At the heart of concerns over whether religious belief is compatible with democracy is the question of authority. Democracy arguably requires granting a level of assent to the results of a process that does not guarantee the return of a right answer. Moreover, democracy cannot stand without granting equal rights to those with whom you may fundamentally disagree. These prerequisites have proved difficult for those with the utmost commitment to their religious faith, both as political theorists have argued it (e.g., Carter 1991; Rorty 1994; Wolterstorff 2003) and how empirical social scientists have measured it (e.g., Djupe 2015; Gibson 2010). But the measures used to engage in this essential debate have been fraught; they conflate religious conservatism or religiosity with what is truly at issue, which is religious authority – granted legitimacy to religious leaders and principles to guide behavior. This is not an exercise in defining religious influence (power), which may result in the absence of authority.

Therefore, we propose a new measure of religious authority that, while correlated with religiosity and religious conservatism, has independent effects on measures of interest. We draw on evidence from clergy and citizens in three samples to show that it is often religious authority that drives relationships with religion and core democratic requisites. Religiosity and religious conservatism are related to these items, but their effects often shrink or disappear once we incorporate our measure of religious authority.

We will review problems in the literature where generic measures of religiosity or religious conservatism have been used as proxies for religious authority, which serve as a call for independent measurement of this critical component of a religious worldview. Then we rebuild theory to make clear how religious authority should be linked to democratic process, highlighting the metaphorical qualities that congregational life has for democracy. Finally, we present results from three datasets with appropriate measures for clergy and citizens that confirm religious authority's link to democratic thinking.

Religious Authority By Proxy

The behavioral revolution in the social sciences was fueled by the rise of Nazism in Germany and the experiences of established democracies whose democratic commitments wavered in the face of grave threats like the spread of communism (e.g., Stouffer 1955). Religion played a role in this burgeoning research agenda that was deeply concerned with problems of authority, though religion was initially measured quite crudely. Whether Herberg's (1960) tripartite classification or Stouffer's (1955) reliance on church attendance, no student of American religion would be satisfied with singular measures of religious experience and identity.

Glock and Stark (1965) filled that gap with their canonical discussion of religiosity which provided the intellectual basis of the modern variants called religious commitment, religiosity, and the "3 B" approach. In each scheme, individuals *belong* to religious organizations, they display various forms and amounts of *behaviors*, and they adopt various *beliefs* (e.g., Layman 2001; Leege and Kellstedt 1993; Kellstedt et al. 1996; Smidt, et al. 2009). Access to better or at least more measures of religious belief improved over time, but early studies of democratic orientations often relied on a single measure – biblical literalism.

The variety of ways in which biblical literalism have been used highlights the need for independent measures of religious authority. Oftentimes this single measure was used as a proxy for religious conservatism when surveys had no others (e.g., Layman 1997; Layman 2001; Burge 2013). Other scholars used literalism as a measure of religious fundamentalism (Jelen and Wilcox 1991) in line with the development of the more general (and secular) concept of dogmatism (Rokeach 1961). Literalism has also been used as a proxy for a particular environmental worldview ("dominion") that values human consumption over conservation (Eckberg and Blocker 1989; Guth et al., 1993; Sherkat and Ellison, 2007; Woodrum and Hoban, 1994). Of course, the measure is both – it is a measure of religious belief as well as a statement about religious authority. Moreover, others have suggested that religiosity is suggestive of religious authority. In this view, greater religious commitment indicates a motivation to adopt religious and political information and arguments from the clergy (e.g., Kellstedt et al. 1993). If true, then religiosity indexes are likely to be correlated with authority measures, but well short of perfectly.

The Nature of Religious Authority

The earliest social science regarding the role of the religion in society carefully considered the nature of religious authority. When constructing his definition of a religious organization, Max Weber argued that the way the church understood authority made it unique. Weber believed that religious institutions stand as an example of a "hierocratic organization" in that it enforces order by relying on "psychic coercion," usually by cutting members off from religious benefits. Thus, Weber defines a church as possessing an authority structure which has a monopoly on "the legitimate use of hierocratic coercion" (Weber 1978, 54). Weber's understanding of religious authority is closely linked to political authority insofar as both have the ability to withhold benefits or resources that individuals want.

The primary difference between religious and political authority, however, lies in the fact that religious authority is "legitimated by calling on some supernatural referent" (Chaves 1994: 756; Smith 2017). The proper interpretation of these supernatural edicts is mediated through the recognized leader of the religious organization, who often engages in the use of specific religious terminology to justify their decision making (Fenn 1982; Djupe and Calfano 2012). This specific use of coercion is necessary for religious authority because they do not have the ability to force compliance like teachers have in the classroom or managers possess in the workplace. Instead, religious leaders can use the threat of excommunication (Sosis 2005).

The literature has continued to debate whether religious authority is voluntary or dispositional. The rise of the "strong man" dictators of the early 20th century forced social scientists to seek explanations for their rise to power. Adorno's seminal work, *The Authoritarian Personality*, posited that certain individuals were predisposed to seek out ways to exert power over others and were prone to favor the strong over the weak (Adorno 1950). These suppositions were quickly linked to the fundamentalist religious tradition in the United States (Rhodes 1960; Brown 1962). This early work noted that there was a deep psychological link between those who preferred authority and those who were drawn to conservative religious traditions.

More recent work has grappled with whether fundamentalist Christians are true authoritarians or if they are more accurate described as "authority-minded," which is as an "ideological commitment" rather than a "defective psychological trait" (Owen, Wald, and Hill 1991: 75). Authority mindedness is rooted in adherents' commitment to the proposition that there is ultimate authority and that true fulfillment in life can be found only in living under that authority. This approach to understanding authority is closely related to religious certainty (or religious dogmatism). Instead of being focused on the church's organizational structure, authority-mindedness helps adherents "avoid drowning in a sea of relativism, unpredictability, and change" (Owen, Wald, and Hill 1991: 88).

In testing their authority-minded hypothesis, Owen et al. find a great deal of slippage with a traditional measure of authoritarianism, which were centered on individual authority, rather than a more appropriate conception that would focus on conformity and order. For instance, when asked "Would you like to end up as Top Dog?" fundamentalists were less likely to say yes, reflecting a discomfort with individuals standing apart from the group. However, their own measure was still rooted in the measurement of individual certainty (1991: 87) rather than whether religion demands conformity, rigidity, and order. The importance in understanding and measuring religious authority would come to fore in the next two decades as two important religious movements shaped the landscape of American Christianity.

