



Polarized Scientists? Exploring Political Differences about Religion and Science among U.S. Biologists and Physicists¹

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From the Texas textbook debate to the March for Science, visible displays of activism illuminate how deeply politicized the science-religion interface has become. However, little is known about the extent to which scientists' attitudes about science and religion are politicized. Using original survey data from 1,989 U.S. academic biologists and physicists, we examine the degree to which political views shape how scientists perceive the relationship between religion and science, religious authority, their personal religious identity, and views on dominant scientific theories. Findings suggest that, indeed, the science-religion interface holds political meaning for scientists, but in different ways across the political spectrum. Specifically, for politically liberal scientists, atheism and the conflict narrative are particularly politicized belief structures, while politically conservative scientists emphasize religious identity to distinguish themselves from political liberals. Findings point to the critical role of politics in shaping scientists' attitudes and identities, which may have implications for the scientific enterprise, both at the lab bench and in the political sphere.

KEYWORDS: conservative; liberal; narratives; politics; religion; science.

INTRODUCTION

In September 2013, pro-science activists marched through Austin, Texas, while the State Board of Education held hearings about biology textbooks (Rich 2013). At the heart of their political concerns were Board members' views that Creationism or Intelligent Design ought to be taught in public schools. In April 2017, an unprecedented number of protests swept across the United States and major cities around the world. Coined the March for Science, these widespread demonstrations brought together scientists and supporters of science in a collective display of advocacy for the importance of scientific evidence in an era inundated with concerns about "alternative facts" (Fandos 2017), an effort that has since occurred annually. The march garnered support from numerous religious groups (Cross 2017; Ecklund 2017), yet marchers voiced support for evidence-based policies on issues that remain religiously and politically divisive in

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the United States, such as climate change (Yong 2017b). Together, these demonstrations illustrate how both science and religion have become increasingly politicized, and how conflicts between science and religion often manifest in the political sphere. They also suggest that scientists are not disinterested political actors, as further evidenced by the number of scientists who ran for public office in the 2018 midterm elections (Kluger 2017; Yong 2017a).

Recent expressions of activism reflect heightened public concerns about the status of scientific authority in the current political climate. Indeed, sociologists have long been concerned with the cultural authority of science, as well as public trust in science, given the centrality of scientific knowledge in the development and legitimation of modern social systems (Gauchat 2012; Luhmann 1979; Parsons 1962). Increasingly, the role of politics in shaping the acceptance of scientific authority has come to the fore. As Gauchat (2012:168) explains, “in the political sphere, the credibility of scientific knowledge is tied to cultural perceptions about its political neutrality and objectivity, which are crucial social resources for building consensus in ideologically polarized policy arenas.” This desired neutrality has been challenged, however, amid growing concerns of a “liberal bias” in science and the perceived “moral agenda” of scientists (Evans 2013; Larregue 2018), particularly among conservative Protestants and political conservatives. Such concerns have prompted questions about the empirical validity of such a liberal bias (Duarte et al. 2015; Skitka 2012), and the extent to which scientists brush up against religious and political boundaries.

Meanwhile, perceived tension between science and religion also has political implications, as exemplified by enduring debates about human origins (Ecklund and Scheitle 2018) and climate change (Ecklund et al. 2016; McCright and Dunlap 2011). For Hunter (1991), the contemporary political and social divide is not fundamentally characterized by denominationalism or ontological beliefs per se, but rather epistemology and moral authority. His so-called “orthodox” and “progressive” camps represent broad coalitions of religious and nonreligious individuals alike, aligning based on how they determine right from wrong. In fact, prior research indicates that for many Americans, politicized attitudes around science and science policy are shaped by both scientific and religious authorities (Cacciatore et al. 2018; Scheitle et al. 2018), signaling a critical interplay between religion, science, and politics.

Here, we consider the politicization of science and religion, which we conceptualize as the process through which the interface between science and religion acquires political meaning and consequences. The process manifests when political commitments, rather than ontological or metaphysical convictions, shape attitudes about science, religion, and the interface between them. Prior research reveals this process from the perspective of the general public, as evidenced by declining levels of trust not only in science (Gauchat 2012), but also *scientists* (Evans 2013; Mann and Schleifer 2019), particularly among political conservatives and conservative Protestants. However, here we turn our attention to the scientists themselves. The extant literature lacks empirical research on the degree to which the science-religion interface has political meaning for scientists. Yet, given their proximity to science in their professional lives, examining the extent to which scientists’ attitudes about science and religion are politicized will offer insight into the potential politicization of religion and

science among those who most frequently negotiate these boundaries, which may have implications far beyond the scientific workplace. We begin to fill this gap by examining original survey data of 1,989 academic biologists and physicists in the United States. In short, to the degree that science and religion are politicized among scientists, we expect political views—independent of religiosity—to shape (1) perceptions of the science-religion interface, (2) attitudes about religious authority, (3) religious identity, and (4) attitudes about scientific theories that have political and religious stakes. In what follows, we begin by examining the literature on attitudes about religion and science.

RELIGION AND SCIENCE AS CULTURAL AUTHORITIES

Science and religion continually come into contact in the political sphere, as exemplified by enduring debates about human origins (Ecklund 2010; Ecklund and Scheitle 2018), teaching evolution in public schools (Johnson et al. 2016), and climate change (Ecklund et al. 2016; McCright and Dunlap 2011; Zaleha and Szasz 2015). On the surface, these debates appear to center on the nature of ontological reality. Underneath, however, are fundamental epistemological commitments regarding the relative authorities of religion and science for constructing both knowledge and morality (Hunter 1991). In the United States, religion remains a potent institutional source of meaning and a powerful moral authority because it provides what Berger (1967) calls a “nomos,” or a definition of sacred order through which all other knowledge is filtered. This notion of sacredness, according to Durkheim (1995 [1912]), is constructed and sustained by a moral community whereby participants collectively define what is deemed sacred and reinforce this meaning through shared rites and rituals.

For the religious, then, beliefs derived from religious sources and communities provide interpretive frameworks or schemas that shape moral attitudes (DiMaggio 1997; Edgell and Hull 2017), as well as cultural tools for social action (Swidler 1986). Further, religion serves as a robust political resource both culturally and ideologically (Williams 1996), as evidenced by its critical role in constructing civic identities (Lichterman 2008), mobilizing political participation (Beyerlein and Chaves 2003), and motivating engagement in social movements (Smith 1996). And the stakes are high. For some, seeming to contradict religious knowledge about the origin of the cosmos and life is paramount to contradicting the authority of an omnipotent God. Among the U.S. public, in fact, many individuals turn toward their faith and religious leaders for scientific knowledge, either as an alternative for or in addition to scientific resources (Scheitle et al. 2018).

