


ARTICLE

Holy day surveys and political attitudes in Israel

Hannah M. Ridge 

Political Science, Chapman University, Orange, CA, USA

Email: haridge@chapman.edu

Abstract

Researchers regularly use large survey studies to examine public political opinion. Surveys running over days and months will necessarily incorporate religious occasions that can introduce variation in public opinion. Using recent survey data from Israel, this study demonstrates that giving surveys on religious occasions (e.g., the Sabbath, Hannukah, Sukkot) can elicit different opinion responses. These effects are found among both religious and non-religious respondents. While incorporating these fluctuations is realistic in longer-term surveys, surveys fielded in a short window inadvertently drawing heavily on a holiday or holy day sample may bias their findings. This study thus urges researchers to be cognizant of ambient religious context when conducting survey studies.

Keywords: public opinion; Judaism; surveys; liberalism; Sabbath

Introduction

Globally, the religious-engaged population is increasing (Pew Research Center, 2022). At the same, many countries in the Global North, including the United States, have seen rising “unaffiliated” and non-practicing populations (Pew Research Center, 2022; Smith *et al.*, 2024). Scholars argue that religious and non-religious citizens view each other with skepticism and political mistrust, including projecting socio-political beliefs onto citizens and candidates based on their (non-)religiosity (Castle *et al.*, 2017; Moore-Berg *et al.*, 2020; Golebiowska, 2024). These population parameters set the stage for tremendous social division both within countries and across global regions.

While researchers may have questioned religion’s enduring role in politics and society, it has substantial effects (Perry, 2023). Religion and religiosity have been strongly linked to political beliefs and behaviors. Religion and religiosity predict vote choice and issue positions (Zaller, 1992; Manza and Wright, 2003; Layman and Carmines, 2019). The high and low ebbs in religiosity, across people and across time, merit attention in politics research across domains.

Religion is out there in the world, but it is more salient on some days than others. Holy occasions, like Ramadan, have been used to identify religiosity effects by specifically considering the temporal variation in religion’s salience. However, if researchers are not intentionally invoking the religious occasion, they may introduce bias into

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their survey estimates, particularly in quick-burst survey studies. A long-run survey should incorporate religious-occasion-based fluctuations in opinion in order to capture public opinion. However, short-term surveys inadvertently drawing heavily on these occasions may reflect the religious atmosphere disproportionately to the general pattern.

This study considers the empirical challenge introduced in non-experimental studies by common ambient religious cues. Random selection for a nationally representative survey on the Sabbath, for instance, constitutes a subsample experiencing greater religious salience. This article looks at a variety of political attitudes from the 2016 European Social Survey (ESS) in Israel to identify a religious salience effect on measured political attitudes.

Unsurprisingly, religiosity impacts policy preferences for many citizens. The timing of the survey—whether it takes place on the Sabbath or overlaps with a holiday—also impacts citizens' expressed beliefs in some cases. Citizens are naturally more aware of religion on a religious occasion, particularly if they participate themselves, if their location mandates social observance, or if religious occasions permeate the environment. Furthermore, the opinion differences between religious and non-religious respondents were often greater on the Sabbath. Far from being exempt from the effects of a religious occasion, the non-religious occasionally exhibited *greater* differences between the Sabbath and non-Sabbath days than religious respondents.

These results suggest that scholars of public opinion should be cognizant of the socio-cultural context in which their subjects are operating. The context, which is itself changing throughout the week and the year, can make religio-cultural elements more or less salient. This changing salience could drive differences in response patterns. Furthermore, these ambient religious cues could generate heterogeneous effects for more or less religious respondents. One group may be affected more than the other, or they could have divergent or convergent changes in opinion due to the changed social environment. While intentional exploitation of the temporal variation is useful to researchers seeking a religious prime, unintentional holy occasion measurement can skew researchers' evaluations. This study also demonstrates the importance of examining the less religious or unaffiliated respondents in considerations of religion in politics, not just the strong group identifiers or active members.

Holy day surveys

Prior research has utilized religious events during surveys as exogenous religion primes, including a few studies of "Sabbath" days. Brooke *et al.* (2023) uses "Friday effects" in the Arab world to study exclusionary attitudes toward religious minorities. They find that Arabs who took the surveys on the Friday—when Muslims typically pray the noon prayer communally and hear a sermon—expressed more exclusionary attitudes. This effect was driven by frequent mosque attenders; those who attended less often were largely not distinguished in their exclusionary attitudes from those who took the Arab Barometer survey on other days. Fridays have also been associated with protests in the Arab world because the religious services provide a focal point; this pattern has been exploited by researchers studying protest efficacy (Butcher and Pinckney, 2022).

Surveys have examined heterogeneous effects of the Christian Sabbath.¹ Sunday Sabbaths have been used to study the effect of religion on crime and alcohol

consumption rates. Moreno-Medina (2023) exploits quasi-random variation in the number of Sundays per month to identify a Sabbath effect on behavior, while Gruber and Hungerman (2008) examine the discontinuity induced by changing Sunday Blue Laws. Sundays have been associated with increased political participation in sub-Saharan Africa because of religious service attendance and sermon content (McClendon and Riedl, 2015). These Sabbath studies are exploiting religious salience to measure an effect of religion on behaviors in society. However, if researchers desire a general measurement of attitudes or preferences, then temporal variation in ambient religious cuing is a confounding factor of which they must be cognizant.

Major religious holidays have also been used as ambient religious cues to study the effects of religion. Ramadan is a lunar month of heightened religious observance in the form of prayer and fasting. Some governments require their citizens to (pretend to) observe the Ramadan fast (Ridge, 2019). Ramadan has substantial effects on economic development, health, and happiness in the Muslim world (Kuran, 2018). Another holiday, Ashura, which commemorates the martyrdom of Hussein, has been used. Studies examine religious influences on public mood and optimism (Al-Ississ, 2015; Campante and Yanagizawa-Drott, 2015), sense of economic status and stability (Akay *et al.*, 2013), risk tolerance (Lai and Windawati, 2017), and cooperation and willingness to punish defectors (Akay *et al.*, 2015). Another study examined the influence of Easter on propensity to commit crime and found no effect (Heaton, 2006). It is well-established, then, that religious occasions can transform individuals' thought and action patterns both in the long- and short-term. Survey study design should account for that possibility.

In Jewish tradition, the Sabbath starts Friday in the afternoon or evening—just before sunset—and continues through Saturday sunset. Observant Jews refrain from work, which is very broadly defined (e.g., carrying anything, writing, turning on lights). Sabbath-related tasks, such as pre-cooking meals, shopping, and setting automatic timers, are done before the Sabbath starts. In Israel, most shops are closed, and public transport shuts down. Israeli national labor laws require a period of consecutive non-work hours, theoretically covering the Sabbath, for employees. Local labor regulations may (not) exist or be enforced to mandate that businesses close.² The issue is subject to political debate (Newman, 2015). The Friday to Saturday Sabbath and the attendant preparations would nonetheless be highly visible in Israel, even for non-observant Jews and religious minorities.