Without question, the greatest tectonic shift in the recent American religious landscape has been the rise of the Christian Right (Balmer 2007; Armstrong 2010). One of the most prominent understandings of the rise of the Religious Right is that it was the result of a coordinated mobilization effort by several charismatic televangelists who preached a conservative theology that made religious authority a central feature (Diamond 1999; Hadden and Shupe 1988; Hoffmann and Bartkowski 2008; Sherkat and Ellison 1997). However, while the movement attracted millions of followers, it also alienated a number of moderate Christians (Hout and Fischer 2002; Patrikios 2008; Djupe, Neiheisel, and Sokhey, 2017). Some of these disaffected Christians become a part of the growing number of "nones" (Djupe, Neiheisel, and Conger 2018; Burge 2020), while others joined together to create the emergent church movement (ECM), which offered a number of criticisms of conservative Christianity (Marti and Ganiel 2014). The emergent critique centered around the concept of objective truth and the interpretation of the Bible, both of which are deeply intertwined with religious authority. Instead of clearly defined leaders, the ECM advocated for a flat organizational structure (Jones 2011). In fact, Worthen writes, "Many emergent pastors seem to find the very notion of clergy slightly embarrassing" (2013, 256). Instead, the ECM places a great deal of emphasis on deliberation and discussion among all members of the religious community (Tickle 2012; Burge and Djupe 2015). Clearly, the nature of religious authority is a central concern of American Protestant Christianity.

While religious authority may have a tremendous effect on the way congregants view the concepts of conformity and truth, it is of consequence to the functioning and legitimization of the democratic process. A growing body of research has assessed the role that religious institutions play in encouraging or suppressing dialogue inside the local congregation (Djupe and Neiheisel 2007; Neiheisel, Djupe, and Sokhey 2009; Djupe and Olson 2013; Smith 2016). Some scholars have worried that the presence of religious leaders can lead to a reduction in true debate and an acceptance of the views held by those in authority (Button and Mattson 1999). If this is the case then religious communities are not giving congregants the cognitive skills necessary to engage in debate around contentious topics in more diverse environments that exist outside the church walls (Putnam and Campbell 2012; Bloom and Arikan 2012).

Moreover, Owen, Wald, and Hill describe this well when they write, "The passion for order… seems to have led conservative Evangelical leaders to a radical distrust of the very democratic processes they have become adept at using" (1991, 81). Scholars have noted that religion may serve as an impediment to the cultivation of democratic values, as it has frequently been related to political intolerance and prejudice toward outside groups (Lipset 1981; Gibson 1992; Hunsberger 1995). This has been portrayed as a value conflict as religiously devout members of democratic societies must choose to live under the authority of the church or the state, with democratic authority often taking a subordinate position (Alvarez and Brehm 1995).

Can a member of a religious community be taught to not question their divinely appointed clergy, but be able and willing to respect government officials who are selected through very deliberative and often contentious democratic processes? From another perspective, the answer is yes. Religious authority may reinforce secular authority through system justification (Jost et al. 2014). In this view, religion is evolutionary adaptive because it promotes stability of the social order by inducing complacency or even happiness with the status quo. If God is in control (e.g., Glazier 2015), events are ordained, and leaders are anointed (Djupe and Burge 2020), then those who rebel against the social order are rebelling against what God has instituted.

Despite the obvious importance of religious authority on the generation or continuation of democratic values, only a handful of studies have been undertaken which endeavor to measure religious authority in a systematic way. This paper proceeds by describing survey data collected from a sample of Christian clergy in 2014, the general population of religious affiliates in 2016, as well as of Protestants in 2019 that contain questions to delineate religious authority values (RAV). We will then compare how RAV relates to other measures of authority (e.g., child-rearing authority), as well as key democratic orientations, including deliberative values and democratic norms.

Data

Our data come from three separate surveys, both conducted online through the Qualtrics interface. The clergy data result from a 2014 survey of clergy invited by email to participate.[1] We obtained responses from United Methodist Church, Southern Baptist Convention, Reformed Church in America, Presbyterian Church (USA), and Greek Orthodox clergy, religious groups chosen in part by convenience and primarily because they covered a wide range of the Christian religious spectrum. This is clearly not a random sample of clergy, nor are the denominations/traditions present necessarily representative of the American religious population. What is useful about the sample, despite its limitations, is that appropriate questions were asked to gauge religious authority, authoritarianism, religious conservatism, and democratic norm commitment. Moreover, the sample includes considerable diversity of religious and political conservatism.[2] With appropriate controls, we can test with some confidence our hypotheses about the correlates of religious authority. On the other hand, we have little confidence that the descriptive statistics regarding the levels of religious authority can be generalized directly to a relevant population.[3] We will still display them, but they should not be taken as necessarily representative of the larger population of clergy.

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[1] Clergy were contacted to participate via their listed office email address. For the smaller denominations in our study – the Greek Orthodox and RCA – addresses were culled from publicly-available parish and denominational websites that listed this individual-level contact information. PCUSA clergy contact information were provided to the authors from the denomination's in-house research office. For the largest denominations in our study – the UMC and SBC – we relied on a commercially-generated email list from the vendor Exact Data, which maintains current congregational lists for a variety of US denominations. Each of the culling methods has drawbacks from the standpoint of representativeness, although it is not possible to determine exact sampling biases a priori. In each denominational case, we endeavored to use the total population of clergy with listed email addresses, which is a subset of the total clergy population in each denomination. In February, 2014, we emailed 16,740 survey invitations. Given missing data, we received somewhere between 375-411 valid responses depending on the question.

