.5% of those assigned to religiously-worded treatments did (diff=9.6 p.p., p=0.058). In the second distributive game, in which the subject's own income was implicated, the differences were starker. Among those treated with a secular message, 50.3% chose the more equal option, while only 34.8% of those treated with a religious message insisted on equity over higher overall payoffs for themselves and others (diff=15.5 p.p.,p=0.002).

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[38]These included education, married, age, number of children, female, number of previous laboratory studies, Kikuyu, Luhya.

Figure 1 presents behavior in the second distributive game where personal payoffs were at stake for the participants. As might be expected, with the addition of a personal payoff incentive to choose the 75/25 split, subjects on average insisted on equity at lower rates in the second distribution game than in the first. Yet the rate at which subjects decided to insist on equity over abundance differed significantly between religious and secular treatment conditions, with those exposed to secular treatments much more likely to insist on equity.

[Figure 1 about here.]

Figure 2 then shows the rates at which participants who chose equity in the first game then chose either to "bail on" privileging equality above all else by switching to the first option once it was more personally profitable (bars on the left) or to "stick with" privileging equality by choosing the second option again (bars on the right). Here as well, the primary cleavage is between those assigned to religious messages and those assigned to secular messages. Among those assigned to a secular treatments who chose the more equal option in the first distributive game, 66.4% insisted on equity again even though the overall size of the pie and payoffs to themselves was lower. By contrast, among those assigned to a religious treatment who chose the more equal option in the first distributive game, only 48.0% insisted on equity over abundance again (diff=18.4 p.p., p=0.005).

[Figure 2 about here.]

Differences did not emerge by denominational content. Among those assigned to religious messages, those assigned to the prosperity gospel made similar choices to those assigned to the social gospel. In the first distributive game, the difference between the two was 5.5 percentage points (, diff=5.5 p.p., $p = .457$). The difference in behavior between the two in the second distributive game was nil (diff=0.001 p.p., p=0.984). Overall, a prosperity-social gospel cleavage in distributive behavior did not emerge. Instead, a religious-secular cleavage was clear.

Figure 3 summarizes estimated differences in means across several of the outcome variables in the study, comparing religious and secular treatment conditions. Again, those in the religious treatments were less likely than those in the secular treatments to insist on equity, choosing overall abundance for themselves and others instead. These results remain robust in regressions that include subject covariates, as shown in the available appendix.

Despite the different approaches to inequality espoused by the prosperity gospel and the social gospel precisely, they did not produce stark differences in distributional preferences over trade-offs between abundance and equity. Instead, differences were apparent between those exposed to religious messages and those exposed to secular messages.

Political Participation

While differences between exposure to the individual prosperity messages and exposure to the social responsibility messages did not emerge in the distribution games, they did emerge in measures of political participation. Figure 5 shows rates of text message campaign participation across treatments. Together, 38% of individuals exposed to either of the self-affirming, individual prosperity messages sent a text message articulating their priorities for the government, whereas only 29% of the individuals in the non-self-affirming, social responsibility messages did so (diff=9.0 p.p., p=0.079). The prosperity gospel produced the highest rate of participation among the four treatment conditions, with 40.9% of subjects assigned to its exposure sending an SMS. The secular social message induced the lowest rate, with only 27.4% of subjects assigned to it participating in the campaign. The difference between these two conditions (13.5 p.p, p=0.062) constitutes a 49% increase in the participation rate from the social gospel treatment group to the prosperity gospel condition. The p-value from a two-sided Welch t-test for that difference in means is 0.062.[39]

Figure 4 shows the estimated differences in means between the social responsibility (religious or secular) treatments and the individual prosperity (religious or secular) treatments. The difference between people exposed to these two types of messages is in willingness to participate in the SMS campaign, the most costly and real-world form of political participation in the experiment.[40] Both

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[39]See appendix for regression results including subject covariates.

