

Abstract

The belief in God's control of the world, common to many of the world's religions, raises conflicting theoretical predictions regarding its role in shaping attitudes toward the welfare-state. In this paper we present the results of priming experiments designed to resolve this theoretical dispute. Study 1 demonstrates that priming the belief in God's control increases support for income redistribution and welfare-state expenditure among Israeli-Jews. In studies 2 and 3 we replicate this experiment among American-Jews and American-Christians, and show that this effect largely holds across cultural/political contexts (Israel and US) and three major religious traditions (Judaism, Catholicism, Protestantism). These results challenge existing arguments about the substitutability of religious belief and support of strong political institutions, and the welfare-state in particular. The findings suggest that the traditional and common political gap between the economic left and the religious, based on the evaluation that religious beliefs form conservative economic preferences, might be over-stated.