For the scientist, though, *science itself* can also provide a deep sense of higher calling and purpose (Froese 2016) and afford a repertoire of cultural resources embedded in the ethos of scientific knowledge and practice (Merton 1938) that may shape moral attitudes and the construction of social identities. For them, the stakes in political debates at the intersection of science and religion are no less high. Contradicting knowledge about climate change, for instance, discerned using the scientific method has the potential effect of widespread death, disease, and dislocation

(Christensen 2019; Deese and Klain 2017). Further, many scientists and science advocates see issues like teaching evolution rather than Creationism in public classrooms as an important matter of scientific literacy with moral and social implications. The National Center for Scientific Education (2016), for instance, frames evolution as “the fundamental, unifying theory that underlies all the life sciences,” while describing Creationism and other “theories of origins” as having theological roots particular to some (not all) Christian denominations. They assert that the theory of evolution, then, is faithful to the scientific method, critical for the study of science, and recognized by the scientific community as settled knowledge. Thus, evolution has and continues to be legitimated by the authority imbued in scientific knowledge, practice, and community.

In recent years, there has been increased public discourse and activism around these issues, as exemplified by the March for Science. However, while the march unified scientists and the general public in a shared quest for science advocacy, it also unveiled the variation in attitudes among scientists regarding the role of science and scientists in the political sphere. Whereas some scientists viewed their participation in the march as a responsibility (Wessel 2017), others raised concerns that such a public spectacle may serve to heighten the polarization of science rather than engender unity (Ross 2017). As geology professor Dr. Robert Young explained in a *New York Times* op-ed, “a march by scientists, while well intentioned, will serve only to trivialize and politicize the science we care so much about, turn scientists into another group caught up in the culture wars and further drive the wedge between scientists and a certain segment of the American electorate” (Young 2017).

While there has been increasing scholarly discourse about the public, political, and academic implications of this new wave of science activism (Brulle 2018; Fisher 2018; Frickel 2018; MacKendrick 2017), reflected on both sides of this debate is a shared concern about the status of scientific authority, and the potential social consequences if the legitimacy of scientific authority declines. This desire to establish and maintain cultural authority and legitimacy dates back to the origins of modern science and, according to Gieryn (1999), has historically motivated scientists to engage in boundary-work to distinguish themselves, their methods, and their work from nonscientific claims and practices. In fact, as Moore (1996:1592) explained, “among the most well-documented conclusions from studies by sociologists and historians of science is the conclusion that scientists consistently engage in activities to create, defend, and reinforce their intellectual, social, and political turf,” motivated by the socio-cultural and material rewards that establishing and maintaining scientific authority affords (see Gauchat and Andrews 2018; Lamont and Molnár 2002).

However, the diverging perspectives observed about the March for Science mirror findings (Ecklund 2010; Ecklund et al. 2019; Moore 1996) that scientists are not a uniform collective, but rather represent a diverse social group with a myriad of attitudes, beliefs, and identities. Thus, they may engage in boundary-work in different ways based on aspects of their social locations beyond their professional identities. As Moore (1996:1595-1596) argued, “studies of boundary work typically examine scientists as scientists, not as people who have competing, complex, and overlapping social commitments” which risks overlooking critical variation *among* scientists and may “impinge upon the kinds of claims that scientists make about the proper rela-

tionship between science and politics.” Similarly, recent work has found significant variation in scientists’ views on the relationship between science and religion. In fact, the majority of scientists in the United States do not perceive religion and science to be in conflict (Ecklund and Park 2009), but rather as mutually collaborative or as distinct, independent spheres, reflecting Gould’s (1997) notion of “nonoverlapping magisteria.” Scientists employ different cultural strategies to conceptualize this relationship (Ecklund et al. 2011), with views about the conflict paradigm patterned by religiosity.

Here, we examine the role of politics in how scientists maintain boundaries between scientific and religious authority. Research suggests, for instance, that religious scientists actively engage with these dual cultural resources to negotiate meaning and boundaries across these domains (Ecklund et al. 2019). For the scientist, socialization into the scientific community and scientific practice (Merton 1938) can entail the internalization of moral norms that hold political meaning. Thus, both religion and science remain salient forces in demarcating social boundaries and shaping conceptions of meaning, morality, and identity. While recent studies have begun examining the role of prominent public intellectuals like Richard Dawkins (Evans 2016), we know less about the impact of political commitments on attitudes about religion for the broader scientific community, which may hold increasingly critical implications as scientists become more visible in the political sphere (Yong 2017a).

We, therefore, start by considering the relationship between political views and perceptions of the relationship between science and religion among scientists. Perceptions of conflict between these domains have been a site of some empirical study (Baker 2012; Ecklund and Scheitle 2018; O’Brien and Noy 2015), with a growing body of scholarship challenging the notion that conflict between science and religion is a purely ontological one. Instead, increasing evidence points to the cultural and moral dimensions of conflict (Evans and Evans 2008), and the public sphere as a potent site of conflict (Evans 2016). Thus, as central debates about such issues as evolution continue to drive a political wedge among the general public, the extent to which scientists perceive conflict around the faith-science interface may signal the salience of the conflict paradigm as a symbolic boundary for scientists politically.

Given that religious and political conservatism have converged among the U.S. public since the 1970s (Kellstedt et al. 1994; Guth et al. 2006; Putnam and Campbell 2010), we expect that politically conservative scientists will be more religious and, specifically, more religiously conservative than their politically liberal counterparts. Thus, we reason that they will have lower odds of opposing religious beliefs and, *as scientists*, will have lower odds, by extension, of viewing science and religion as in conflict. Further, recent work suggests that among scientists, religious liberalism is associated with greater perceptions of conflict between religion and science rather than religious conservatism (Ecklund and Park 2009). Taking these insights together, we offer the following hypothesis:

H1: Compared to politically liberal scientists, politically conservative scientists have lower odds of perceiving conflict between religion and science.

POLITICIZATION OF RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AND BELIEF IN THE UNITED STATES

Because of their moral force, the products of religion—particular texts, beliefs, and practices—often serve to legitimate political narratives (Smith 1998), making religion a central feature of American politics. As Putnam and Campbell (2010:369) argue, “the coupling between religiosity and partisanship has become one of those unquestioned generalizations of American political life—an election day fault line.” Since the emergence of an evangelical voting bloc in the 1980s, the evolution of this fault line has motivated scholarship on the convergence between religious and political conservatism, including the relationship between religiosity and voting behavior (Gold and Russell 2007; Kellstedt et al. 1994), political party affiliation (Guth et al. 2006; Hout and Fischer 2002), and social action around issues of moral concern, such as economic justice and poverty (Thomson and Froese 2018).