[2] There are few benchmarks available for comparison. One high quality study, the Cooperative Clergy Study (Smidt 2009), was a cooperative venture between a number of scholars to survey clergy in 10 Protestant denominations: Assemblies of God, Christian Reformed Church, Disciples of Christ, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, Presbyterian Church (USA), Reformed Church in America, Southern Baptist Convention, United Methodist Church, and Mennonite Church. A religious conservatism measure from the CCS with 7 likert (5 point) items has a mean of 4.1 (sd=1.0), while a comparable measure from our data has a mean of 3.6 (sd=1.1). That is, the distribution of religious conservatism in our data is more flat, including more moderates and liberals than the CCS. Our data are also symmetrically distributed in terms of partisanship (45 percent each Democrats and Republicans),

Analysis of the clergy survey allowed us to prune the measures needed to include in future batteries down to 3. In March 2016, we surveyed 1,000 citizens from Survey Sampling International's (SSI) online panel. The sample used quotas for Census region and gender distributions. Though technically a convenience sample, the descriptive statistics of the participants (see Table A1 in the Appendix) are largely representative of the national population. We also asked these items in a 2019 sample of 1,010 Protestants collected through Qualtrics Panels. Given that it was limited to Protestants, it is not representative of the nation, but has the useful quality of being drawn from the same side of American religion as the clergy sample.

Religious Authority Values (RAV) Measurement

The clergy survey contained a battery of questions that reflected an attempt to operationalize religious authority. Respondents were given a list of ten statements regarding their orientation toward adapting the organization and core beliefs to the congregation and to reach future members. Response options ranged from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree," and included a "neither agree nor disagree" option. These statements can be most accurately as "values" because each was phrased in terms of how the people and institutions should act. We used five items that tapped the flexibility of organizational commitments in order to maintain and grow the congregation. They included the

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whereas the CCS is somewhat more heavily Republican (55 percent). This is not to say that either is better, but is simply to say that there is considerable diversity in our sample and moreover that the two samples are not radically different from each other.

[3] Outside of community studies (e.g., the Northern California clergy study of Stark et al. 1971), clergy studies have never been generalizable to the population of clergy because of the difficulties of defining the sampling frame of clergy relative to the population. Instead, researchers have sampled within denominations, given occasional access to their lists.

following statements: (Organization:) The more clergy can step out of the way of the congregation the better; It is important for the congregation to construct their own salvation; (Belief:) The Gospel is what the congregation makes of it; I believe there are many valid interpretations of the Bible; and (Outreach:) The church must adapt to a postmodern culture in order to spread the Gospel. In total there were 387 clergy respondents who completed this religious authority values (RAV) battery, and the five items hang together reasonably well as an index (α=.66). The scale ranges from 1-5 (higher values indicating a higher opinion of authority, collapsed to 0-1 for analysis) and values spanned nearly the entire range.

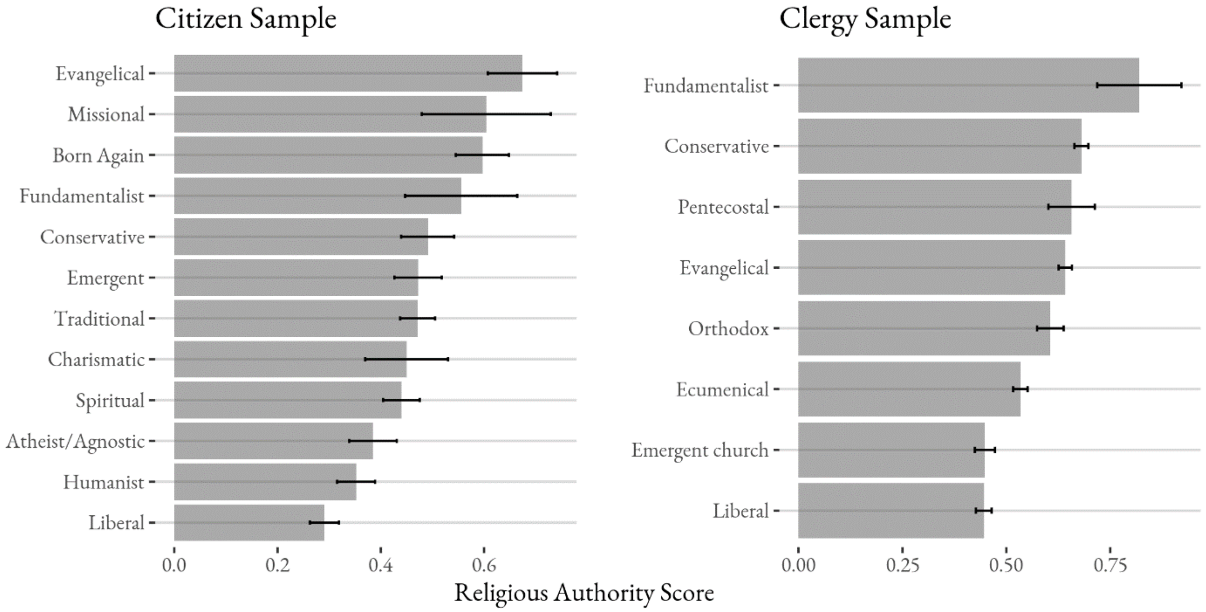
Due to space considerations, we condensed the question set included in the 2016 and 2019 citizen surveys. We asked for their agreement with three statements at the core of the clergy battery: Religious truth is what the congregation makes of it; Religion needs to adapt to the modern culture in order to gain and keep members; and Religion needs to adapt to the modern culture in order to be relevant. Coded so that commitment to authority (disagreement with these statements) is high, the items scaled well (α=.83 in 2016, α=.80 in 2019 among Protestants), and covered the entire range of the scale from 1-5 (collapsed to 0-1 for analysis).

Descriptive Results

In order to properly situate this measure of RAV, it is helpful to understand how the measurement exists in relation to well understood religious identifiers. The clergy and citizen surveys afforded respondents the opportunity to indicate how they identified themselves religiously. The question was posed, “Admittedly, few people like labels, but would you use any of the following to describe your religious faith?” Respondents were given a number of labeling options, indicated in Figure 1, which displays how religious label identifiers scored on RAV.