[40]The prosperity gospel treatment also generated the highest rate at which subjects took home the pamphlet explaining the activities of the Community Focus Group. Over 88% of subjects in the prosperity gospel treatment took the pamphlet home. We have less confidence in this measure

prosperity treatments encourage self-affirmation and positive thinking, while the social treatments do not.

[Figure 4 about here.]

This finding is interesting in light of observational studies arguing that religiosity promotes political engagement through the depth of friendships, skills, participation in communal practices and social ties involved in religious communities (e.g. Brady et al. 1995; Chhibber and Sekhon 2013; Putnam and Campebell 2012; Putnam et al. 2013). Our findings point to the possibility that exposure to particular church messages may also drive political participation. Our findings also suggest, however, that this effect is not necessarily specific to messages that use religious language. Instead, self-affirming messages—including those now prominent in Pentecostal and Charismatic churches (McClendon and Riedl n.d.)—seem to have an empowering effect that mobilizes listeners to take action in public life on a variety of issues important to them.

Robustness Checks

The study faces a potential multiple comparisons problem, since we are testing for differences across four treatments and on multiple outcome measures. In anticipation of this problem, we registered a pre-analysis plan. Based on the 24 comparisons we pre-specified and the 16 additional tests we performed for the paper,[41] we calculate that, at this point, we have run 40 separate tests. We expect that, using an alpha of 0.10, four of these tests should generate statistically significant results just by chance. Instead, we observed 11 significant results.[42] Using a Bonferroni correction (whereby a p-value has to be below α divided by the total number of tests, in this

than in the SMS measure, however, because of the possibility of experimenter demands. Pamphlets were placed on desks in the lab and whether participants took the pamphlet could be observed by the lab staff. Take-home rates were quite high across all treatment conditions.

[41]All tests are listed in tables in the appendix.

[42]Using a Poisson distribution, with Poisson parameter 10, we calculate that the likelihood that we would have observed this many by chance if all the nulls were true is 0.11. This is not a large chance but it is not miniscule.

case less than 0.003), the result that exposure to religious treatments increase the rate at which subjects choose abundance for themselves and others over equity survives. The others do not. Corrections for multiple comparisons are very conservative by design. In fact, some have argued that we should avoid corrections for multiple comparisons in most instances because they could be misleading or unnecessarily discourage certain research paths (Rothman 1990). In this case, however, the correction gives us high confidence in the results showing a religious-secular exposure effect on distribution decisions. For the interesting effects on political participation, we encourage additional research, especially since the findings are in keeping with a social psychology literature on the effects of self-affirmation.

Heterogeneous Treatment Effects by Denomination

We have presented average treatment effects within the full sample of participants. The advantage of our design is that participants were assigned to plausible treatments in a way that was orthogonal to their own unobservable preferences and proclivities. We could not ask for religious affiliation or strength of religious belief and frequency of religious practice in advance. One might nevertheless wonder whether treatment effects were moderated by subjects' own religious traditions. Here, we must be cautious. While treatment assignment does not predict reported religious affiliation, the measure is still post-treatment, and the sub-groups are small. We therefore present some sub-group analyses circumspectly.

With regard to the effects of the religious versus secular treatments, the results are identical among Pentecostals and among members of mainline Christian denominations in terms of direction and significance of the effects. Just as in the full sample, exposure to religious rather than secular language lessens insistence on equity in the distribution games in both groups of Christians but has no significant effect on political participation in either group. Figure 6 shows demonstrates the consistency of these results.

[Figure 6 about here.]

Likewise, the result that self-affirmation messages, and the prosperity gospel in particular, boosts participation holds within both groups. Among Pentecostals, the prosperity gospel significantly boosts willingness to participate in the SMS campaign, especially compared to the religious

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social gospel treatment (diff=21.2, p=0.13). Among mainline Christians, the prosperity gospel boosts willingness to join the membership of the two activist organizations. Compared to exposure to all three other treatment groups, exposure to the prosperity gospel boost willingness to join activist organizations by 12.2 percentage points among mainline Christians (p=0.005). The domain of political participation on which we observe effects is different for each group, but the general pattern is the same. Self-affirmation messages stimulate political activism among both mainline and Pentecostal christians.