Meanwhile, the number of nonreligious Americans has also increased since the 1990s, the majority of whom tend to lean politically liberal. This increase in nonbelievers has been viewed, in part, as a response to the rise of the Christian Right (Hout and Fischer 2002) and highlights the divisiveness of religion within U.S. politics. This divisiveness is exemplified by the divergent voting patterns between religious and nonreligious Americans (Putnam and Campbell 2010), and the endurance of negative attitudes toward atheists and religious “nones” more broadly. As Edgell et al. (2006:230) explain, “the boundary between the religious and the nonreligious is not about religious affiliation per se” but rather “the historic place of religion in American civic culture and the understanding that religion provides the ‘habits of the heart’ that form the basis of the good society” (cf. Bellah et al. 1996). Edgell et al. (2006:230) suggest that being an atheist represents something uniquely different than being a religious minority since “Americans construct the atheist as the symbolic representation of one who rejects the basis for moral solidarity and cultural membership in American society altogether.”

Compared to the general public, however, scientists tend to be less religious and are disproportionately atheist (Ecklund 2010) and, thus, may be more likely to encounter these symbolic boundaries. As a counter-maneuver to the conservative public, who imbue instruments of religious authority with political meaning supporting their position (Froese 2014), we suspect that liberal scientists eschew religious authority in a way that conservative scientists do not so as to reinforce the cultural authority of science within the discipline. In other words, we expect that like their nonscientist counterparts (Hout and Fischer 2002), scientists’ attitudes toward religious authority depend not merely on their religious orientation, but also on their political orientations. Specifically, politically liberal scientists will have higher odds of distancing themselves from sources of religious authority, such as believing in God or the Bible, independent of their personal religiosity. We thus test the following hypotheses:

H2: Compared to politically liberal scientists, politically conservative scientists have higher odds of believing in God.

H3: Compared to politically liberal scientists, politically conservative scientists have higher odds of believing the Bible is authoritative.

We also expect that, like their nonscientist counterparts (Putnam and Campbell 2010), we will observe a convergence among religiously affiliated scientists between their religious and political identities. Politically conservative scientists, in particular, may find maintaining a conservative religious identity to be an effective method for asserting and reinforcing their political views. And even as the Religious Left may be diminishing in size and political activism in recent years (Baker and Martí 2020), political liberals can still find religious support—with all the weight of its moral authority—for their positions as well (Hunter 2010). According to Baker and Martí (2020), identifying with the Religious Left can help individuals distance themselves both from the Religious Right and Secular Left, two otherwise powerful voting blocs. Whether politically conservative or liberal, then, we expect religious scientists to draw from their religious communities to support their political views. More formally:

H4: Among religiously affiliated scientists, political conservatives have higher odds of identifying as religiously conservative.

H5: Among religiously affiliated scientists, political liberals have higher odds of identifying as religiously liberal.

SCIENTIFIC DEVIANCE

Given that politics can pattern trust in science (Gauchat 2012) and dissent to scientific theories (McCright and Dunlap 2011), conformity to and deviance from particular scientific concepts may also hold distinctly political meaning, even among scientists. Attitudes about evolution vary considerably among the general public, with skepticism patterned by both religious and political views (Ecklund et al. 2016). However, the U.S. public largely perceives consensus among scientists. According to a recent Pew Research Center (2015) study, most U.S. adults (66 percent) believe that scientists generally agree about human evolution, and over half (52 percent) believe that scientists generally agree on the Big Bang. Despite this perception of scientific consensus and evidence that the majority of scientists (87 percent) agree about human evolution compared to about one-third (32 percent) of the general public (Pew Research Center 2009), we know little about the conditions under which attitudes might diverge among scientists. Issues such as the textbook controversy in Texas (Rich 2013) illustrate how denial of scientific theories among religiously and politically interested actors can influence policy, and that deniers *can* include scientists. Thus, we test whether political views relate to conformity to and deviation from contentious scientific concepts among scientists.

H6: Compared to politically liberal scientists, politically conservative scientists will have higher odds of not expressing agreement with (i.e., deviating from) scientific concepts that are perceived to have scientific consensus, including (a) evolution and (b) the Big Bang theory.

DATA AND MEASURES

Data come from a survey of academic biologists and physicists in eight regional contexts: France, Hong Kong, India, Italy, Taiwan, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States. To avoid context-dependent sources of variation, we focus here only on data from the U.S. survey, which was collected by Abt SRBI in 2015. Investigators chose to focus only on two broad disciplines—physics and biology—within institutional science in order to more reliably compare discipline-related dynamics related to faith and ethics (Ecklund et al. 2019). Physics and biology were selected for a number of reasons, especially because they are common and prestigious natural science disciplines, and therefore widely represented at many institutions, the research of which sometimes has implications for certain religious beliefs.

To construct the sampling frame, investigators first developed a list of research departments ranked by the number of publications using Thomson Reuters Web of Science, an online citation index cataloging over 12,000 scientific journals. Departments were stratified by discipline (biology and physics) and institutional status (nonelite and elite) to ensure broad representation. The latter was determined by considering research productivity, publication rankings, and insider perspectives. From an original frame that included 289 biology departments and 285 physics departments, investigators randomly sampled 26 biology departments and 52 physics departments, or the minimum numbers needed to sample enough scientists in each stratum. Using institutional websites, a sample frame of individual researchers was constructed and stratified by career stage and gender. From a total sample frame of 3,482 biologists and physicists, 1,989 scientists completed the survey (response rate = 57 percent). In multivariable analyses, we applied sampling weights to correct for the probability of having been selected based on institutional and individual strata.

Our analyses examined the degree to which scientists' attitudes and identities related to science and religion are politicized, and whether such politicization comes primarily from the political left, the political right, or both. Political views, therefore, constituted our primary independent variable. The survey measured political views by asking, "In political matters, people talk of 'the left' and 'the right.' Using a scale where '1' means 'left' and '10' means 'right,' how would you place your views on this scale, generally speaking?"⁵ On average, scientists in our sample reported their political views to be 3.60 (SD = 1.81). By comparison, the average score among the U.S. general public (mean = 5.76, SD = 2.00 according to the 2011 World Values Survey) is closer to the midpoint value.

Relative to the general public, then, we observed scientists to be left-of-center. The skewed distribution among scientists indicated that interpreting political views as approximately normal would be problematic. Rather than transforming the variable logarithmically, we opted to construct political views as a system of binary variables consisting of three categories in order to strategically compare politicization among those on the left and the right. We also constructed categories such that each would include a sufficient number of scientists to make reasonable comparisons

⁵ See Ecklund et al. 2019 for documentation on the origins of survey item wording.

between categories. Specifically, we defined scientists with a score below the mean (3.60, or 1 to 3) as *political liberals*, scientists scoring between the mean and the scale's midpoint value (5.5, or 4 and 5) as *left-leaning political moderates* (or simply "moderates"), and scientists scoring above the midpoint (6 to 10) as *political conservatives*. Among scientists in our sample, we classified about 57 percent as politically liberal, 26 percent as left-leaning politically moderate, and 16 percent as politically conservative (Table I).