The Sabbath in Israel has been previously analyzed for some exogenous—if not necessarily religion-specific—variations. For instance, Romem and Shurtz (2016) use it to demonstrate a connection between traffic volume and road accidents. Anson and Anson (2001) demonstrate lower rates of all-cause mortality on the Sabbath for Israeli Jews; they do not find a holiday effect or an effect among non-Jews.

The Sabbath could make citizens' Jewish identity more salient. In Israel, the Jewish identity is inextricably linked to some political beliefs, especially those related to the Jewish character of the state. The Sabbath or services could highlight specific values. By bringing religion to the forefront of the mind, either by highlighting the individual's own religion and observance propensity or by reminding him he is in a state defined by religion, the Sabbath is pertinent. If the political attitudes are not impacted by religion or they are somehow fixed, then asking on a religious day would not

matter. If the responses are impacted, at least in part, by what is front of mind, then Sabbath effects would occur (Zaller, 1992). Bringing religion to the front of the mind could then change the role religion has in shaping political beliefs. While researchers may choose to intentionally exploit that process, the temporal shift in salience and opinions is something of which all designers should be aware—arguably most pertinently for those *not* intentionally exploiting the variation.

Although everyone is “treated” insofar as the Sabbath is happening around everyone, its import may not be equal across respondents. Jewish Israelis may be ethnically or culturally Jewish without being religious (Yadgar, 2020); Jewish law does not exclude “lapsed” members, so it is customary to maintain the “belonging” identification even without “behaving” or even “believing.” Those who identify as secular could theoretically not react to a religious occasion; for instance, they may not be aware of that week’s Torah portion. However, they could react to the social prevalence of religion and its socio-political importance, which would be made salient by the general observance of the occasion. For instance, they could be aware of secular Jews’ relative political power compared to more religiously conservative Jews, reminded of the increasing size of the religious population, or frustrated by the shuttering of secular activities. Thus, we can look both for a direct religious cue effect *and* for heterogeneous effects. Salient religiosity may cause divergences between religious and secular Jewish Israelis. To the extent that the collective participation or content of the services would inform opinions, these effects would reasonably be concentrated in the participatory or devout population. Ambient religiosity effects need not be so confined.

This is a test case. It is useful because of the temporal span of available data and the sizeable secular population, which permits examination of heterogeneous effects. However, it is not postulated that heterogeneous effects of the Sabbath or religiosity are unique to Israel or Judaism. Ambient religion effects can occur among Jewish minority populations or majority religions in other countries as well.

Materials and methods

This analysis draws on the Israel surveys in Wave 8 (2016) of the ESS. Per the ESS data portal, “The survey involves strict random probability sampling, a minimum target response rate of 70% and rigorous translation protocols. The hour-long face-to-face interview includes questions on a variety of core topics repeated from previous rounds of the survey and also two modules developed for Round 8 covering Public Attitudes to Climate Change, Energy Security, and Energy Preferences and Welfare Attitudes in a Changing Europe.” The Israel surveys were conducted between September 2016 and February 2017.

After randomized selection of addresses, members of the survey team were permitted to use their judgement in timing the (re)contacting of households with the instruction that visits should be distributed along the days and times. Haredi (ultra-orthodox) neighborhoods were not excluded or treated differently for random assignment. A representative of the survey team noted that surveys on the Friday and Saturday would likely have occurred in the lead-up to sunset on Friday and after sundown on Saturday to avoid bothering people *during* observance (Irit Adler, personal correspondence, September 27–28, 2022).³ Also, the survey researchers were

permitted to follow the work restrictions. Still, the interviews would be temporally proximal to the Sabbath preparations and observances. Thus, this is more a question of the religious prime that the Sabbath represents rather than a selection effect from who is or is not in the synagogue during the window or not being allowed by religious law to conduct or participate in a survey.⁴ In total, 78.5% of the surveys were conducted in Hebrew, which even surpasses the Jewish share of the survey sample. In total, 20.5% were conducted in Arabic; the rest were conducted in Russian.

The analysis includes those who identified as Jewish Israelis (76.0% of the Israel sample). Most of the non-Jewish Israelis were Muslim; members of other religions were grouped together for anonymity. Although Friday mosque attendance is temporally proximal to the Jewish Sabbath, these groups are fundamentally distinct for Israeli politics. As such, non-Jewish respondents are excluded from the presented analysis. Future research can concentrate on effects among religious minorities.

The key independent variable is the day of the week on which the survey was conducted. The ESS Data Protocol specifies they conducted surveys on the weekends, since the law permits this.⁵ In fact, instructions for contacting the randomly selected households in each sampling unit required that some recontacts occur on a weekend and some occur in the evening. Thus, the sample includes some Sabbath surveys by Jewish Israelis (5.2% of Jewish respondents; $n = 101$).⁶ Importantly, “it is plausibly exogenous to likely confounders” (Brooke *et al.*, 2023).

The random assignment and exogeneity are evident in considering respondents’ likelihood of assignment to “treatment.” Several demographic characteristics are considered (Table 1). Gender, tertiary education, life satisfaction, economic satisfaction, and employment status were not significant predictors of assignment to Sabbath survey treatment. While Sabbath service attendance was not a significant predictor of participation, the other two indicators of religiosity related to a slightly increased likelihood of taking a Sabbath survey. Given these findings, scholars might treat the date as random assignment to treatment, but accounting for these demographics could still improve opinion estimation and control for potential imbalances during randomization.

To account for potential distinction between religious and secular Jews, religiosity indicators are utilized. Religious individuals are likely to experience the Sabbath “treatment” through participation in religious traditions, like lighting candles or reading the designated Torah portion.⁷ The first indicator is religious service attendance. Those who attend at least weekly are marked with a binary indicator.⁸ It is 23.6% of the sample. Another metric is self-identification as religious on a 0–10 scale (mean 4.74; median 5.0). Lastly, they could report their frequency of prayer from never (1) to every day (7) (mean 3.33; median 2.0). Arguably these respondents are more likely to think of the Sabbath in religious terms. These multiple metrics thus feature both active and affective religiosity (Sullins, 2006).

Non-participatory respondents also experience the Sabbath observance in Israel, especially since things like the closing of businesses and busses would not be optional for them. They, though, may experience the Sabbath more socio-culturally. For instance, it could highlight the socio-political prevalence of religion. That could disconcert a largely secular-identifying (*hiloni*) population (Cooperman *et al.*, 2016). The secular respondents are not “untreated” by religious occasions.