The one sub-group pattern that, again we present cautiously, but that might be worthy of further research is that exposure to the prosperity gospel stands out among all four messages in moving distributional preferences specifically among Pentecostals. As can be seen from Figure 7, for Pentecostals, being exposed to the prosperity gospel dramatically strengthens the choice of personal and social abundance over equity, compared to being exposed to other messages, including to the other Christian message. We treat this result with caution, given the post-treatment measurement of religious affiliation, but it suggests interactive effects between previous religious practice and new exposure to religious messages that are worthy of additional exploration. The strongest effects of exposure to a religious message on behavior could be among those who are already likely to have been exposed to that message numerous times. We have shown in this study that exposure to religious messages can induce behavioral effects even when participants are not necessarily strong adherents of that message; but the effects may be even stronger among regular practitioners.

[Figure 7 about here.]

Conclusion

Understanding the influence of religious ideas on political attitudes and behavior is a pressing issue in many parts of the world but methodologically challenging. Religious institutions are ubiquitous forms of associational life in Sub-Saharan Africa today, and yet we know little about whether the religious sphere is influencing the political. More specifically, because Sub-Saharan African democracies are grappling with high levels of inequality and a nascent welfare state (Van de Walle 2009), it is crucial to understand whether and how religion is shaping both citizens' prioritization of equity and their political mobilization.

In this paper, we described a study that exposed participants in Nairobi to real-world religious messages in a controlled experiment, partnering with local activist organizations to develop new behavioral measures of political preferences and participation. Focusing on the effects of important Christian *ideas*—and specifically on the prosperity and social gospels—we found that individuals exposed to religious messages were more likely to choose abundance for themselves and others rather than to insist on equity, compared to those exposed to secular messages. We argue that in a context in which secular and traditional social systems often impose constraints and social risks on individual accumulation, contemporary Christian theologies may by contrast be creating space that allows for the compatibility of personal fortune, social abundance and social morality absent an insistence on equity. We also find that self-affirmation messages, whether religious in the form of the prosperity gospel or secular, boost political participation. A feature of the theology of growing Pentecostal and Charismatic churches that has noted by ethnographers, and that we document in a related project, is its seeming effort to mentally transform "victims into victors." We find evidence that self-affirmation messages in general, including the prosperity gospel, have this effect.

Our findings have possible implications for trends in social mobilization in Sub-Saharan Africa and globally. If the prosperity gospel continues to incorporate self-affirmation, and thereby encourages political activism, it is potentially ripe for use in partisan mobilization. In many Sub-Saharan African countries, there have been attempts by parties and office seekers to mirror prosperity gospel messaging in political rhetoric, seemingly in order to engage these followers in their political campaigns.[43] Our study suggests that the use of religious messages is not likely to make equity the priority of any political agenda around which Pentecostals are mobilized. But political campaigns may be finding the prosperity gospel useful, not just because of Pentecostal churches' growing membership base, but also because of the potential of the prosperity gospel message to mobilize activism.

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[43]Among others, President Jacob Zuma of South Africa has used references to his membership in prosperity-gospel churches to rally people around his party. President Museveni of Uganda makes public use of his wife's Pentecostal church. Zambia has now had a string of presidents who have made public use of their conversions to and membership in Pentecostal churches to galvanize support.