Table I. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	% or Mean (SD)	Range
Political views			
Political conservative	1,800	16.42	0, 1
Left-leaning political moderate	1,800	26.41	0, 1
Political liberal	1,800	57.17	0, 1
Outcomes			
Relationship between science and religion			
Conflict perspective	1,820	28.74	0, 1
Independence perspective	1,820	51.19	0, 1
Collaboration perspective	1,820	12.12	0, 1
God-belief			
Atheist	1,844	34.59	0, 1
Agnostic	1,844	29.40	0, 1
Believer	1,844	36.01	0, 1
Authoritative Bible (Judeo-Christian subsample)	508	49.32	0, 1
Religious Identity ^a (affiliated subsample)			
Religious conservative	762	11.47	0, 1
Religious liberal	762	26.66	0, 1
Scientific Deviance			
Evolution	1,832	8.30	0, 1
Big Bang	1,831	23.88	0, 1
Controls			
Religious Tradition			
Judeo-Christian	1,890	26.07	0, 1
Religious minority	1,890	13.46	0, 1
No religion	1,890	60.47	0, 1
Nonattender	1,885	58.83	0, 1
Religious	1,874	30.55	0, 1
Spiritual but not religious	1,847	13.74	0, 1
Career stage			
Rank 1	1,974	43.74	0, 1
Rank 2	1,974	30.74	0, 1
Rank 3	1,974	25.52	0, 1
Biology	1,989	66.11	0, 1
Elite	1,989	40.84	0, 1
Female	1,825	31.62	0, 1
Racial minority	1,821	36.37	0, 1
Immigrant	1,815	42.05	0, 1
Parental degree	1,823	70.91	0, 1
Income	1,785	6.49 (4.11)	1-15

Notes: Data come from the 2015 US survey of the Religion among Scientists in International Context (RASIC) study. All data were weighted and values exclude nonresponse. Standard deviations in parentheses.

^aContrast category includes the response "The words conservative/traditional and liberal/progressive don't mean anything to me in this religious context," as well as "don't know."

After constructing our key independent variable, we then examined how scientists perceived the religion-science interface. The survey asked scientists to indicate the statement that best represented their understanding of the relationship between science and religion. Possible responses included (1) “Conflict; I consider myself to be on the side of religion,” (2) “Conflict; I consider myself to be on the side of science,” (3) “Conflict; I am unsure which side I am on,” (4) “Independence; they refer to different aspects of reality,” and (5) “Collaboration; each can be used to help support the other.” Less than 1 percent of scientists affirmed the first and third responses, so we dropped them from analyses to maintain conceptual clarity. We recoded the remaining responses into a system of dichotomous variables with affirmative values representing *conflict*, *independence*, and *collaboration*, respectively. Consistent with prior literature (Ecklund et al. 2019; Gould 1997), more than half of our sample (51 percent) affirmed the independence perspective (Table I). About 12 percent affirmed the collaboration perspective, and 29 percent affirmed the conflict perspective.

We also tested for the politicization of religious beliefs about God and the Bible. First, the survey asked scientists to “Please indicate which statement below comes closest to expressing what you believe about God.” Possible responses included (1) “I don’t believe in God,” (2) “I don’t know whether there is a God and I don’t believe there is any way to find out,” (3) “I don’t believe in a personal God, but I do believe in a Higher Power of some kind,” (4) “I find myself believing in God some of the time, but not at others,” (5) “While I have doubts, I feel that I do believe in God,” and (6) “I know God really exists and I have no doubts about it.” In contrast with the general public, among whom more than 90 percent report belief in God or a Higher Power to some degree, only 36 percent of scientists did so. We, therefore, constructed a system of three dichotomous variables, labeling the first response as *atheist*, the second as *agnostic*, and combining the final four categories as *believer*. Scientists were fairly evenly split among these three categories, with 35 percent identifying as atheist, 29 percent as agnostic, and 36 percent as believers in God or a Higher Power (Table I).

Belief about the Bible was measured with the question “Which of these statements comes closest to describing your feelings about the Bible?” Possible responses included (1) “The Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word,” (2) “The Bible is the inspired word of God but not everything should be taken literally, word for word,” or (3) “The Bible is an ancient book of fables, legends, history, and moral precepts recorded by Man.” Participants could also respond that they did not know, or that the question did not apply to them. Since a very small share (about 1 percent) of respondents selected the first response, we constructed a dichotomous variable, labeling those who affirmed the first two responses as perceiving the Bible as authoritative (*authoritative Bible*). We restricted analysis for this question to Judeo-Christians (Roman Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, and Jewish), the group for whom this question was most relevant. Among Judeo-Christians, about half (49 percent) believed the Bible to be authoritative (i.e., literally true or inspired).

We constructed two variables operationalizing religious identity based on a pair of sequenced survey questions. The survey first asked “Do you belong to a religion

or religious denomination? If yes, which one?" Respondents could indicate "I do not belong to a religion," they could select among options including "Roman Catholic," "Protestant," "Orthodox (Russian/Greek/etc.)," "Jew," "Muslim," "Hindu," and "Buddhist," or they could select "Other" and enter the name of a religious tradition or denomination. If respondents selected an option other than "I do not belong to a religion," the survey then prompted them with the question "Would you describe yourself as a conservative/traditional [name of religion] or a liberal/progressive [name of religion]?" Response options included (1) "Very conservative/traditional," (2) "Somewhat conservative/traditional," (3) "Somewhat liberal/progressive," (4) "Very liberal/progressive," (-89) "The words conservative/traditional and liberal/progressive don't mean anything to me in this religious context," and (-79) "don't know." We constructed the variable *religious conservative* as a dichotomous variable by assigning responses of very and somewhat conservative/traditional a value of 1 and all other responses as 0. Similarly, we constructed the variable *religious liberal* as a binary measure by assigning the responses very and somewhat liberal/progressive a value of 1 and all other responses as 0. About 11 percent of those in our sample who belonged to a religious tradition or denomination identified as religiously conservative, while more than a quarter (27 percent) identified as religiously liberal (Table I).

We operationalized scientific deviance from two survey items. Specifically, the survey asked scientists to react to two statements about scientific knowledge, indicating whether they believed them to be true, false, or that they did not know. The first statement read "Human beings, as we know them today, developed from earlier species of animals." About 92 percent of respondents indicated the statement on evolution was true, so we considered responses of false and "don't know" as deviant (=1). The second statement said, "The universe began with a huge explosion." More than three in four scientists (76 percent) identified the statement on the Big Bang as true, so we again considered responses of false and "don't know" as deviant (=1).

We controlled for several additional measures operationalizing individual religiosity. Religious tradition was comprised of a system of binary variables representing *Judeo-Christian* traditions, *religious minorities* (including Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and other religions), and those reporting that they do not belong to a religious tradition (*no religion*). Religious attendance was measured by asking respondents "Apart from weddings and funerals, about how often do you attend religious services these days?" Response categories ranged from (1) "More than once a week" to (7) "Never, practically never." Because responses were highly skewed toward nonattendance, we dichotomized responses so that "never" was assigned a value of 1 (*nonattender*). More than half (59 percent) of respondents reported that they never attend services.