In the 2016 citizen sample (left panel), religious authority is most common among self-described evangelical and born-again respondents. Their levels are twice as high (above .6) as those who identify as liberal (.3). Also on the low end of the scale are those who identify as humanist and agnostic. The number of cases is very small for some categories, which helps explain the moderate level of authority expressed by fundamentalist identifiers. In the clergy sample (right panel), those who chose the label "emerging church" scored lower on the scale along with liberal identifiers, while fundamentalists anchor the high end. It makes sense that evangelicals score no differently than Pentecostals, who do not differ from conservatives. It is interesting to note as well that those who see themselves as "orthodox" indicated a level of religious authority (3.42) that is not statistically different than the overall median for RAV (3.36), a finding that supports the notion that orthodoxy is neither biased toward or against religious authority.[4]

Figure 1 – Religious Authority Scores by Religious Groups Identities, Clergy and Citizen Samples



Sources: 2014 Clergy Sample and 2016 Citizen Sample.

Note: Comparison of any two confidence intervals is the equivalent of a 90% test (p=.10) at the point of overlap.

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[4] As a check of measurement validity, both RAV and religious conservatism were correlated with each of the ten possible response items, the results of this analysis can be found in Appendix Table A2.

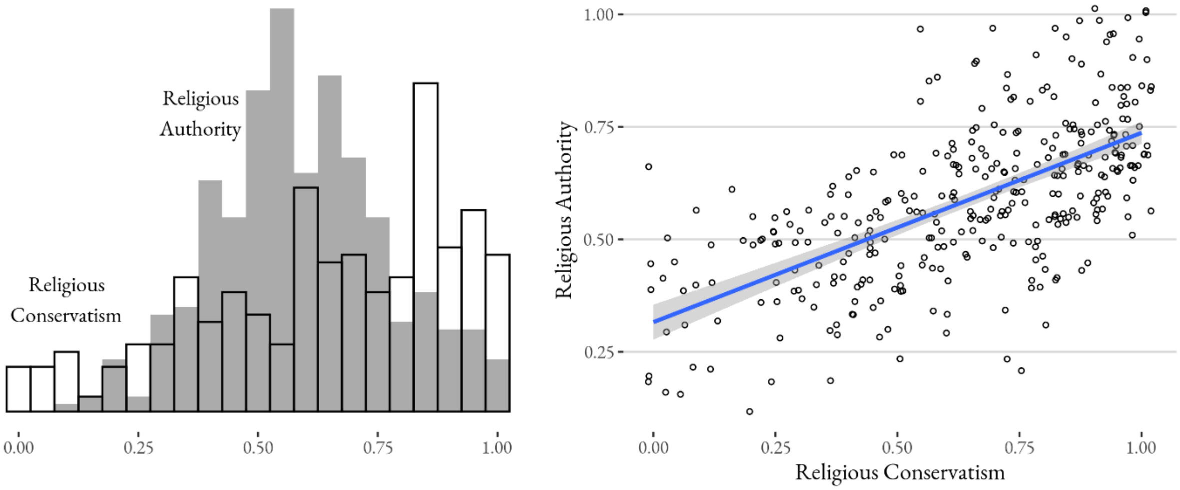
Next, we compare RAV scores among clergy to an index of religious conservatism, constructed along the lines of a vast amount of previous research (e.g., Leege and Kellstedt 1993; Kellstedt et al. 1994; Guth et al. 1997). These items included biblical literalism, the virgin birth, a belief in Satan, and a complementary view of gender roles (for full question wording see the Appendix), which were summed to generate a scale of conservative religious belief (α=.92). To begin to understand how these two scales are related, we show both a histogram as well as a scatterplot, which are presented in Figure 2. While there are some similarities between the two measures, there is a significant difference between the distributions of the two scales. While the largest concentration of the sample falls between .4 and .6 on religious authority, most clergy in this sample show considerable religious conservatism (>.8). While just 15% scored a .8 or higher on RAV, over 44% of clergy scored above .8 on religious conservatism. There is some clearly some independence between the two scales.

There is little doubt that there is a positive relationship between religious authority and conservative theology, which the scatterplot shows. However, there is a great deal of heterogeneity in the sample on these measures – there is a near constant amount of variation around the slope that occupies about 40% of the scale throughout the range of religious conservatism.

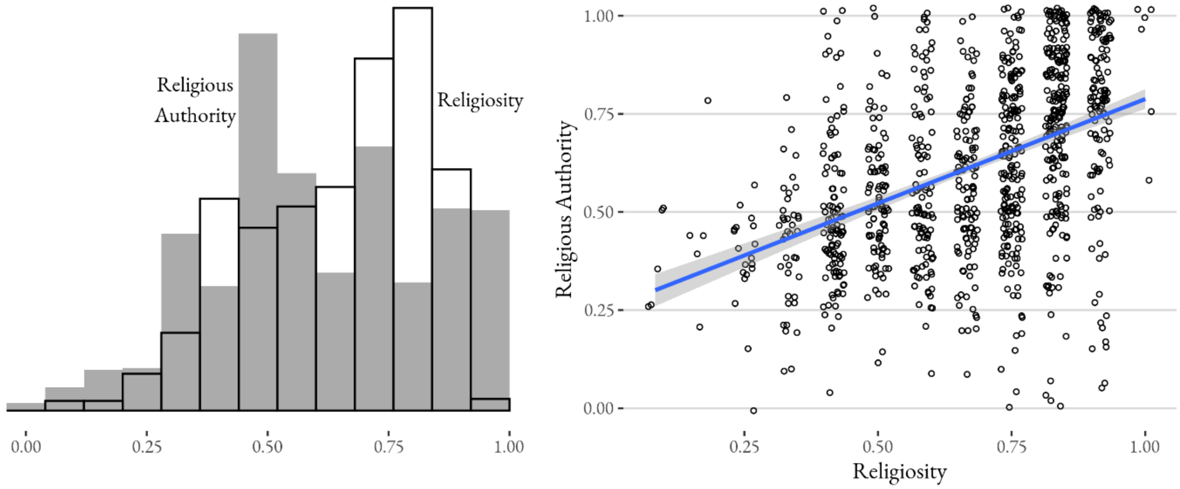
The bottom row of Figure 2 shows the same information for Protestant citizens (2019), though using a religiosity scale instead of religious conservatism. This is a high-religiosity sample, but there is considerable variation in the religious authority that comes with it. And as we would expect, the relationship between the two measures is less clean among citizens, even devout ones. It is positive so that those who display more religiosity also report more religious authority, but we can find every possible combination of the two in the sample, from those with low religiosity and high authority to those with high religiosity and little religious authority.