Our study opens many avenues for future research. For reasons discussed, we were unable to document participants' religious practice and affiliations pre-treatment, but based on our findings, future research could investigate whether the effects of exposure to religious messages are stronger among those already frequently exposed and devoted to particular religious associations. Researchers could also investigate whether our findings extend to different contexts. Furthermore, the experimental strategy used here, which takes seriously the fixed and fluid aspects of exposure to religious messages, could be applied to any set of theological ideas to which individuals can plausibly be exposed. Some of those sets of ideas may be close in nature to the ones explored here. For instance, recent observational studies on Salafism and Sufiism in West Africa suggest interesting parallels to the prosperity and social gospel's positions on wealth accumulation and salvation (Elischer 2014), and one could test whether the results of our study hold among Muslims. The effects of other types of religious and secular messages on political attitudes and behavior could also be explored using the same basic strategy. This study thus opens the door to many future directions in research on theological influences on politics—a pressing agenda given the continued social salience of religious identities and messages across the globe.

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Tables and Figures

Table 3: Summary Statistics on Outcome Variables

Variable	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max	No. Obs
Chose Equality No Cost	0.59	0.49	0	1	382
Chose Equality At Cost	0.43	0.50	0	1	382
Stuck With Equality (if Chose in 1st Game)	0.58	0.49	0	1	227
Sent SMS	0.34	0.47	0	1	341
Took Pamphlet	0.85	0.36	0	1	361
Want to Join Group	0.84	0.37	0	1	382

Figure 1: Percentage Insisting on Equity in Second Redistributive Game
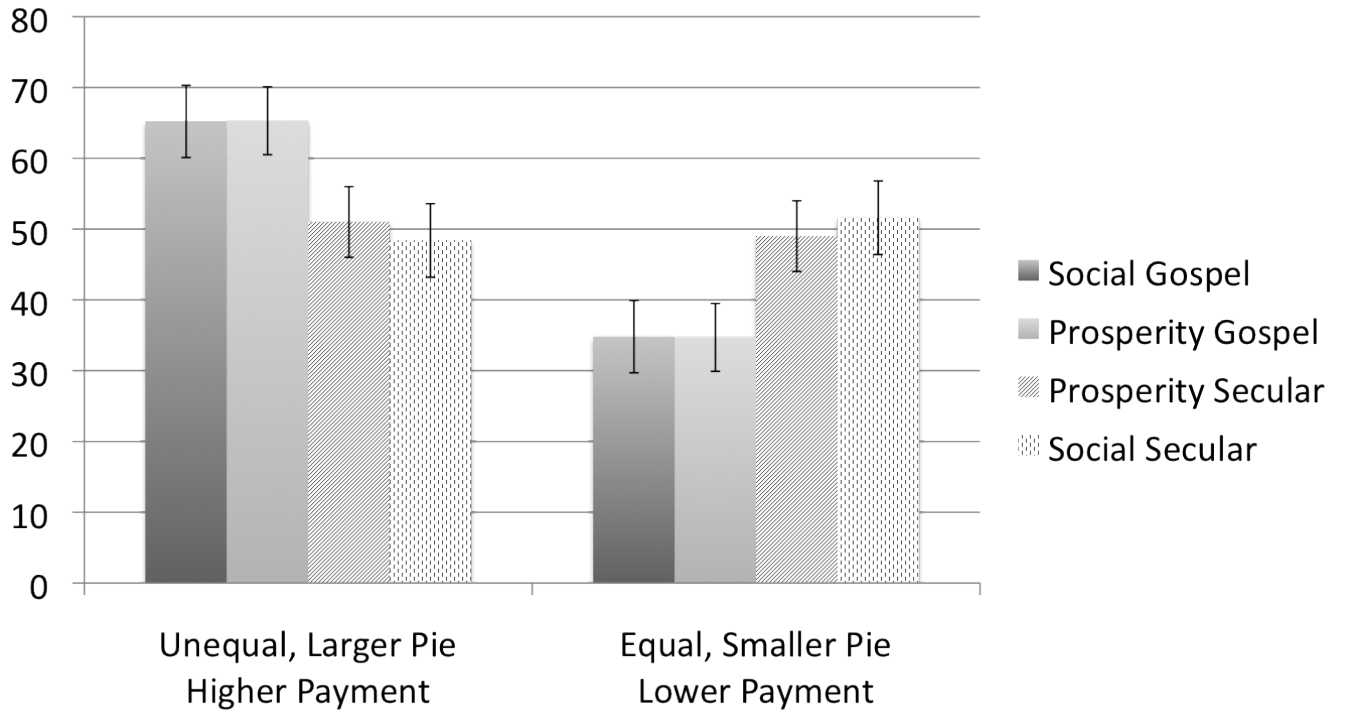
Note: Error bars represent standard errors of the mean.