Finally, we controlled for whether respondents identified as religious, or spiritual but not religious. The former was operationalized from a question asking "Independently of whether you attend religious services or not, would you say you are...". The responses "A very religious person," "A moderately religious person," and "A slightly religious person" were assigned a value of 1, while "Not a religious person," "A convinced atheist," and "Don't know" were assigned a value of 0 (*religious*). About 31 percent of respondents identified as at least slightly religious. The latter was operationalized from a survey item asking respondents to select the

response that best describes them, with the response “I don’t follow a religion, but consider myself to be a spiritual person interested in the sacred and the supernatural” coded as 1 (*spiritual but not religious*, or SBNR). All other responses were coded as 0, including “I follow a religion and consider myself to be a spiritual person interested in the sacred and the supernatural,” “I follow a religion, but don’t consider myself to be a spiritual person interested in the sacred and the supernatural,” “I don’t follow a religion and don’t consider myself to be a spiritual person interested in the sacred and the supernatural,” and “don’t know.” Nearly 14 percent of the sample identified as spiritual but not religious.

Multivariable analyses included a number of demographic and institutional controls. We operationalized the career stage as a system of binary variables such that *rank 1* represents graduate students, *rank 2* represents mid-career scientists, and *rank 3* represents senior scientists. We also controlled for institutional status (*elite* = 1, *nonelite* = 0) and academic discipline (*biology* = 1, *physics* = 0). Given that certain politicized scientific debates, such as evolution, may interface with scientists’ work and attitudes differently across discipline and institutional context, we control for potential variation across these dimensions. We also control for gender (*female* = 1, *male* = 0), *racial minority* status (*non-whites and Hispanics* = 1), and nativity (*immigrant* = 1). *Parental degree* indicates that respondents have at least one parent with a college degree. Income was measured by asking “In which of these groups did your total family income, from all sources, fall last year, before taxes, that is. Total income includes interest or dividends, rent, Social Security, other pensions, alimony, or child support, unemployment compensation, public aid (welfare), armed forces or veteran’s allotment.” Responses ranged from (1) “less than \$30,000” to (15) “more than \$1,000,000.”

ANALYTIC STRATEGY

We implemented a two-model strategy to estimate the relationship between political views and each outcome related to science and religion. We first estimated a baseline model including political views (suppressing liberals as the reference category) as well as demographic and institutional controls. To ensure relationships between political views and each outcome were not simply a reflection of religiosity, we added potentially confounding factors related to religion to a second model for each outcome, specifically religious tradition, service attendance, and self-reported religiosity and spirituality.⁶ For all outcomes except those modeling perceptions between religion and science, we included a measure representing independence and collaboration views (suppressing conflict) between science and religion. When estimating regression equations modeling authoritative Bible and religious identities, we did not control for religious tradition in full models, as affiliation was inherent in outcome variable construction.

⁶ To test for possible issues related to multicollinearity, we performed a series of correlation analyses. Among the full sample, the absolute value of Pearson correlation coefficients between political categories and variables of religion did not exceed .30. Among the Jewish and Christian subsample, correlations did not exceed .40.

FINDINGS

We estimated multinomial logistic regressions to model attitudes about the relationship between science and religion (Table II). Consistent with H1, results revealed salient political differences in attitudes among scientists. The first pairing compared independence and conflict perspectives. In Model 1, left-leaning political moderates and political conservatives had 164 percent $(=(2.64-1)\times 100\%)$ and 254 percent higher odds, respectively, of perceiving the science-religion interface to be one of independence rather than conflict, when compared to political liberals. In other words, among scientists, the conflict narrative was seemingly strongest among liberals and weakest among conservatives. And as expected, the relationship held when controlling for religion variables (Model 2). Notably, religious and SBNR scientists had 431 percent and 121 percent higher odds than nonreligious and non-SBNR scientists, respectively, of affirming the independence rather than the conflict perspective, independent of political views and controls. Responses were also patterned by religious attendance. Those who never attend services had 64 percent $(=(1-.36)\times 100\%)$ lower odds than those who attend of affirming the independence rather than the conflict perspective. In other words, nonattenders had higher odds of perceiving conflict than attenders. Differences by religious tradition, however, were not significant.

Table II. Multinomial Logit of Perceived Relationship between Religion and Science (Odds Ratios)

Independent Variable	Independence vs. Conflict		Collaboration vs. Conflict	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Political liberal (ref)				
Left-leaning political moderate	2.64***	2.41***	5.70***	4.23***
Political conservative	3.54***	2.12*	13.66***	4.63***
No religion (ref)	—	—	—	—
Judeo-Christian	—	1.51	—	2.90**
Religious minority	—	1.02	—	1.54
Nonattender	—	.36***	—	.28***
Religious	—	5.31***	—	18.63***
Spiritual but not religious	—	2.21*	—	3.80**
Rank 1 (ref)				
Rank 2	1.41	1.27	3.73***	3.24**
Rank 3	1.56	1.34	3.18*	2.44
Biology	1.04	1.06	.51**	.44**
Elite	.85	.83	.75	.75
Female	2.78***	2.86***	2.61**	2.38**
Racial minority	.83	.74	.91	.88
Immigrant	1.02	1.11	.71	.79
Parent degree	1.69*	1.94**	2.12*	2.60**
Income	.99	.99	.88*	.88
N	1,621	1,619	1,621	1,619

Notes: Data come from the 2015 US survey of the Religion among Scientists in International Context (RASIC) study. All data were weighted.

* $p < .05$;

** $p < .01$;

*** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests).

In the second pairing of outcomes, political moderates and conservatives had 470 percent and 1,266 percent higher odds, respectively, than liberals of perceiving collaboration between science and religion rather than conflict, again consistent with H1. Like the first pairing, results suggest that the conflict narrative was strongest among liberal scientists and weakest among conservatives. Again, the significance of political differences held when controlling for religious covariates, though group differences between political liberals and conservatives attenuated substantially. Among religious variables, Jewish and Christian scientists had 190 percent higher odds than nonaffiliated scientists of perceiving the science-religion interface to be one of the collaborations rather than conflict. Nonattenders had higher odds of perceiving conflict, while religiosity and spirituality corresponded with higher odds of perceiving collaboration.