Figure 2 – Distribution of Religious Authority By Religious Conservatism and Religiosity

Clergy Sample



Protestant Citizen Sample



This quick analysis indicates that those who are theologically conservative and observant also value religious authority at higher rates, which flows logically from the understood positions of evangelical Protestants, who largely agree on questions such as biblical inerrancy. However, there is a significant degree of pluralism in religious authority models across the range of religiosity and religious conservatism.

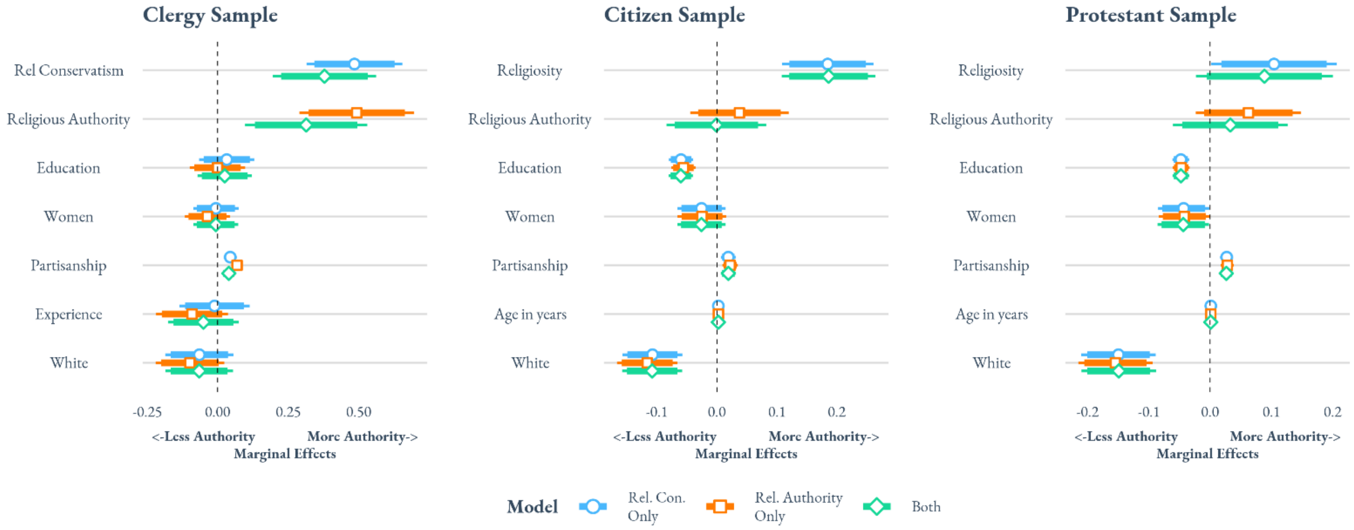
Religious Authority and Secular Authoritarianism

We begin with a direct test of the association between religious authority and authority-mindedness. Authoritarianism is a concept that has long been explored in the field of psychology with research going back to the 1930's identifying an authoritarian disposition and its link to political orientations (Lasswell 1930; Smith 1958). Perhaps the most succinct definition of this concept is "the balance between group authority and uniformity and individual autonomy and diversity" (Stenner 2005, 14). The role that authoritarianism plays is one of the crucial tensions that society wrestles with, "(a) basic human dilemma…common to all mankind" (Duckitt 1989, 72).

The measurement of this concept has a long and varied history in the psychology literature, with a number of different operational strategies being employed. The earliest appearance of authoritarian measurement was included as part of the F-Scale, which attempted to assess the building blocks of an individual's personality (Adorno 1950). One of the questions touched on parental values for children reading, "Obedience and respect for authority are the most important virtues children should learn." Subsequent research built upon the theme of child-rearing values (Kohn 1977), believing that, "How to 'bring up' children…is a matter of profound consequences" (Martin 1964, 86). Subsequently, the use of child rearing measures to operationalize the concept of authoritarianism has been widely employed (e.g., Feldman and Stenner 1997; Stenner 2005; Hetherington and Weiler 2009). Previous work has indicated that while conservatism is typically strongly correlated with increased levels of authoritarian child rearing, the relationship is complex (Stenner 2005). For example, some work has concluded that conservative Protestants are more willing to use corporal punishment as a way to discipline their children (Ellison and Sherkat 1993; Ellison et al. 1996), while other research has indicated that evangelical fathers spend more quality time with their children, and also express more physical affection (Wilcox 1998, 2002). One expectation is that emphasizing religious authority in a religious context may lead religious individuals to desire their children to respect their elders and seek to conform to the larger culture. But if religious authority is to be useful for social science, then it needs to be independent of secular authority-mindedness.

Following in the footsteps of previous scholarship (e.g., Feldman and Stenner 1997; Stenner 2005), the survey asked subjects a number of questions in relation to what values they desired for their own children. Respondents were read the following statement, “Although there are a number of qualities that people feel children should have, every person thinks that some are more important than others. Below are pairs of desirable qualities. Please tell me which one you think is more important for children to have.” The three response pairs were: independence or respect for elders, curiosity or good manners, being considerate or well-behaved. The three response items were combined to create a scale that ranged from 0 to 1 (α=.61 for clergy, α=.61 for citizens, and α=.65 for Protestants), with higher values indicating a more authoritarian approach to child rearing (clergy *mean* = .37, *s.d.*= .33; citizen *mean* = .55, *s.d.*= .33; Protestant *mean* = .65, *s.d.*= .31).

Figure 3 – OLS Estimates of Authoritarian Child-Rearing Values – Clergy and Citizen Samples



Sources: 2014 Clergy Sample; 2016 Citizen Sample; 2019 Protestant Sample.

Note: Confidence intervals are 95% (thin line) and 90% (thicker line).

In order to understand how a traditional measure of religious conservatism is related to religious authority, a linear regression was estimated using child rearing values as the dependent variable. A number of control variables were included that assessed a respondent's years of ministry experience (age for citizens), education level, gender, as well as their partisanship (full question wording is available in the Appendix)[5]. Estimates from three models are displayed graphically in Figure 4 – the first includes just conservative theology, the second has the religious authority values measure, and the final model includes both of these independent variables as a way to see how the two measurements interact (see Appendix Table A3 for the coefficients). If they are highly correlated, then the estimates will shift with the specification. Confidence intervals (90% thick line, and 95% thin line) that do not overlap with the vertical line at zero value indicate which variables have a statistically significant effect.