Figure 2: Percentage Changing Options, if Chose More Equal Option First
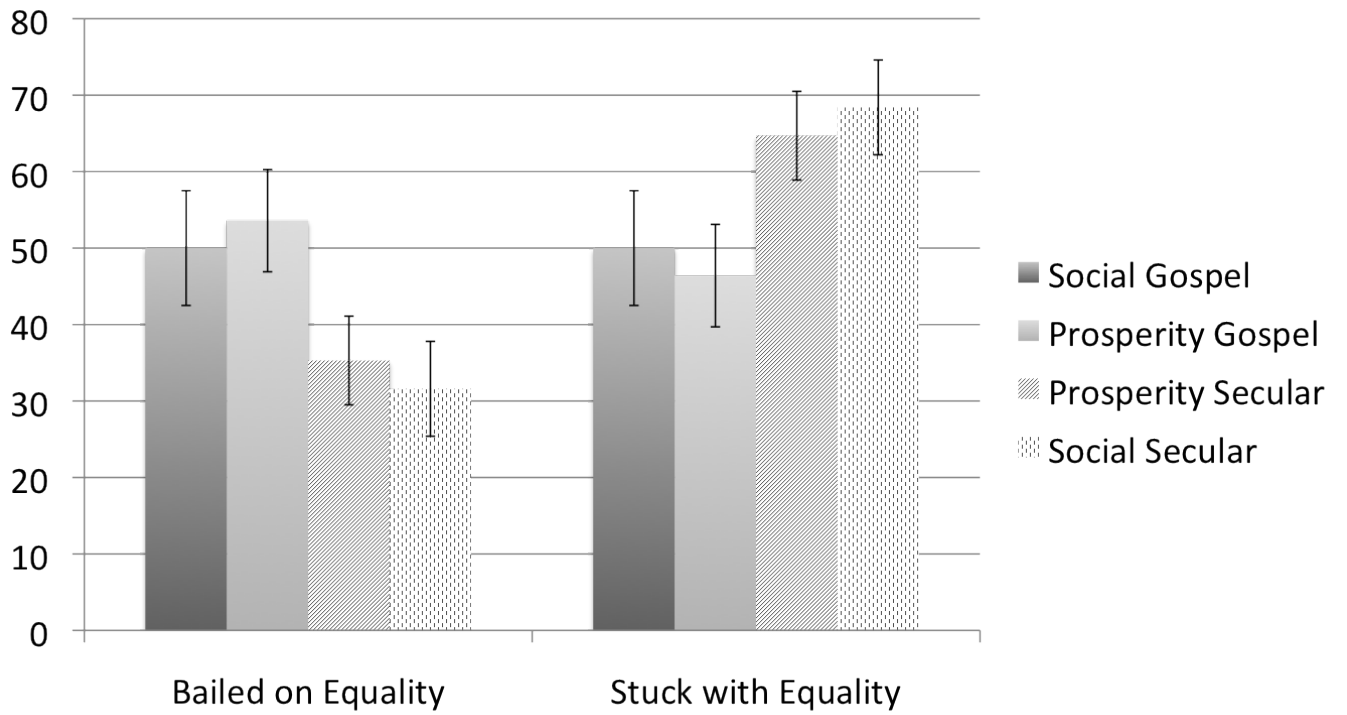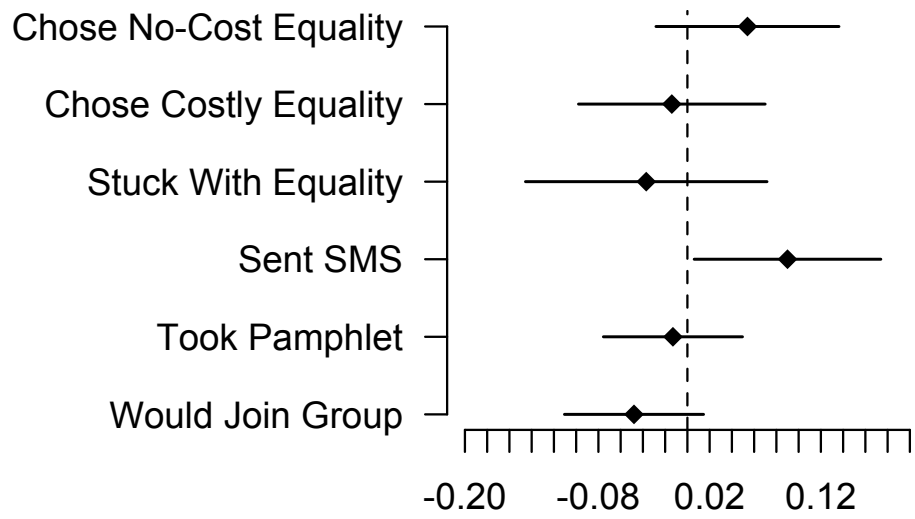