Second, we tested the association between political views and our three categories of God-belief, also by estimating multinomial regressions. Table III presents the results of models for three sets of outcome pairings, namely atheist versus believer, agnostic versus believer, and atheist versus agnostic. H2 received mixed

Table III. Multinomial Logit of Belief in God (Odds Ratios)

Independent Variable	Atheism vs. Belief in God or Higher Power		Agnosticism vs. Belief in God or Higher Power		Atheism vs. Agnosticism	
	Model 3	Model 4	Model 3	Model 4	Model 3	Model 4
Political liberal (ref)						
Left-leaning political moderate	.33***	.48*	.70	.94	.47**	.52**
Political conservative	.10***	.32***	.37*	.96	.28***	.33***
No religion (ref)						
Judeo-Christian	—	.14***	—	.32***	—	.45*
Religious minority	—	.67	—	.29***	—	2.30
Nonattender	—	1.98***	—	1.28	—	1.55*
Religious	—	.06***	—	.14***	—	.42**
Spiritual but not religious	—	.40	—	.61	—	.65
Conflict (ref)						
Independence	—	.36***	—	.70	—	.51**
Collaboration	—	.07***	—	.25***	—	.27*
Rank 1 (ref)						
Rank 2	.86	1.63	.87	1.47	.99	1.11
Rank 3	.98	2.60	1.00	2.11	.98	1.23
Biology	.89	.81	.89	.87	1.00	.93
Elite	1.62*	1.89**	1.24	1.37	1.30	1.38
Female	.78*	1.30	.73	.98	1.06	1.32
Racial minority	.92	.68	.68	.54*	1.35	1.25
Immigrant	1.14	.88	.84	.72	1.35	1.23
Parent degree	1.02	1.30	.90	1.10	1.13	1.18
Income	1.04	1.00	1.01	.96	1.03	1.04
<i>N</i>	1,736	1,724	1,736	1,724	1,736	1,724

Notes: Data come from the 2015 US survey of the Religion among Scientists in International Context (RASIC) study. All data were weighted.

* $p < .05$;

** $p < .01$;

*** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests).

support. Compared to political liberals, political moderates and conservatives had 67 percent and 90 percent lower odds, respectively, of being atheist rather than a believer (Model 3). In Model 4, political differences remained significant, suggesting that differences in God-belief were not merely a function of religion, but also politics. Net of controls, political moderates, and conservatives had 52 percent and 68 percent lower odds, respectively, than liberals of being atheist rather than a believer. Most variables operationalizing religiosity were also substantively and statistically significant, unsurprisingly. Further, scientists at elite institutions had 89 percent higher odds than those at nonelite institutions of reporting atheism rather than belief in God or a Higher Power, net of political and religious variables.

Turning to the second pairing of outcome categories in Table III, political conservatives had 63 percent lower odds than liberals of being agnostic rather than a believer net of demographic and institutional controls (Model 3). Differences between political liberals and moderates, however, were not significant, and when including religious controls (Model 4), differences between political conservatives and liberals became nonsignificant (in contrast to H2). Religion variables, though, were again strong and significant.

Our third pairing of outcome categories compares two modes of nonbelief, namely atheism and agnosticism. Interestingly, political differences were salient and significant. Compared to political liberals, moderates and conservatives had 53 percent and 72 percent lower odds, respectively, of affirming atheism instead of agnosticism (Model 3). Differences largely held and remained significant when controlling for religion variables (Model 4). Further, religious tradition and measures of religiosity were also significant. Those belonging to Judeo-Christian traditions had 55 percent lower odds than nonaffiliates, nonattenders had 55 percent higher odds than attenders, and religious scientists had 58 percent lower odds than nonreligious scientists of being atheist rather than agnostic. Taken together, results from Table III suggest that *among the most politically liberal scientists, atheism is a particularly politicized belief structure.*

Table IV reports the results of binary regression analyses modeling belief in an authoritative Bible, religious identity, and scientific deviance. Unlike analyses modeling the perceived relationship between science and religion and belief in God, we restricted analyses on religious outcomes here to subsamples for whom each outcome was relevant. Consistent with H3, and among Judeo-Christian scientists, political conservatives had 148 percent higher odds than liberals of affirming that the Bible is literally true or inspired (Model 5). When controlling for religion (Model 6), however, differences between conservatives and liberals became nonsignificant, suggesting that beliefs about the Bible have no residual political meaning net of religiosity.

Religious identity, however, was significantly associated with political views, as predicted by H4 and H5. Specifically, among religiously affiliated scientists, political conservatives had 499 percent higher odds than liberals of being *religiously* conservative (Model 7). This association remained strong and significant when controlling for religion variables (Model 8). Further, political moderates and conservatives had 55 percent and 79 percent lower odds, respectively, than political liberals of identifying as religious liberals (Model 9). Net of religious controls, the differences remained

Table IV. Binary Logits of Belief about the Bible, Religious Identities, and Scientific Deviance (Odds Ratios)

Independent Variable	Authoritative Bible ^a			Religious Conservative ^b			Religious Liberal ^b			Scientific Deviance: Evolution			Scientific Deviance: Big Bang		
	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12	Model 13	Model 14					
Political liberal (ref)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Left-leaning political moderate	1.00	.80	.97	.73	.45**	.51*	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Political conservative	2.48*	1.27	5.99**	3.75*	.21***	.23***	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
No religion (ref)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Judeo-Christian	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Religious minority	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Nonattender	—	.38*	—	.59	—	.61	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Religious	—	11.94***	—	7.16*	—	.88	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Spiritual but not religious	—	.69	—	.73	—	1.48	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Conflict (ref)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Independence	—	1.20	—	1.99	—	.56	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Collaboration	—	4.25*	—	3.13	—	.32*	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Rank 1 (ref)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Rank 2	2.15*	1.90	1.98	1.62	.86	1.00	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Rank 3	.67	.66	.79	.65	2.07	2.31	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Biology	.91	.88	.46*	.50*	2.02**	1.97**	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Elite	.85	.57**	.59	.48	.99	1.05	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Female	1.12	.86	1.05	.91	1.16	1.18	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Racial minority	2.13*	1.52	.97	.81	1.05	1.06	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Immigrant	.60	.79	.26**	.36*	1.75*	1.65	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Parent degree	.87	.97	.80	.80	1.00	1.10	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Income	.96	1.01	1.03	1.05	.93	.92	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
<i>N</i>	480	477	698	690	698	690	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Pseudo R-squared ^c	.09	.31	.18	.25	.11	.13	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Notes: Data come from the 2015 US survey of the Religion among Scientists in International Context (RASIC) study. All data were weighted. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests).

^aIncludes only Jewish and Christian scientists.

^bIncludes only religiously affiliated scientists.

^cPseudo R-squared values were obtained by replicating the logistic procedure in with the nonsurvey logistic command in Stata, considering the trimmed weights as “importance weights” rather than “sampling weights.”

significant (Model 10). Interestingly, self-reported religiosity was significantly associated with identifying as a religious conservative, but not as a religious liberal. Furthermore, religious attendance and identifying as SBNR did not relate significantly to identifying as a religious liberal. Thus, being religiously conservative seems to have both religious *and* political meaning. But identifying as religiously liberal is *politically—but not religiously*—salient among religiously affiliated scientists, independent of religious controls.