In their individual models using the clergy sample, both religious authority and religious conservatism reach statistical significance and are signed positively, indicating a desire to raise children in a more authoritarian manner. The third model, which included both variables, RAV and religious conservatism maintain statistical significance and are positively signed in the direction of seeking to raise children to be more obedient.

This is manifestly not the pattern we see in either citizen sample, where religiosity is positively and significantly linked to child rearing authority, while RAV is not, regardless of the presence of religiosity in the model. Religiosity also slips to insignificance in the full model using the Protestant sample. These are important results because they suggest the independence of the particular religious form of authority from other dimensions of society where authority may be prized. If they were highly linked, that would indicate that one, comprehensive measure of authoritarianism would suffice. This may in fact be true for clergy, who appear to see the structure of the church as inherently linked with parenting styles, suggesting that maintenance of the social order hinges on sustaining rightful authority across social institutions. But it does not appear to be true for citizens – for them religious authority is distinct from the child-rearing form.

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[5] All variables, including IVs, DVs, and control variables were scaled from 0 to 1 in order to ease comparison of magnitude between coefficients.

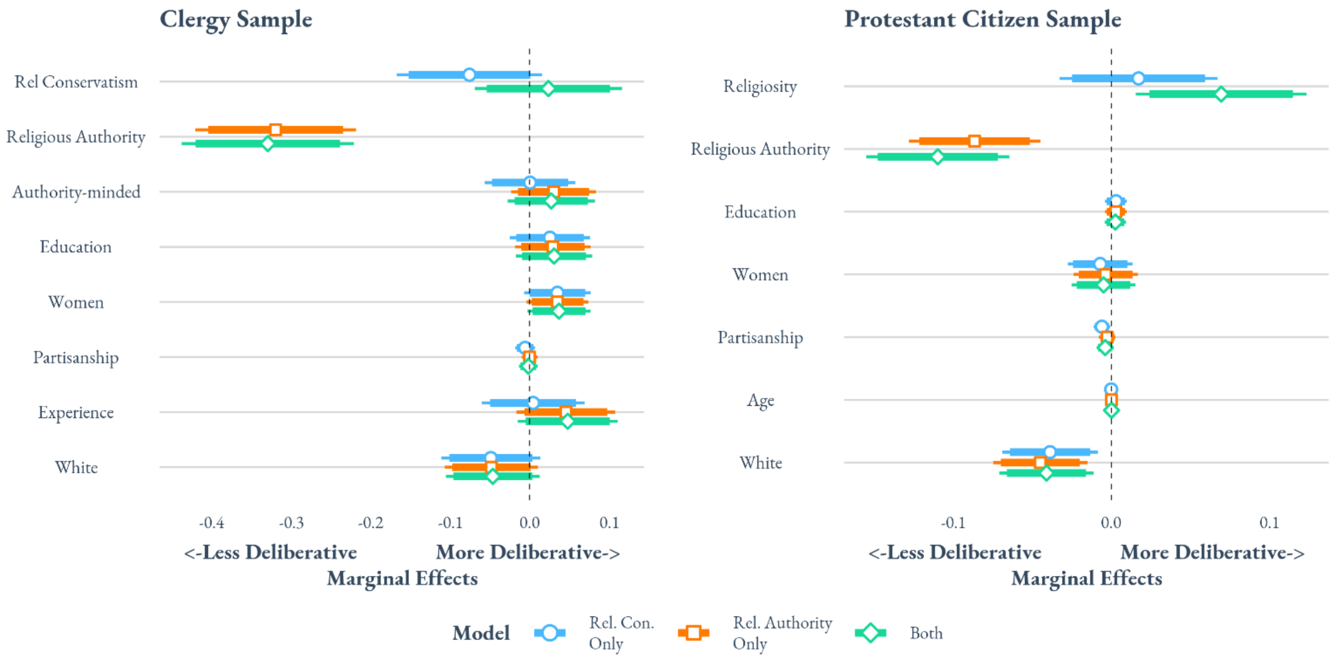
Religious Authority and Deliberative Values

A fruitful place to begin a look at how religious authority structures social life is inside the congregation. A growing amount of social science literature has indicated that religious environments provide opportunities for individuals to engage in dialogue about important theological and political issues on the national stage (Shields 2007), at the denominational level (Wood and Bloch 1995), as well as in the local congregation (Djupe and Neiheisel 2007; Djupe and Olson 2013). In addition, clergy have the variable ability to help frame the types of discussions that occur in the church context, by highlighting arguments for and against a position (Djupe and Calfano 2012). At least at the congregational level, previous work has found that weaker commitment to deliberative values and practices in conservative churches, though none of it has explicitly considered the role of religious authority. If a pastor is seen as the "expert" on religious matters, as mentioned above, then deliberation would be fruitless or even counterproductive as the goal would not be about sharing differing viewpoints to inform opinions, but rather the presentation of the right view to set opinions and beliefs. We suspect that religious authority is the crucial consideration structuring support for deliberation in the congregation.

In order to assess this relationship, clergy were asked a series of five statements (wording can be found in the appendix) that were prefaced with the following question: Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about any adult forums that would be held in your church to address social or political issues? One example was, "It would be essential for participants to learn how to talk through their differences." These five response items, based on general principles of deliberation used in previous research (Barabas 2004), were summed into a deliberative practices variable (Neiheisel, Djupe, and Sokhey 2009) that creates a statistically valid scale (for the clergy α=.73; for the Protestant sample α=.76). This scale then became the dependent variable in a regression analysis using the same modeling strategy from the previous analysis.

The regression model estimates from three models for clergy and citizens are displayed graphically in Figure 4 – the first includes just conservative theology (religiosity for citizens), the second has the religious authority values measure, and the final model includes both independent variables as a way to see how the two measurements relate to each other in a single model (see Appendix Table A4 for the coefficients).

Figure 4 – Association of Religious Authority with Deliberative Values in Congregational Affairs (OLS)



Sources: 2014 Clergy Sample; 2019 Protestant Sample.