Note: Error bars represent standard errors of the mean.
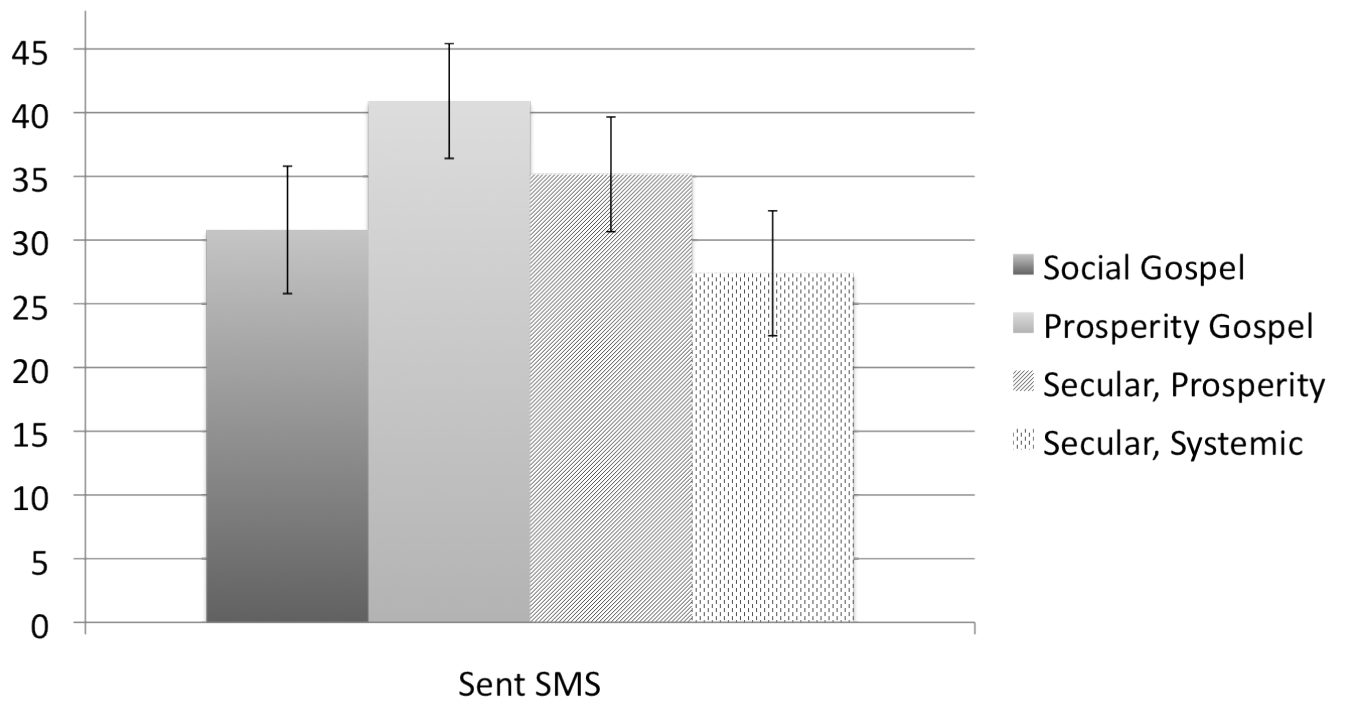
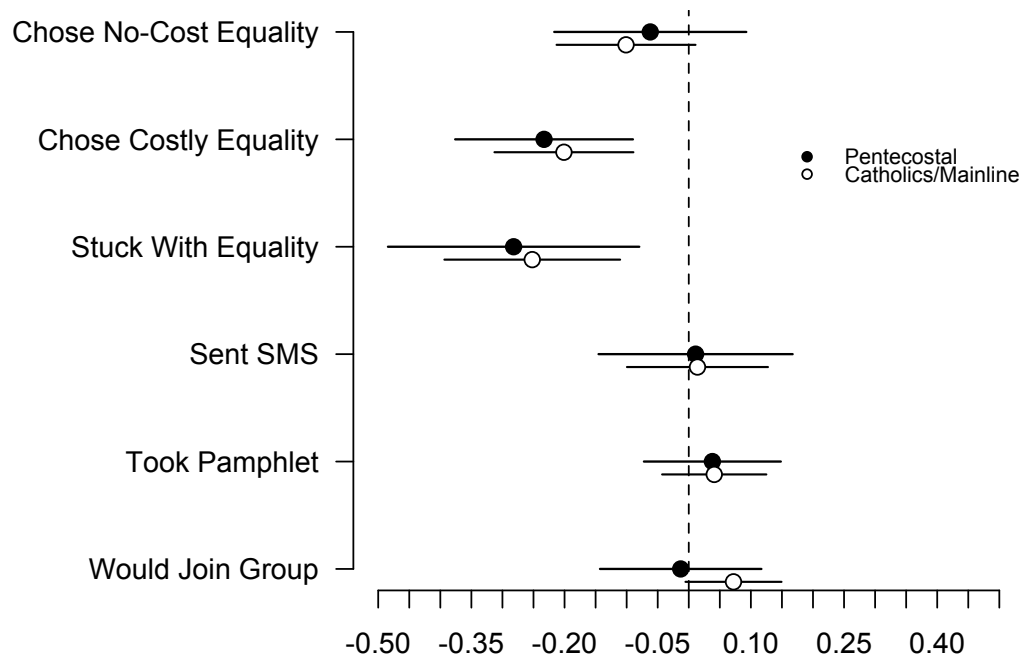Figure 3: Religious Treatment Effects