Table 1. Assignment to Sabbath survey

	Friday/Saturday	Friday/Saturday	Friday/Saturday	Saturday	Saturday	Saturday	Hanukkah	Hanukkah	Hanukkah
(Intercept)	-20.12 (17.64)	-18.32 (17.35)	-19.83 (17.65)	-35.64 (24.20)	-33.46 (24.00)	-35.12 (24.39)	-9.04 (20.61)	-8.22 (20.65)	-9.10 (20.65)
Jewish	-1.80*** (0.30)	-1.89*** (0.30)	-1.73*** (0.30)	-1.56*** (0.39)	-1.67*** (0.40)	-1.44*** (0.40)	-0.61 (0.42)	-0.61 (0.42)	-0.60 (0.42)
Year of birth	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
Female	-0.15 (0.30)	-0.03 (0.30)	-0.11 (0.30)	-0.28 (0.40)	-0.14 (0.40)	-0.24 (0.40)	-0.01 (0.39)	-0.03 (0.39)	-0.01 (0.39)
Tertiary education	0.07 (0.39)	0.00 (0.38)	0.01 (0.39)	-0.04 (0.53)	-0.08 (0.52)	-0.10 (0.53)	-0.06 (0.51)	-0.11 (0.51)	-0.06 (0.51)
Life satisfaction	0.03 (0.09)	0.10 (0.09)	0.06 (0.08)	-0.02 (0.11)	0.07 (0.12)	0.00 (0.11)	0.05 (0.11)	0.05 (0.11)	0.05 (0.10)
Economic satisfaction	-0.03 (0.07)	-0.03 (0.07)	-0.03 (0.07)	0.01 (0.09)	0.01 (0.09)	0.01 (0.09)	-0.07 (0.09)	-0.07 (0.09)	-0.07 (0.09)
Employed	0.44 (0.31)	0.40 (0.31)	0.43 (0.31)	0.38 (0.41)	0.31 (0.41)	0.34 (0.41)	-0.07 (0.39)	-0.08 (0.39)	-0.07 (0.39)
Religiosity	0.16** (0.06)			0.16* (0.08)			-0.01 (0.06)		

Weekly attendance		0.30			0.38			-0.04	
		(0.32)			(0.42)			(0.45)	
Personal prayer			0.16**			0.22**			-0.00
			(0.06)			(0.08)			(0.07)
AIC	101.91	102.40	101.21	69.42	66.84	71.27	78.76	78.68	78.72
Num. obs.	2,442	2,442	2,442	2,442	2,442	2,442	2,442	2,442	2,442

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

The ESS offers a variety of socio-political attitudes to consider. For this study, the net is very broadly cast to get a sense of the scope of Sabbath survey effects. Some questions relate to egalitarianism. As religion is often associated with social conservatism, it would be reasonable for those who took the survey on the Sabbath to express more conservative positions on these issues (Gaskins *et al.*, 2013).

Respondents were asked whether they agreed (1) or disagreed (5) with the statement “When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women” and whether they agreed (1) or disagreed (5) with the statement “Gay male and lesbian couples should have the same rights to adopt children as straight couples.” The former question appeals to gender egalitarianism. Although conservative interpretations of *halacha*—Jewish law—have gender distinctions, *halacha* does not forbid women’s working outside the home. Sabbath preparations may though make women’s work at home seem more important. The latter question would afford equal rights to gay couples. Adoption by gay couples remains legally complicated in Israel, especially since Judaism is passed matrilineally and because the law favors within-religion and within-ethnicity adoptions. The dependent variables were recoded such that higher scores indicate greater egalitarianism.

In a set of questions on welfare, respondents gave their opinions on “when do [they] think [people coming to live in Israel from other countries] should obtain the same rights to social benefits and services as citizens already living here?” Response options were (1) immediately on arrival; (2) after a year, whether or not they have worked; (3) after having worked for a year; (4) upon becoming citizens; or (5) never. The results were recoded such that higher ratings meant favoring more rights for immigrants. Israel’s immigration laws favor Jewish immigration (Raijman and Kemp, 2010). Thus, religious occasion should highlight their co-religious connection to the foreigners.

Respondents were asked to consider a hypothetical person who believes “it is important that every person in the world should be treated equally” and that “everyone should have equal opportunities in life.” They would indicate if that person was very much like them (1) or not at all like them (6). Scores were recoded so that higher scores meant identifying as egalitarian. Religious events could remind these respondents that most of the world is not their co-religionists, it could remind them that Jews have faced persecution as religious ethnic or minorities, or it could remind them of local diversity that they would want tolerated or repressed (Hoffman, 2020).

Another set of questions looks at trust issues. Participation in voluntary associations, including religious groups and service attendance, has been linked to interpersonal trust and insularity (Anheier and Kendall, 2002; Valente and Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2021). They were asked directly whether they thought “you can’t be too careful in dealing with people” (0) or “most people can be trusted” (10). They were also asked about trust toward an outgroup, refugees to Israel. They could express their agreement (1) or disagreement (5) with the statement “Some people come to this country and apply for refugee status on the grounds that they fear persecution in their own country. [...] The government should be generous in judging people’s applications for refugee status.” Disagreement signals distrust in the applicants. Similarly, they could express their agreement (1) or disagreement (5) with the statement “Some people come to this country and apply for refugee status on the grounds

that they fear persecution in their own country. [...] Most applicants for refugee status aren't in real fear of persecution in their own countries." Responses were recoded so that higher scores indicate *distrusting* refugee petitions. Distrust toward refugees would undermine public support for their admittance.

Respondents were asked about their experience with discrimination. They could indicate whether they were "a member of a group that is discriminated against in this country." Only 11.9% of Jewish Israelis reported experiencing discrimination. If they said yes, they were asked if they felt it was on the basis of several characteristics. In total, 4.1% of respondents said that they had experienced religious discrimination. While generally a religious occasion could make this more salient, as Israel is a Jewish-majority state, making religion salient may not prime feelings of discrimination.

Binary logistic regressions are used in analyzing the yes/no questions. OLS models are used for the other questions. ESS's supplied and recommended analysis weights are included in the models as well. Although assignment to "treatment" is functionally exogenous, covariates that regularly relate to political attitudes or impact weekday survey availability are included.