Finally, Table IV reports results for binary logistic regressions modeling scientific deviance using the full sample. In the baseline model of views about evolution (Model 11), political moderates and conservatives had 364 percent and 926 percent higher odds, respectively, than liberals of deviating from an affirmative position. In Model 12, the magnitude of political differences attenuated but remained significant, in support of H6a. Notably, net of political views and other measures of religiosity, religious affiliation was unrelated to views on evolution. Scientists identifying as religious, however, had 376 percent higher odds than nonreligious scientists of deviating from affirmative views about evolution. This finding suggests that the significant association between political conservatism and denying or expressing uncertainty about evolution relates both to the religious and political implications of the issue.

When modeling deviance regarding the Big Bang theory, differences between political groups were again significant (Model 13). Net of demographic and institutional controls, political moderates and conservatives had 81 percent and 70 percent, respectively, higher odds than liberals of deviating on views about the Big Bang. And in partial support of H6b, differences between liberals and moderates remained significant and robust net of religious controls (Model 14). Of note, religious scientists had 413 percent higher odds than nonreligious scientists of deviating from the scientific consensus on the Big Bang net of political views. Maintaining conformity to positions on both evolution and the Big Bang, thus, appears to have political meaning independent of religiosity.

Both because each of these groups is religiously different and to aid the interpretation of results, we also plotted predicted probabilities for each of the outcomes by the political group in Figure 1. Taken together, results provide clear evidence that religion, science, and the interface between them have political meaning for scientists. Political conservatives and liberals differ significantly on every measure except two: agnosticism versus belief in God or Higher Power and authoritative Bible. Notably, religious indicators did significantly correlate with both outcomes, suggesting that variance on these measures depends on within-group differences of religiosity rather than cross-group differences of political views. In sharp contrast, political differences for outcomes pairing atheism with other God-belief categories were consistently significant. Liberals (.71) had a 14 times greater probability than conservatives (.05) of expressing atheism rather than belief in God or a Higher Power independent of personal religiosity, and interestingly, they also had a four times higher probability of expressing atheism rather than agnosticism (.53 versus .13). These patterns suggest that the politicization of science and religion manifests specifically in terms of political commitments about atheism rather than nonbelief more generally construed.

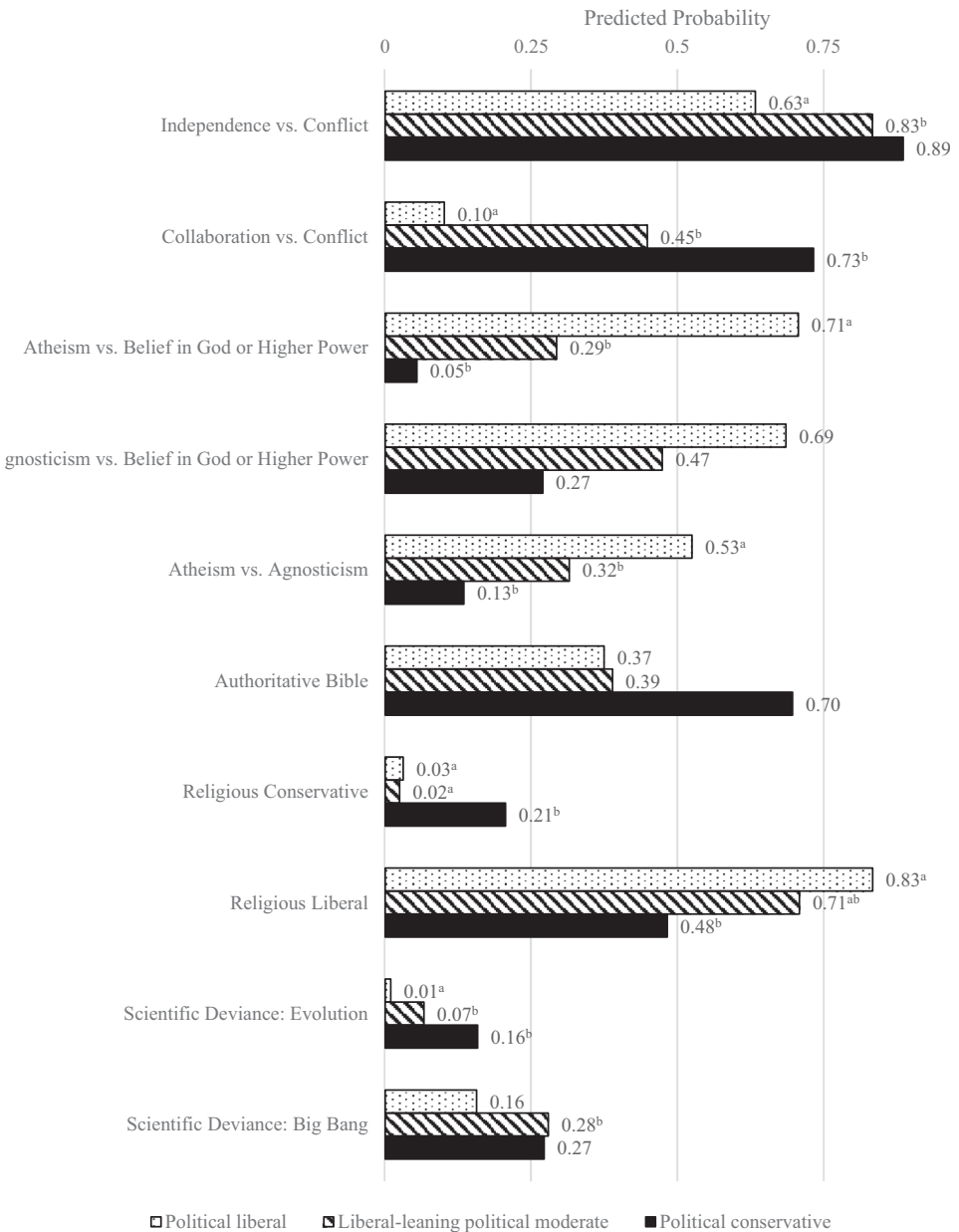


Figure 1. Predicted probabilities for outcome variables independent of religiosity and control variables, by political views. We estimated values by holding independent variables at group means. Superscript a = significantly different than political conservatives, b = significantly different than political liberals ($p < .05$, two-tailed tests).

Politically liberal scientists were also more likely than political conservatives to affirm a conflict narrative between science and religion and identify as a religious liberal, whereas political conservatives were more likely than political liberals to affirm the independence or collaborative perspectives instead of a conflict perspective, identify as a religious conservative, and hold deviant scientific beliefs.

Interestingly, results also suggest that political liberals differ significantly not only with political conservatives, but also with left-leaning political moderates. For many outcomes, including the perception of a conflict narrative, belief in God, and scientific deviance, political conservatives did not differ significantly from left-leaning moderates, suggesting a nonlinear relationship between political views and most of the outcomes considered here. The only exception to this pattern relates to religious identity, as political conservatives were significantly more likely to identify as religiously conservative (net predicted probability of .21) and significantly less likely to identify as religiously liberal (.48) than moderates (.02 and .71, respectively). Nevertheless, we find that scientists on average tend to report relatively liberal political views, but that the significant line of political demarcation tends to be between those above and below the mean rather than above and below the middle value.