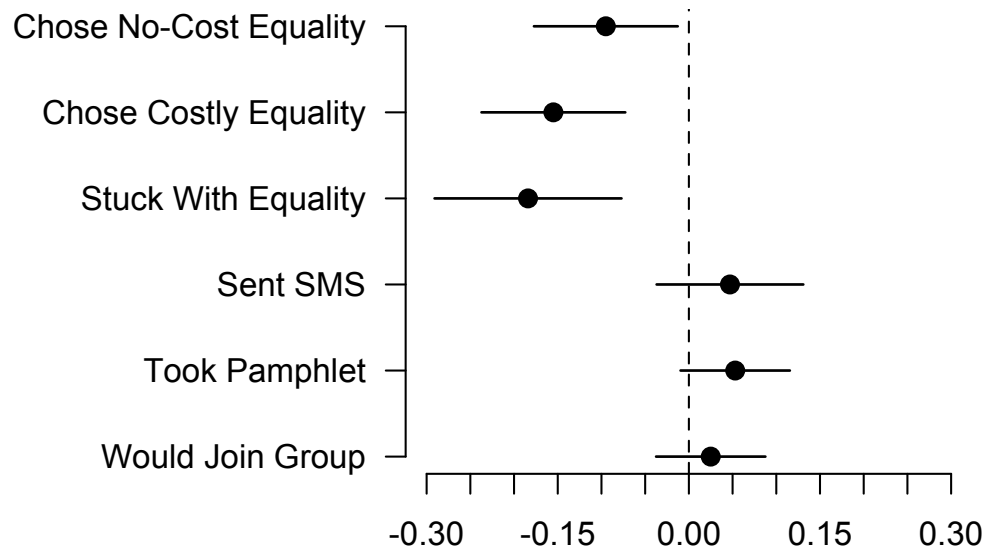
Note: Points are estimated differences in means between the religious and secular treatment groups. Error bars represent 90% confidence intervals.