A binary indicator identifies female respondents, paid employment, and tertiary education. A variable indicates general life satisfaction from extremely dissatisfied (0) to extremely satisfied (10) and satisfaction with the country's economy from extremely dissatisfied (0) to extremely satisfied (10). These proxy for generalized day of the week effects (see Note 1). For the sake of brevity, covariate relationships will not be discussed; the results are presented for readers who are interested.⁹

Results and discussions

Outcomes are considered in the order they were presented above, beginning with egalitarianism. Some models show direct effects of taking surveys on religious occasions. Furthermore, these effects sometimes manifest in heterogeneous effects between the more religious and the less religious. Their opinions may be brought into alignment or driven further apart.

First, we consider egalitarianism (Appendix 1). The gender egalitarianism models do not show a direct Sabbath effect. Although the responses are slightly less egalitarian on the Sabbath, the result is only marginally significant in the attendance model ($p = 0.07$). More religious Jews were less likely to support gender egalitarianism, while women were more supportive. Although Sabbath surveys showed less egalitarianism among the less religious respondents, shifting their opinion closer to that of the more religious respondents, the effect was marginally significant (model 6, $p = 0.088$) (Figure 1).¹⁰

Attitudes toward gay adoption rights were also not significantly different on the Sabbath in a general fashion. However, the Sabbath heightened the differences in attitudes among the religious and non-religious (Figure 2). Less religious Jews are generally more open to gay adoption than religious Jews; this difference is larger on the Sabbath. The greater change is among the less-religious respondents, who evince greater tolerance toward gay parents on the Sabbath than on non-Sabbath days, while the decrease in support among religious respondents is small. A similar pattern is shown with respect to prayer frequency.

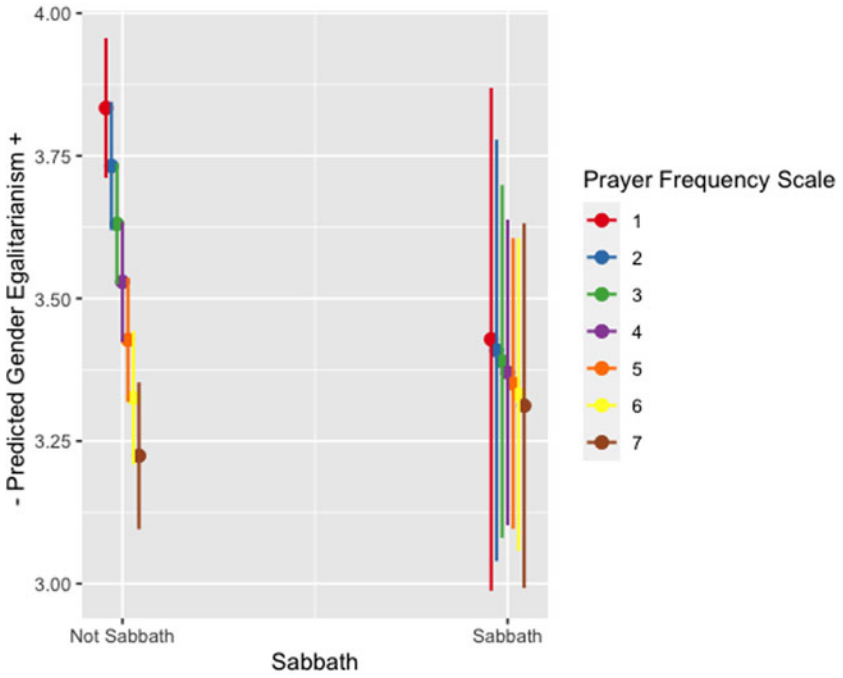


Figure 1. Gender egalitarianism.

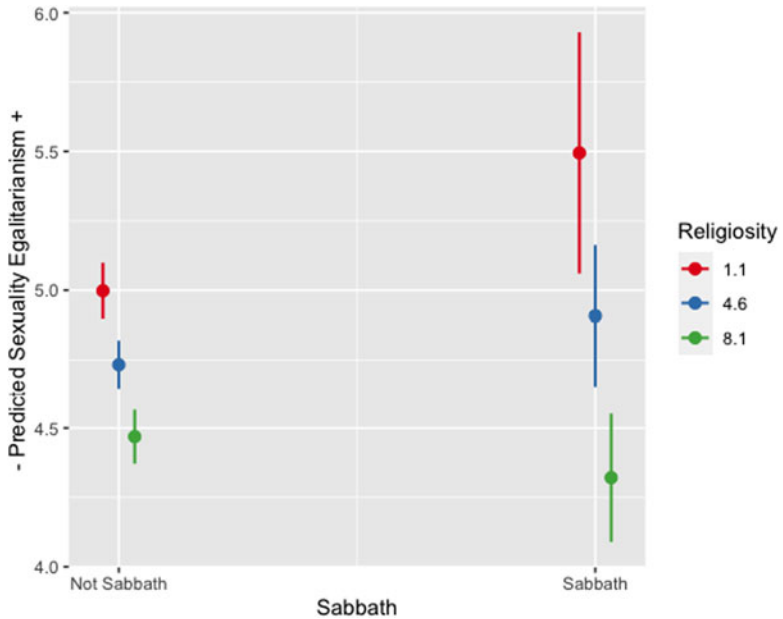


Figure 2. Support for legalizing gay adoption.

Respondents were asked about providing equal access to welfare benefits to new immigrants (Table 2, models 1–6). Those who took the survey on the Sabbath were more inclined to *delay* welfare benefits access for recent immigrants. On the scale of immediate access (5) to never granting immigrants access to welfare (1), there is approximately a 0.3-point lower response on the Sabbath. This effect was not contingent on personal religiosity. This pattern occurs even though most immigrants to Israel would be co-religionists due to Israel's Right of Return policy.¹¹

Respondents also indicated whether they believed all people should be treated equally and have equal opportunities. Higher scores were more egalitarian (Table 2, models 7–12). Responses are not shown to be significantly different on the Sabbath in the aggregate. However, there were significant differences contingent upon religiosity by any of the metrics (Figure 3). Citizens gave similar self-assessments on non-Sabbath days regardless of their reported level of religiosity. They diverged on the Sabbath. Among the most religious, self-identification as egalitarian is slightly lower on the Sabbath. Among the less religious, identification as egalitarian is more than a half-point higher on the Sabbath. This divergence suggests a heterogeneous effect of the ambient religious environment.

It is possible that the enforced Sabbath experience was making the secular Jews feel more egalitarian in reaction to the tacit inequality of enforcing religious legislation. Conversely, participation in a religion-group activity, like communal prayer, could increase group-favoring attitudes (Hoffman, 2020). That said, the responses, including people taking the survey on the Sabbath, favored the self-identification with the egalitarian person.