Note: Confidence intervals are 95% (thin line) and 90% (thicker line).

In both the first and second model for clergy, conservative theology and RAV have statistically significant (only at the 90% level for conservative theology) relationships linked to lower deliberative values, although the magnitude is much larger for RAV. For instance, an individual clergyperson who went from the lowest value on the RAV scale to the highest would be nearly 50% less supportive of deliberative values. Under the same conditions, an individual moving from the most religiously liberal to the most religiously conservative would only become 15% less supportive of deliberative values. In the final model with both variables included, conservative theology fails to reach statistical significance, while RAV is clearly significant and gains strength.

The citizen sample reinforces the power of religious authority – higher RAV scores entail less support for deliberation in the congregation. The effect is not as dramatic as it is for clergy, but those with the highest religious authority report about 11 percent less deliberation intent in their congregations. On the other hand, religiosity has no effect by itself, and once we control for religious authority, the effect of religiosity is positive and significant, predicting a greater degree of deliberation. It is no surprise that those engaged would think that congregational life was more inclusive (see also Bloom and Arikan 2013; Neiheisel, Djupe, and Sokhey 2009), but the relationship would not otherwise be discoverable given the association of religiosity with religious authority.

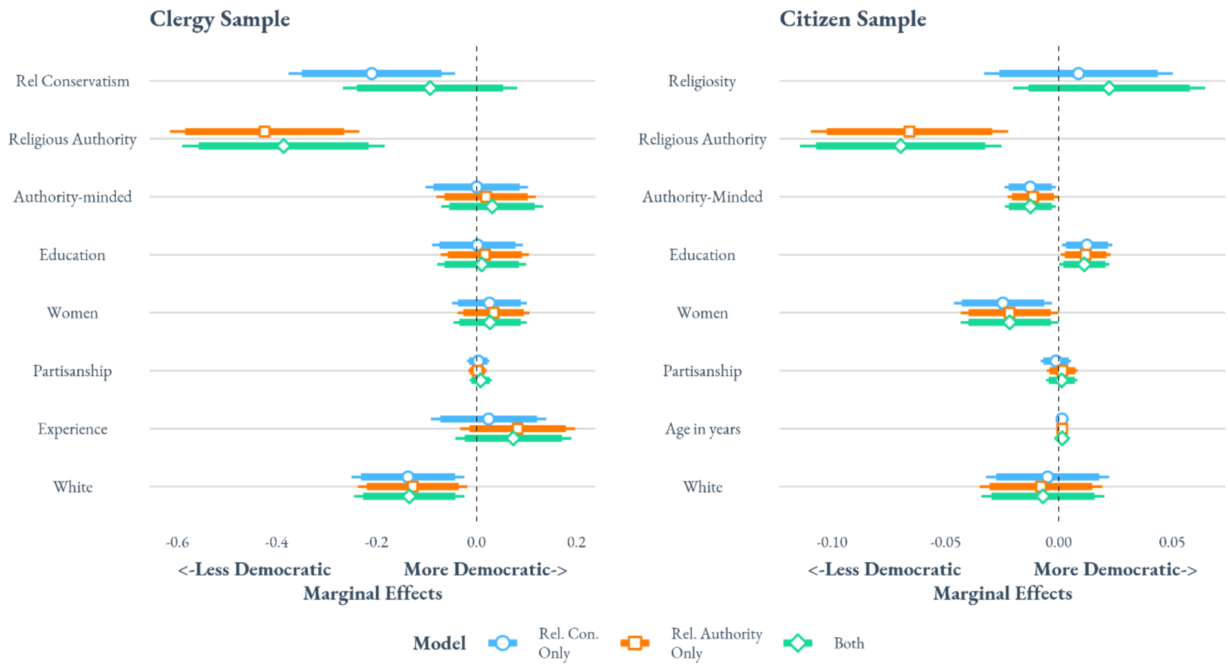
Religious Authority and Democratic Norms

Finally, we turn now to the concept of democratic norms, which underpin how individuals feel about the fundamental aspects of democracy, including openness to opposition and free speech (Prothro and Grigg 1960; McCloskey 1964). Previous literature has indicated that churches are especially capable of helping congregants construct a worldview, not just in a religious context but in all aspects of society (Wald, Owen, and Hill 1988), through a combination of intentional messaging as well as formative experiences through small group activities (Wuthnow 1996) and informal interactions that take place among church members (Djupe and Gilbert 2009). These exposures subtly push church-goers to consider their role, as well as the place of the church, in a democratic society. If "churches can be considered microcultures that showcase the promise and perils of democracy" (Djupe and Calfano 2012: 95), then they way that authority is structured is tremendously important to how individuals perceive the requisites of democracy in the larger environment.

We constructed a scale using four questions that have been used in previous research (Arceneaux 2008) that assessed how supportive clergy and citizens were of democratic norms (Djupe and Calfano 2012 – full question wording can be found in the Appendix). Each subject was given four response options ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. These four items were combined into a scale that hangs together well (α=.79 for clergy; α=.73 for citizens) and finds modest support (*mean*= .62, *s.d.* = .25 for clergy; *mean*= .69, *s.d.* = .17 for citizens). As in the previous models, this scale of democratic norms then became the dependent variable in a linear regression, the results of which are graphically displayed in Figure 5.

We used the methodological approach that was employed previously (see Table A5 for the coefficients). In both the first and second models among clergy religious conservatism and RAV predict lower levels of democratic norms, however the magnitude of the effect for RAV is twice that of religious conservatism. The finding that religious conservatism drives down democratic norms supports previous descriptions of the theological conservatives and their overall reluctance to listen to alternative points of view (e.g., Sherkat and Ellison 1997), but this finding shifts in the full model. When both religious conservatism and religious authority are included in a single model, religious conservatism does not achieve statistical significance, while RAV both maintains significance at the $p<.05$ level and the previous effect size. The overall magnitude of RAV's effect is substantial with an individual clergyperson moving from the lowest level of RAV to the highest becoming 25% less supportive of democratic norms. This finding, taken together with the previous discussion of deliberative values provides strong evidence that, while religious authority is in some ways conceptually similar to traditional measures of religious conservatism, there is an additional component that is essential to consider separately.