Sensitivity Analyses

In addition to our main analyses, for which we conceptualized political views as categorical using mean and middle-values as cut points to construct discrete groups, we also performed supplemental analyses (available upon request) using a continuous measure of political views to ensure that our findings were not merely artifacts of group construction. By log-transforming the raw measure of political views, the skew of the distribution reduced from .82 to -.38, so we regressed outcomes on the log-transformed measure of political views. Findings were generally consistent with findings from our main analyses. Specifically, for every incremental increase in political conservatism, respondents had lower odds of being an atheist rather than believing in God or a Higher Power, as well as lower odds of being an atheist rather than an agnostic. Independent of personal religiosity, political views again did not significantly correlate with being an agnostic versus believing in God, nor did they relate to views about the Bible. But with increasing political conservatism, respondents had higher odds of identifying as a religious conservative, lower odds of identifying as a religious liberal, and higher odds of deviance on views about evolution and the Big Bang theory.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Here we have examined survey data representing the views of a sample of U.S. physicists and biologists for evidence of the politicization of religion and science, which we defined as the process by which political commitments influence attitudes about science, religion, and the interface between them, independent of personal religiosity. Multivariable analyses largely supported our hypotheses that, among biologists and physicists, political views correlated significantly with (1) perceptions of the

science-religion interface, (2) beliefs related to religious authority, (3) personal religious identity, and (4) attitudes about scientific theories.

Patterns were not politically symmetric, however. Consistent with prior scholarship, more than half of our sample perceived the relationship between science and religion to be one of independence, referring to different aspects of reality (Ecklund et al. 2019). Our findings, however, suggest that politically liberal scientists were significantly more likely than either conservatives or even left-leaning moderates to report that science and religion are in conflict, and that they side with science. The most liberal scientists also had higher odds of affirming either atheist or agnostic beliefs about God or a Higher Power than both left-leaning moderate and conservative scientists. Independent of personal religiosity, perception of a conflict narrative is particularly salient for the most liberal of scientists, as is a commitment to nonbelief in God.

In contrast, among the religiously affiliated, religious identity was particularly salient for politically conservative scientists, as they exhibited a significantly higher probability than political liberals and left-leaning moderates of identifying as religious conservatives, as well as significantly lower odds of identifying as religious liberals. Given how deeply intertwined religion and politics have become in the United States, the convergence of religious identity and political conservatism and liberalism among religiously affiliated scientists is rather unremarkable. What is surprising, however, is that being religiously conservative seems to have both religious *and* political meaning, while identifying as religiously liberal is *politically—but not religiously*—salient among religiously affiliated scientists. In other words, identifying as religiously liberal was statistically unrelated to personal religiosity among the religiously affiliated, but political conservatives had substantially lower probabilities of identifying as religiously liberal than both political conservatives and, to a lesser degree, left-leaning moderates (.48 vs. .83 and .71, respectively).

Our findings have implications for research on the politics of nonbelief (Hout and Fischer 2002; Putnam and Campbell 2010). In contrast with political conservatives and left-leaning moderates, liberal scientists were distinctive for their nonbelief in God. As we expected, politically liberal scientists had a higher probability of affirming atheism than belief in God, even net of religious controls. This finding corroborates prior studies describing *political* influence for religious disaffiliation and diminishing certainty in belief about God (Hout and Fischer 2002; Thomson and Davignon 2017). Strikingly, politically liberal scientists also had a higher probability than conservatives, and even left-leaning moderates, of identifying as atheist instead of agnostic. Predictors of atheism were, therefore, *both religious and political*. In contrast, predictors of agnosticism (vs. belief in God) were primarily religious *but not political*. While political conservatives had lower odds than liberals of being agnostic rather than a believer, the association became nonsignificant when controlling for religious covariates.

For the most liberal of scientists, then, simply indicating uncertainty in the existence of God (i.e., agnosticism) is seemingly not sufficient. We speculate that the heightened certainty—without room for doubt—in the atheist statement is itself an act of political boundary maintenance. Given the U.S. context where religious authority is sometimes exerted in the political sphere over issues relating to science,

we argue that the assertion that “I don’t believe in God” is itself a manifestly political act, with affirming atheism a component of constructing a politically liberal identity. Further, for academic scientists specifically, affirming atheism may be an expression not only of religious (non)belief, but also the authority of science over religion for defining reality and morality, and hence, policy.

Further, while the majority of scientists surveyed affirmed evolution (92 percent) and the Big Bang (76 percent), our findings suggest that the odds of denying or expressing uncertainty about evolution, in particular, is patterned across political lines. Specifically, political conservatives had higher odds of doubting evolution than liberals, while politically liberal scientists had a significantly lower probability of doubting evolution than conservatives, net of religious controls. We speculate, then, that for politically liberal scientists, towing the political line may involve maintaining dominant scientific paradigms like evolution while, for politically conservative scientists, it involves distancing themselves from them. In contrast to evidence that trust in science is specifically declining among political conservatives in the general public (Gauchat 2012), our findings suggest that among scientists, perceptions of conflict are greatest among political *liberals*, and issues related to science that conflict with certain religious perspectives in the political sphere—such as evolution—may be particularly salient for liberals to uphold as an act of political boundary maintenance. Unfortunately, data limit us from evaluating this trend for other political issues such as climate change or reproductive technologies, but we believe our findings suggest avenues for future research.

Given that the survey was conducted in 2015, our data are unable to speak directly to the rise in science activism and political engagement that has garnered increasing public and scholarly interest since the 2016 U.S. presidential election (Brulle 2018; Fisher 2018; Frickel 2018; MacKendrick 2017). Nonetheless, our findings offer insight into the initial conditions that may undergird the discourse and activism that has garnered more recent public attention. Specifically, this study contributes to our understanding of the extent to which scientists’ attitudes, beliefs, and identities around science and religion hold political meaning, which aspects of the science-religion interface hold the most political currency (e.g., atheism, evolution), as well as the politicized nature of the conflict paradigm. As religious and political divides regarding science increasingly center on scientists (Evans 2013; Mann and Schleifer 2019) and scientists’ presence in the political sphere continues to grow (Fisher 2018; MacKendrick 2017; Yong 2017a), examining the science-religion interface as a site of politicization affords a path to disentangle broader dynamics of polarization and illuminate specific issues and attitudes that bear critical implications on reinforcing symbolic boundaries in the United States. Future work ought to examine this site across other dimensions of variation among scientists, such as race, gender, and immigrant status at an individual level (see Wilde and Glassman 2016), in addition to national, discipline, and institutional contexts at the group level (see Ecklund et al. 2019). As science becomes an increasingly global enterprise, our understanding of the politicization of science and religion would be enriched by work that further interrogates the diversity *within* the scientific community.

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