Effects on interpersonal trust were evaluated (Table 3). Higher scores indicate greater interpersonal trust. Responses on the Sabbath were slightly less trusting, although the effect only approaches traditional levels of significance.¹² The effect is significantly conditioned by service attendance (model 4; Figure 4). Non-attenders taking a survey on the Sabbath were less trusting by more than half a point on a 0–10 scale. Those who attend services regularly report being *more* trusting when they answer the question on the Sabbath by nearly one point. This is consistent with prior research linking religious service attendance with interpersonal trust.

Next, we consider the attitudes toward refugees (Appendix 2). Overall, respondents who answered on the Sabbath favored a more generous reading of refugee petitions. More religious respondents favored a less-generous reading (models 1, 3, and 5). Furthermore, the Sabbath effect was conditional on personal religiosity (Figure 5). The effect is functionally zero for non-attenders; the more generous reading is heavily concentrated among those who attend religious services. In that case, there was a 0.85-point decrease on a 1–5 scale. A similar heterogeneous pattern was found for prayer frequency ($p = 0.066$).

Overall, the perceived legitimacy of refugee petitions was not found to differ significantly between the Sabbath surveys and other days of the week, while religious respondents generally were less supportive of refugee petitions. However, there was a religiosity-based heterogeneous response to the Sabbath (Figure 6). Regular service attenders are slightly more likely to express disbelief in the legitimacy of refugee petitions (~0.2 points), while non-attenders are more likely to disagree that “Most applicants for refugee status aren't in real fear of persecution in their own countries” (~0.33 points). The groups' reported beliefs are more similar on the non-Sabbath days.

Table 2. Egalitarian attitudes

	Allow immigrants access to welfare						Identification with an egalitarian person					
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12
(Intercept)	6.53*	6.59*	6.95*	7.04*	6.64*	6.45*	1.94	1.74	2.52	2.42	2.58	2.09
	(3.14)	(3.15)	(3.15)	(3.15)	(3.15)	(3.16)	(3.13)	(3.13)	(3.13)	(3.13)	(3.13)	(3.13)
Year of birth	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Female	0.22***	0.22***	0.22***	0.22***	0.21***	0.20***	0.16**	0.16**	0.16*	0.16*	0.17**	0.16**
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Tertiary education	-0.02	-0.02	0.01	0.01	-0.00	-0.00	0.01	0.00	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Life satisfaction	-0.01	-0.01	-0.02	-0.02	-0.01	-0.01	0.05**	0.05**	0.05**	0.05**	0.05**	0.05**
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Economic satisfaction	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	-0.05***	-0.05***	-0.05***	-0.05***	-0.05***	-0.05***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Employed	-0.07	-0.07	-0.07	-0.07	-0.07	-0.07	0.01	0.01	0.03	0.02	0.03	0.02
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Religiosity	-0.02*	-0.02*					-0.01	-0.01				
	(0.01)	(0.01)					(0.01)	(0.01)				
Sabbath	-0.26*	-0.40	-0.31*	-0.46**	-0.27*	-0.05	0.08	0.73*	0.05	0.25	0.05	0.86**
	(0.13)	(0.32)	(0.13)	(0.16)	(0.13)	(0.28)	(0.13)	(0.32)	(0.13)	(0.16)	(0.13)	(0.26)

Religiosity: Sabbath	0.02				-0.10*							
	(0.04)				(0.04)							
Weekly attendance	0.05		0.02		-0.08		-0.04					
	(0.07)		(0.07)		(0.07)		(0.07)					
Weekly attendance: Sabbath	0.46				-0.59*							
	(0.29)				(0.27)							
Prayer					-0.02		-0.02		-0.00		0.01	
					(0.01)		(0.01)		(0.01)		(0.01)	
Prayer: Sabbath					-0.05				-0.17***			
					(0.05)				(0.05)			
R ²	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.03
Adj. R ²	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.02
Num. obs.	1,763	1,763	1,760	1,760	1,763	1,763	1,710	1,710	1,707	1,707	1,710	1,710

***p < 0.001; **p < 0.01; *p < 0.05; †p < 0.1.

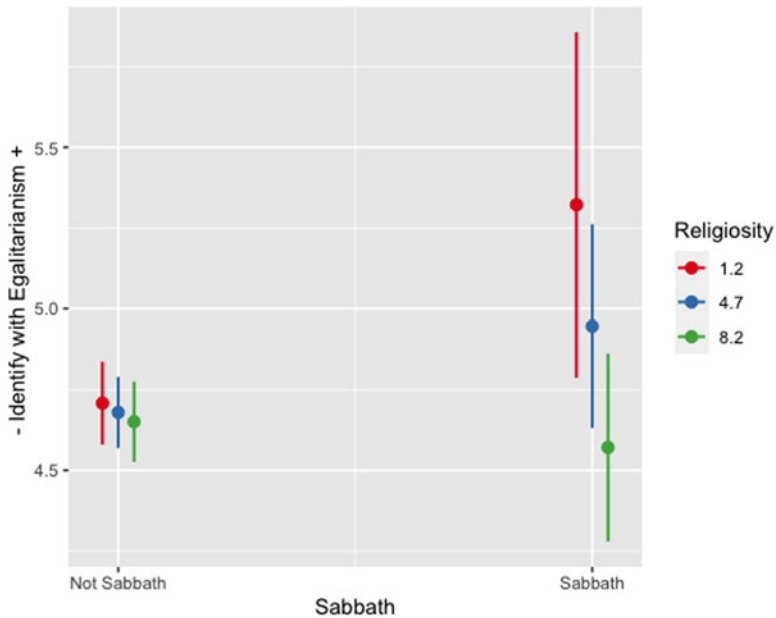


Figure 3. Identification with an egalitarian person.

Finally, the study considers the respondents' experience with discrimination (Appendix 3). The results show no Sabbath effect on experience with discrimination generally or based on religion. There are also not significant heterogeneous treatment effects. Notably, this is a self-descriptive reflection, rather than an attitude; as such, it may be less susceptible to external stimulus. That religiously engaged individuals are more likely to report discrimination, including religious discrimination, could reflect the social predominance of secular Jews (Cooperman *et al.*, 2016). Religious Jews may feel that the large secular Jewish population is biased against them.