Figure 5 – Association of Religious Authority with Democratic Norms (OLS)



Sources: 2014 Clergy Sample; 2016 Citizen Sample.

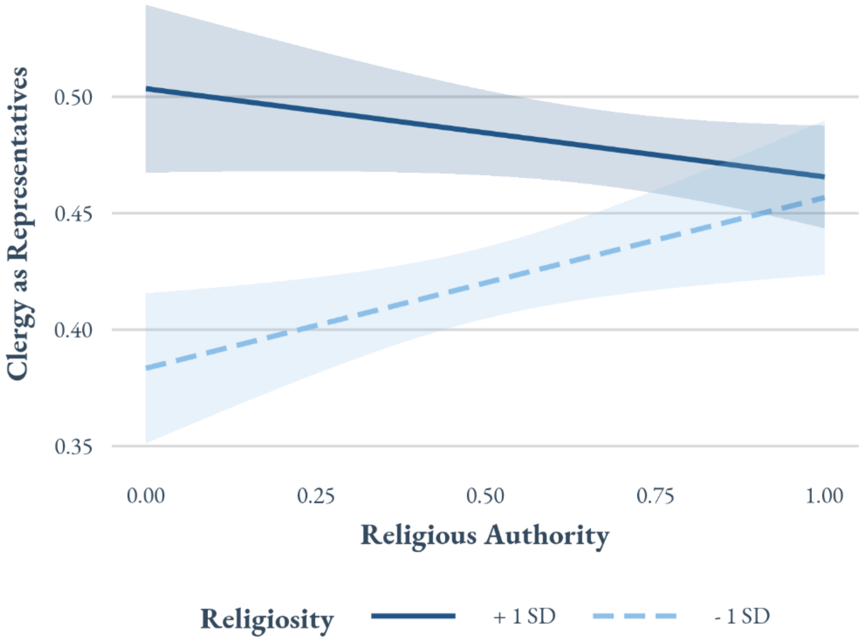
Note: Confidence intervals are 95% (thin line) and 90% (thicker line).

The citizen sample models tell a similar story about religious authority. In both models, with and without religiosity, greater RAV is linked to less support for democratic norms. In contrast, religiosity has no effect on democratic norms in either model. Notably, the magnitude of the RAV effect is much reduced from the clergy model – it's about a quarter of the size. There are two likely reasons why. First, clergy are often quite educated and sophisticated in their thinking about politics – several sources consider them elites (e.g., Guth et al. 1997; Djupe et al. 2016) – and the consistency of their worldviews bears this out. Second, religious authority, specifically, should have a stronger effect for clergy since the congregation is the center of their worlds. The weaker effect among citizens suggests that religion is just one institution among many in their lives, such as the family and work. This interpretation might also help explain why child-rearing authority is linked to less democratic norm support among citizens but not among clergy.

Discussion

Since RAV is linked to less democratic orientations, it is easy to assume that those high in religious authority would be more reliant on religious leadership. That is, they would be more likely to see their religious leaders as their representatives. Adopting three measures used in prior research (Djupe, Burge, and Calfano 2016), we assessed whether RAV is linked to a clergy representative index using the same basic model used in earlier analyses and the Protestant sample (see Table A6). The results in Figure 6 show a significant interaction between religiosity and RAV, suggesting there are multiple routes to relying on clergy as representatives. In one route (solid line), involvement in the congregation is high and religious authority levels are immaterial. In the other path, higher religious authority scores absent high involvement drive up reliance on clergy (dashed line). Put another way, religiosity and religious authority can substitute for each other, with both experience and ideation promoting clergy as political representation.

Figure 6 – The Complimentary Roles of Religious Authority and Religiosity on Views of Clergy as Political Representatives



Source: 2019 Protestant Sample.

Note: Comparison of any two confidence intervals displayed are the equivalent of a 90% (*p*=.10) test at the point of overlap.

Conclusion

In this paper, we introduced a new measure of religious authority meant to disentangle what has long been presumed to be a part of conservative religious worldviews. Research over the decades has used any number of proxies for religious authority, including secular as well as religious measures, providing error-prone estimates and surely weaker than true effects of the phenomenon. Reinforcing that view, our results suggest that religious conservatism and high religiosity are only modestly correlated with our measure of religious authority and have generally independent effects on variables of interest.

We focused on democratic concepts in part because the tension between religious and secular authority is a key concern about the place of religion in modern democracies (e.g., Stepan

2000). It is the question asked of every single candidate with a religious minority affiliation – can they set aside the dictates of their faith and loyally serve secular authority, such as the US Constitution and democratic government. Supporting democratic institutions and processes may be particularly hard for those high in religious authority since the outcomes are not pre-ordained nor guaranteed to reach the "right" conclusion. The results suggest that that this classic tension is founded – those with higher religious authority scores are less likely to inhabit deliberative environments, less supportive of democratic norms, and more supportive of religious leaders for political information and leadership.

There are a number of lines open for investigation regarding the prediction of religious authority and its effects on social and political phenomena. It is important to understand the degree to which RAV is dispositional and can be transported from place to place and whether RAV is shaped by contextual forces. For instance, do individuals augment religious authority when other sources of authority are disappointing or unrepresentative? To what degree does the quality of clergy leadership and congregational polity affect religious authority? We recommend further work building from Cassese and Holman's (2017) work on gendered religious authority toward other groups and with the new measurement of the concept developed in this paper.

Religious authority measures should be transported into other subfields in religion and politics. For example, the work in the field of religion and political tolerance has largely focused on literalism as the primary measure of religious closed-mindedness (Wilcox and Jelen 1990; Eisenstein 2006; Burge 2013). Religious authority is a more direct measure of that concept and may illuminate a more nuanced understanding of the linkage between religious belief and political tolerance.

Moreover, religious authority may act as a key intervening variable that shapes the uptake of communication from religious sources. Are those who score high on religious authority more susceptible to persuasive communication? This is a particularly important question to ask since it may help disambiguate religious effects – religiosity helps expose people to communication, while religious authority may motivate adoption of that communication. Along these lines, in experimental studies of religious communication where exposure is controlled, we would expect effects to be conditioned by religious authority.

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