Figure 4: Prosperity Treatment Effects

Note: Points are estimated differences in means between the religious and secular treatment groups.

Error bars represent 90% confidence intervals.

Figure 5: Choice to Participate in SMS Campaign

Note: Error bars represent standard errors of the mean.

Figure 6: Religious Treatment Effects, By Denomination

Note: Points are estimated differences in means between the religious and secular treatment groups. Error bars represent 90% confidence intervals.

Figure 7: Effect of the Prosperity Gospel Among Pentecostals
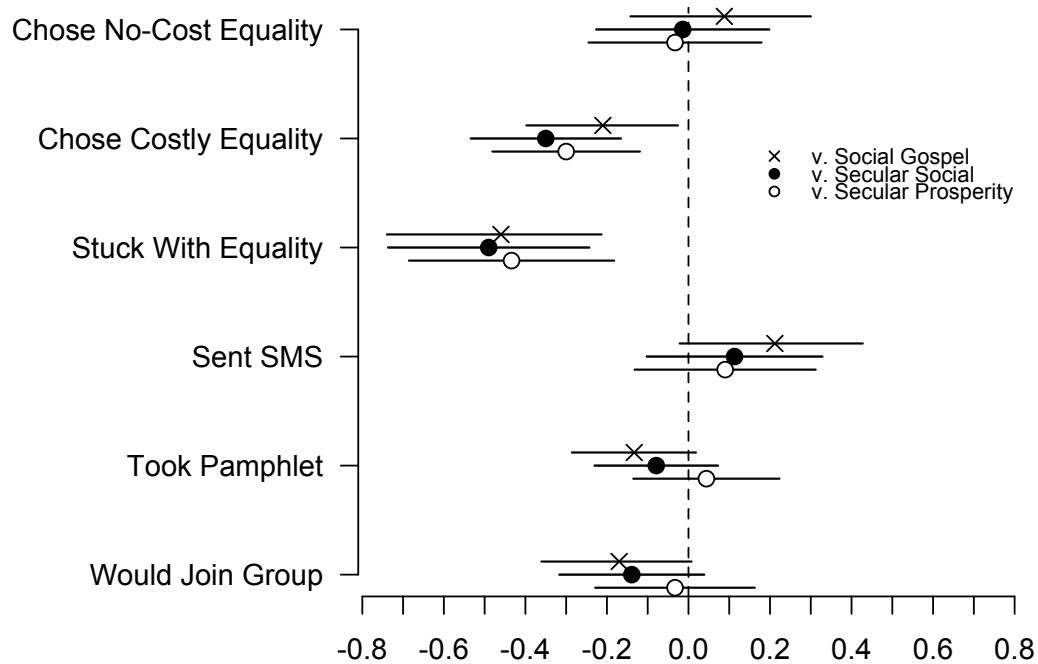
Note: Points are estimated differences in means between the prosperity gospel and each of the other treatment groups. Error bars represent 90% confidence intervals. Number of self-identified Pentecostals=114.