Holiday surveys

Another way to examine fluctuating religious salience is to consider Hanukkah, a festival that occurred during the survey period (December 24, 2016–January 1, 2017). Hanukkah is an eight-day festival commemorating the reclamation of the Second Temple during the Maccabean revolt. It is a non-Biblical holiday, although it is tied to narratives of national liberation. Schools and offices in Israel are often closed, and families gather; however, it is not a fasting day, work is not forbidden, and extra visits to the synagogue are not required. Family gatherings, special prayers, and candle lighting take place to commemorate the Miracle of the Oil and the rededication of the Temple. In total, 4.2% of the surveys took place in that period. This is in contradistinction to Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah, major religious holidays that also transpired in the survey window, for which observances the survey apparatus evidently stopped.¹³ In several of the examined domains, Hanukkah is not a significant

Table 3. Interpersonal trust

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
(Intercept)	18.50**	18.66***	18.11**	18.20**	17.87**	17.81**
	(5.62)	(5.63)	(5.62)	(5.60)	(5.63)	(5.64)
Year of birth	-0.01**	-0.01**	-0.01*	-0.01*	-0.01*	-0.01*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Female	0.12	0.12	0.15	0.15	0.14	0.13
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Tertiary education	0.70***	0.70***	0.67***	0.68***	0.66***	0.66***
	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)
Life satisfaction	0.11***	0.11***	0.09**	0.10**	0.11***	0.11***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Economic satisfaction	0.12***	0.12***	0.12***	0.11***	0.12***	0.12***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Employed	0.06	0.06	0.08	0.09	0.06	0.06
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Religiosity	-0.00	-0.00				
	(0.02)	(0.02)				
Sabbath	-0.41 [†]	-0.84	-0.34	-0.94**	-0.38	-0.29
	(0.24)	(0.59)	(0.24)	(0.29)	(0.24)	(0.49)
Religiosity: Sabbath		0.06				
		(0.08)				

(Continued)

Table 3. (Continued.)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Weekly attendance			0.08 (0.13)	-0.04 (0.13)		
Weekly attendance: Sabbath				1.87*** (0.50)		
Prayer					-0.02 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)
Prayer: Sabbath						-0.02 (0.09)
R^2	0.06	0.06	0.05	0.06	0.05	0.05
Adj. R^2	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05
Num. obs.	1,833	1,833	1,830	1,830	1,833	1,833

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; + $p < 0.1$.

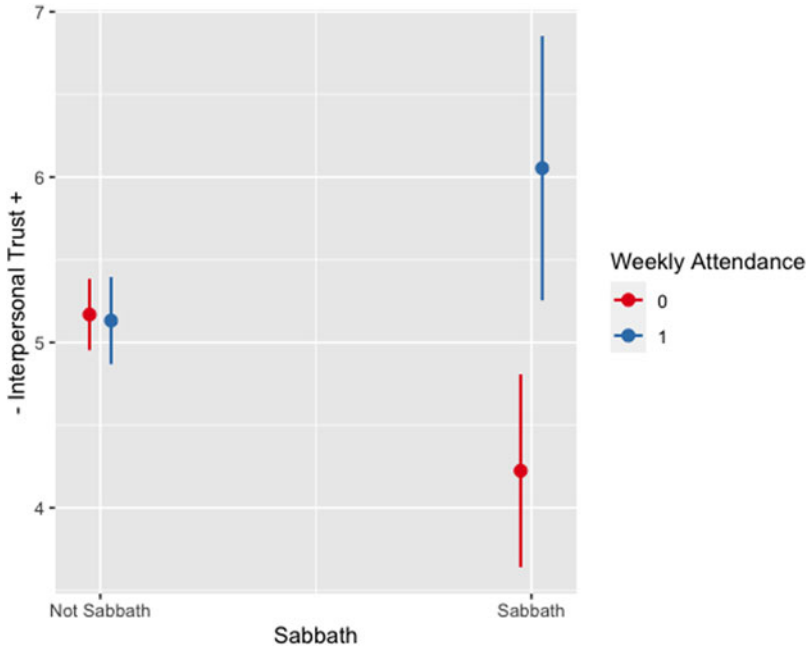


Figure 4. Interpersonal trust.

influence on expressed opinions, nor are the more observant respondents reacting to it (Appendices 4–8). Respondents express more egalitarian attitudes toward women and marginally more interpersonal trust in surveys taken during Hanukkah than at other times (Appendices 4 and 6), while they were marginally less likely to self-identify as egalitarian (Appendix 5). Other Hanukkah effects are concentrated among the particularly religious (Appendix 5).

Sukkot (October 16, 2016–October 23, 2016) can also be probed; 5.1% of the Jewish sample was taken during this period. The Festival of the Harvest and the Festival of the Booths, as it can be called, relates to scriptural commemorations.

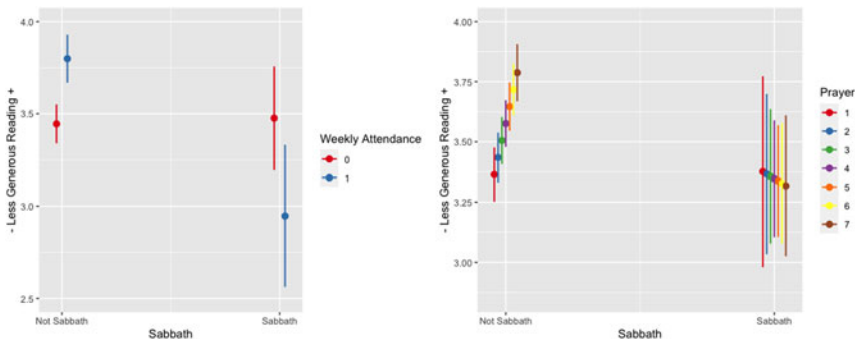


Figure 5. Read refugee petitions conservatively.

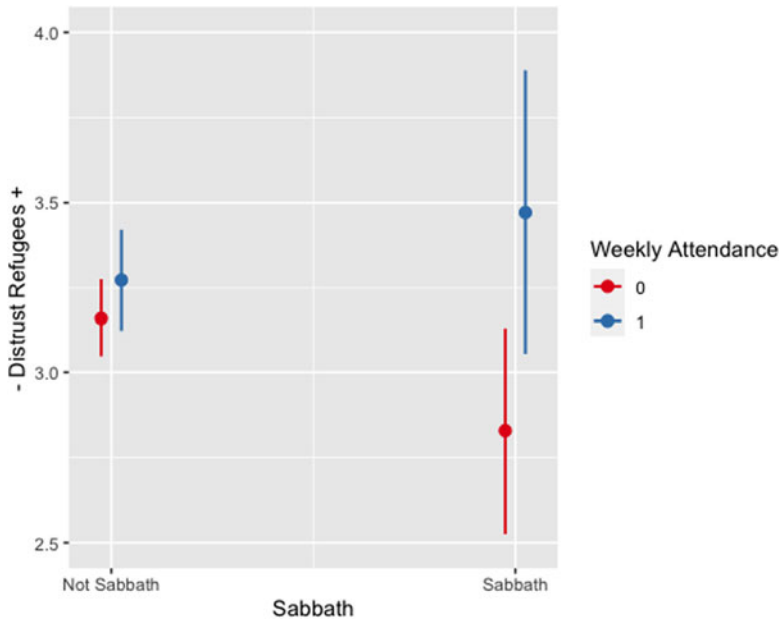


Figure 6. Most refugee petitions are illegitimate.

For some of the days of Sukkot, Sabbath-like work restrictions apply, and additional prayers are recited. Families eat meals and may even sleep in *sukkot*, temporary booths outside the house that recall the temporary dwellings during the Exodus. Also, many businesses close during Sukkot, either for the days with labor restrictions or the full week. As with Hanukkah, the holiday effects are not as widespread as the Sabbath effects (Appendices 9–13). Sukkot surveys demonstrate different evaluations of refugees (Appendix 12). Sukkot is more influential among religious Jews in evaluations of interpersonal equality and the treatment of immigrants and refugees (Appendices 10 and 12). This is fitting, as migration is linked to the religious basis for Sukkot. This finding demonstrates the political pertinence of the religious values assigned to particular occasions, particularly for priming certain responses in the observers (Djupe and Calfano, 2013).

Robustness checks

Another element to consider on this point is Sundays. Workers excused from working at businesses on the Sunday as well would experience a potential reduced-labor effect. A Sunday effect could also signal durability of the religious prime. In practice, however, Sunday surveys do not show significant differences (Appendices 14–18).

As noted above, the Friday evening into Saturday evening timing of the Sabbath means two days of the week are implicated. In theory, only part of that time could be influencing attitudes: the time preparing to observe and the observance. The results show that both Friday (Appendices 19–23) and Saturday surveys can demonstrate different attitudes compared to other days of the week (Appendices 24–28).¹⁴

There are challenges to measuring ideology in Israel. Previously it has been assumed that the left/right scale included both economic preferences and attitudes toward the peace process. New research has called the “Left-Right partisan divide” into question in Israel (Yakter and Tessler, 2022). It was omitted from the main models out of concern for its interpretability; however, the results are robust to its inclusion (Appendices 29–33).

Placebo questions

Domains that are plausibly unrelated to religion and unlikely to be affected by ambient religious primes can also be considered. Demographic immovables are not appropriate as placebo checks. Few attitudes included in the ESS would be plausibly independent of religion. For placebo questions, attitudes toward international bodies are considered because they arguably should not depend on religious salience. In this case, trust in the European Parliament, trust in the United Nations, and opinion on whether or not EU unification has gone too far or not are considered. The Sabbath does *not* induce significantly different responses to these questions (Appendices 34–36).¹⁵ While one cannot prove a non-effect, not finding an effect in this instance where one is not expected is heartening.

Conclusions

Previous scholarship has exploited temporal variation in religious holidays to identify the causal effect of religion on peoples’ feelings, preferences, and practices. Where researchers do this intentionally, such as setting experiments around major holidays, it can be useful. However, when it is not taken into account but is incorporated unrecognized and by happenstance, it can be a problem. This study provides a case in which an ambient religious cue—a publicly observed religious occasion—is shifting public opinion either in the aggregate or among some respondents.

This study identifies effects of surveying on the Jewish Sabbath. Egalitarianism, migration attitudes, and interpersonal trust, for instance, are impacted by the socio-temporal context. While effects are sometimes concentrated among religious respondents, although that is not always the case. Hanukkah also matters for egalitarianism, but the effect is not conditional on religiosity. Although this study provides insight for the questions included on the ESS, researchers should consider how religious occasions are affecting their results based on their own context. Are they capturing a large timespan? Does their survey include a holiday or holy day? What is the nature of the occasion?

Not all countries observe the Sabbath as vigorously as Israel does (Fox, 2015). In other contexts, then, the less religious may experience less socio-cultural cuing. Blue laws around the United States have been winding down, changing religious and secular behavior (Gerber *et al.*, 2016). While Israel does not conduct elections on the Sabbath, other countries, including the United States, permit voting on these days and/or in religious facilities. Some communities even run “souls to the polls” events that link Sunday Sabbath observances and political engagement. Changes in public opinion due to the socio-temporal context of an election could have practical political implications. While partisanship may be hard to shift, issue positions on ballot

initiatives may be more susceptible to the temporal variation. Where ballot initiatives and direct democracy are utilized, these effects could impact outcomes. That would contribute to the concerns about the democratic quality of elections, particularly direct democracy (Leemann and Wasserfallen, 2016).

Furthermore, the impact need not only be in generalized, direct effects. While most prior studies have concentrated on the effects of religious occasions on religious respondents (Brooke *et al.*, 2023) or on the entire community as a unit (Akay *et al.*, 2013, 2015; Lai and Windawati, 2017), this study has examined discrepancies between more and less religious individuals. At a time when religious demographics are in flux, including increasing populations of unaffiliated individuals or non-practicing identifiers, scholars of religion and politics should not omit these individuals from their considerations. Salient socio-cultural events could impact the political preferences of active members, inactive members, or non-members both by reminding respondents of the religion and its obligations *and* by reminding them of its and their position in society. Thus, this study has extended prior research in demonstrating these heterogeneous effects. This furthers the growing literature on the secular, unaffiliated, and non-participatory religious demographic.

There is no reason to suspect these patterns are unique to Israel or Judaism. With respect to the Sabbath, the pertinence would depend on the country. However, major religious feast days (e.g., Christmas, Holy Week, Ramadan) continue to be salient in a great many countries. For some holidays, that could mean only in-group members or active members are informed and affected. In other occasions—like massive parades and festivals during Advent and Holy Week in Europe—inactive members and non-members cannot escape awareness of these religious occasions as social phenomena in their society. Scholars of religion and politics should pay greater attention to ambient religiosity. Survey studies—or elections—occurring during or near these occasions could be impacted by them, either generally or heterogeneously. Design should account for that possibility.

This study was also innovative in considering a multitude of religious occasions. This was possible due to timespan of the ESS survey. Thus, not only could it demonstrate that religious occasions can have effects on public opinion, but it is also able to demonstrate that these effects can be dependent on the nature of the occasion. For instance, some holidays are more religious while others are religion-linked but less devotional. Others address particular social issues. For instance, the focus on diaspora during Sukkot seems to have induced greater sympathy for refugees. Prior research on religious holidays has used Ramadan and Easter as a generalized aura of religion, rather than focusing on the nature of qur'anic revelation or the Resurrection as political drivers. This innovation in the literature could be applied to other occasions either observationally or experimentally. For example, holidays that highlight family, gender roles, or atonement and forgiveness could impact opinions on women's rights or criminal justice.

Future work can extend this examination to other domains. For instance, in some Christian-majority countries, surveys that explore religion and politics are conducted on Sundays (e.g., LAPOP). The results could be considered in those cases. Are these occasions conservatizing public opinion? Does the Christian Sabbath impact opinions among non-practitioners in the United States or Latin America, or are these effects concentrated among the active members?

Additional work could be intentionally experimental. For instance, scholars of Israeli politics or religion and politics could intentionally manipulate the timing of surveys, as studies have done to exploit holiday effects for Ramadan. Researchers could also examine direct Sabbath survey effects on other questions. For instance, they could look at questions more specifically related to religion or to ethnonationalism in Israel. Attitudes toward the Israel-Palestine conflict and other international relations issues could be explored. Research could also examine American Jewish populations to see if the effects generalize outside of Israel; where Jews are the minority, the Sabbath effect could be smaller by being less salient in their society or larger if they are more cognizant of their religious identity on the Sabbath. Studies could also examine the influence of holidays besides Hanukkah, such as the High Holy Days, in a format that intentionally includes more respondents on a religious day or includes further occasion combinations of the holidays and the days with and without work.

That research presumes, though, that scholars are focusing on the religious priming effect. That is often not the goal of survey studies. Where researchers do not intend to exploit the Sabbath, the key takeaway of this study is caution. Surveys conducted over long periods of time may accept this variation as verisimilitude. After all, real-world politics have Fridays and Saturdays too. However, short burst surveys should be cognizant of and cautious about religious occasions in the field. For instance, it would be wise not to gather most or all of the survey sample during a holiday. Survey firms have an economic incentive to promise and provide quick results; YouGov and IPSOS advertise the ability to draw a sample within two days or even mere hours. Although useful for some studies, the quick turnaround could introduce an unintended socio-cultural influence if that survey happened to overlap with a religious occasion. As such, in both long- and short-term fielded surveys, researchers should be cognizant of these temporal religious cues in interpreting survey results.

Supplementary material. The supplementary material for this article can be found at <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048324000348>.

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Notes

1. Other surveys have looked at Sunday differences—or other days in the week—in survey responses for topics like subjective well-being on surveys based on its status as a “weekend” day rather than as a religious date (Taylor, 2006; Akay and Martinsson, 2009; Stone *et al.*, 2012). The focus here though is religion effects.
2. One could wonder whether variations are a “weekend” effect rather than a Sabbath effect. It seems unlikely that weekends mean more to religiously observant citizens for non-religious reasons. Nonetheless, this study has followed the Sunday effect research in including covariates for employment status to address the weekend/workday disparity.
3. One could consider only Saturday to be part of the Sabbath, despite the Friday commencement and preparations, such as businesses closing and public services ceasing on Friday midday. The models are also analyzed using a Saturday-only binary indicator (Appendices 24–28).
4. If the very devout exclude themselves from the survey population, including or especially on the Sabbath, then this selection would work against finding effects either from the religious prime or among the participatory. As will be shown below, that is not the case. Furthermore, self-identification as religious does not significantly influence respondents’ likelihood of being in the “treated” population. Nonetheless, the inclusion of these covariates in subsequent models can account for bias in treatment assignment.

5. Not all surveys run on the Sabbath. For instance, the National Election Survey does not.
6. Because of the smaller proportion taking the surveys on these days, the sample could be underpowered for finding small effects from the Sabbath. Thus, any present effects are particularly noteworthy for researchers in designing their studies, but null findings on particular variables are *not disproof* of a Sabbath effect.
7. Not all Jews observe religious traditions in the same ways. Many surveys focused on Israel would distinguish among the secular, traditional, modern orthodox, or Haredi respondents. The ESS does not include such questions. However, some customs are generally shared, like reciting specific prayers and lighting candles. Rabbis may choose their sermon topics. However, there is a text given for each week of the Hebrew lunisolar calendar to read the Torah through in a year (*Parashat HaShavua*), culminating in the holiday Simchat Torah after Sukkot to celebrate finishing the yearly readings. Thus, the readings, at least, as well as the traditional prayers, would be shared among participants. Future research might consider the impact of the liturgical calendar particularly with respect to textual content and related sermons since the invoked values can be politically salient (Djupe and Calfano, 2013). However, due to the timespan over which the ESS runs and the small sample from individual weeks, such a breakdown is not conducted here. The ESS does not include Judaism-specific-practice questions, such as asking if the respondent lights candles. However, other religiosity and participation questions are usable.
8. Conservative women may not attend every week because of ritual concerns due to menstruation or parturition or because of household needs, like taking care of a sick relative, which, by Sabbath labor regulations, are only permitted in the home. In conservative interpretations only men are part of the *minyan* (quorum for a service), so if someone must stay home, it is more likely to be the woman. In the ESS data, although women are not less likely to self-identify as religious, they are less likely to report weekly service attendance or prayer. Sullins (2006) notes that this presentation is common in Jewish and Muslim communities. Women could still identify as religious in the general sense. Noise from gender effects, though, would work against finding an effect. Thus, it is appropriate to include a sex covariate.
9. Skip rates for the dependent variables are shown in Appendix 37. In no case did assignment to treatment significantly influence non-response propensity.
10. Figures include 95% confidence intervals (Lüdtke, 2015).
11. Whether the new immigrants are co-ethnics is a complicated question because of theoretical and political intricacies of Jewish ethnicity (Gonzalez-Lesser, 2020; Ridge, 2024).
12. It is acknowledged that the lower number of treated cases means that this analysis could be underestimating the significance of the effects (model 1 $p=0.082$; model 3 $p=0.152$; model 5 $p=0.107$). Thus, this study is not asserting no Sabbath effect on trust.
13. Asara B'Tevet occurred on a Sunday during the survey period. However, it only lasts for one day, so an insufficient number of surveys occurred during this holiday for measurement ($n=8$).
14. Because of the smaller number of "treated" cases in these subdivisions, null results on particular models cannot be interpreted as evidence of no difference. The presence of effects, despite the restricted sample, though is compelling.
15. Trust in the EU and UN is significantly lower in the Hanukkah surveys than in the other surveys. However, this is likely not caused by Hanukkah itself. The day before Hanukkah 2016, the UN Security Council, which includes European states, passed Resolution 2334, which was subsequently endorsed by other European countries. The Resolution reaffirmed that "Israel's establishment of settlements in Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, had no legal validity, constituting a flagrant violation under international law and a major obstacle to the vision of two States living side-by-side in peace and security, within internationally recognized borders" (United Nations, 2016). This Resolution is likely what soured Jewish Israelis' attitudes toward the EU parliament and the UN. Sukkot does not show these same negative effects.

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Hannah M. Ridge is an assistant professor of political science at Chapman University. She earned her PhD in Political Science at Duke University. She researches public opinion on democracy, religion, and Middle East politics.