Chapter 9

How Mormonism Affected Mitt; How Mitt Has Affected Mormonism

Chapter 8 provided an overview of Mitt Romney’s political career and the role Mormonism has played within it. In this chapter we dig deeper into voters’ reactions to Romney’s LDS faith. To do so, we begin with two incidents from his first and last campaigns that illustrate the Mormon paradox: peculiar people or quintessential Americans?

Romney’s religion was first used against him during his unsuccessful 1994 U.S. Senate campaign against Ted Kennedy. With Romney and Kennedy tied in the polls and the campaign heating up, Joseph Kennedy, Ted’s nephew and a member of the House of Representatives, played the religion card. He told reporters:

I believe very strongly in the separation between church and state. But I think that if a particular church has a belief that blacks are second-class citizens, and that’s the stated belief of the church, or that women are second-class citizens, I mean you ought to take a look at those issues.

(quoted in Allot 2012)

Kennedy later apologized, saying that he was unaware that the LDS Church had ended its racial restrictions in 1978 but, in doing so, nonetheless again reminded voters of the Church’s controversial history regarding race. Notwithstanding his nephew’s apology,
Ted Kennedy himself entered the fray by once again raising the issue of the LDS Church and its pre-1978 racial policies. The Kennedy campaign was only picking up where Romney’s opponent in the Republican primary, John Lakian, had left off. He too had broached the issue of Romney’s religion, even referring to Romney as “Mr. Mormon” during a televised debate (R. L. Welch and Jensen 2007).

The second incident occurred in the fall of 2012, as Romney was in the midst of his tight presidential race against Barack Obama. Although buoyed by his strong performance in the first presidential debate, Romney faced continued criticism for comments he had made at a private fundraiser in which he dismissed 47 percent of Americans as “dependent upon government, who believe that they are victims . . . and so my job is not to worry about those people. I’ll never convince them that they should take personal responsibility for their lives” (New York Times 2012). At the end of the second presidential debate, the two candidates were asked the following question by an audience member:

What do you believe is the biggest misperception that the American people have about you as a man and a candidate? Using specific examples, can you take this opportunity to debunk that misperception and set us straight?

Romney went first. In seeking to defuse criticism for his “47 percent” comment, he began by saying, “I care about 100 percent of the American people.” After underscoring that point, he went on to say,
My passion probably flows from the fact that I believe in God. And I believe we're all children of the same God. I believe we have a responsibility to care for one another. I served as a missionary for my church. I served as a pastor in my congregation for about 10 years. I've sat across the table from people who were out of work and worked with them to try and find new work or to help them through tough times. (ABC News 2012)

Romney was referencing one of the most potentially controversial parts of his biography, his Mormonism, to rebut one of the most damaging charges leveled against him, that he was a callous elitist. In doing so he employed an alliance strategy by emphasizing the universalistic aspects of his faith (see chapter 8).

The contrast between these two incidents underscores that paradox of Mormonism. Joseph Kennedy cast Mormonism in a negative light by alluding to some of its more distinctive and controversial past policies. Mitt Romney portrayed his Mormonism in a positive light by stressing a belief common to virtually all of the world’s religions.

This chapter begins by asking how attitudes toward Mormons affected support for Romney. Which side of Mormonism mattered more? Did its peculiarity scare voters off or did its common ground with other religions win voters over? That is, how do voters respond to the different ways that Mormonism can be framed? Furthermore, how do the factors known to affect attitudes toward Mormons—factual knowledge and social contact—affect support for Romney?
We then turn the question around and ask whether attitudes toward Mormons were affected by Mitt Romney’s time in the spotlight. Did perceptions of Mormons change because of the twin facts that the nation’s most prominent Republican was a Mormon and the most prominent Mormon was a Republican? One might think that having a Mormon come close to the presidency burnished Mormons’ public image. Or perhaps the fact that Romney was running in an inherently partisan contest during a highly polarized time divided perceptions of Mormons along partisan lines.

**How Did Attitudes Toward Mormons Affect Mitt Romney?**

We concluded chapter 8 with the consensus among the pundits on election night in 2012 that Romney’s religion did not appear to be an important factor at the polls. However, the conventional wisdom that forms after the instant analysis of election night is deepened, corrected, and sometimes even reversed by in-depth analysis of more detailed data available well after the election. In the case of the 2012 election, we have used a statistical model to weigh the impact of voters’ attitudes toward Mormons on the presidential vote, including a measure of Mormon perceptions combining the positive and negative stereotypes into a single index \(^1\) (see chapter 7). [NOTE: MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE STEREOTYPES IS FOUND IN THE APPENDIX TO THIS]

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\(^1\) Our measure of Mormon stereotypes is a single factor score of all the stereotype items described in chapter 7 but one—whether Mormons are “rich.” It does not load well on the factor, presumably because of its ambiguous valence. The eigenvalue for the factor is 3.72. The model described in this paragraph is a logistic regression (1=vote for Romney, 0=vote for Obama). We calculated the percentage correctly predicted by using the “estat” command in STATA.
CHAPTER] The model also contains an extensive array of factors that have long been known to predict both voter turnout and vote choice in elections.²

When we include the Mormon stereotypes in the model, it has a relatively large and statistically significant impact on the vote. Importantly, attitudes toward Mormons have an impact on the vote even when accounting for party identification. In other words, perceptions of Mormons are not just a proxy for partisanship, even though, as we will explain below, there is a growing connection between voters’ party preference and their attitudes toward Mormons. Based only on this information, one might be tempted to conclude that the election night conventional wisdom was wrong and Romney’s religion actually did have a large impact on the vote. But the story is not so simple. Statistical significance is not the same as substantive significance. We need more information before concluding that Mormon stereotypes were a major factor on election day. As evidence that perhaps anti- or pro-Mormonism did not matter so much after all, consider that adding the Mormon stereotypes to our model does not increase its predictive accuracy, as it only rises negligibly from 94.86 percent to 95.41 percent.

So, which is it? Did attitudes toward Mormons matter a lot (as suggested by the statistical significance) or a little (as suggested by the non-improvement in predictive accuracy)? We can reconcile these apparently mixed signals when we look carefully at who holds what attitudes toward Mormons and those attitudes’ measurable effect on both voter turnout and the probability of voting for Mitt Romney once at the polls. We

² The variables are party identification, race, gender, age, socioeconomic status, geographic religion, as well as measures of religion like religious tradition, intensity of religious commitment, and having a religious versus secular worldview.
have thus used a statistical model that has three possible outcomes: did not vote, voted for Romney, voted for Obama. We include “did not vote” as an option, given the hypothesis that voters with a negative view of Mormons would stay home on election day.\(^3\)

Figure 9.1 displays the results of this analysis. For illustration, we highlight results from “pure” independents, those people who claim no allegiance to either party, in contrast to those who identify themselves as either Democrats or Republicans. The first panel displays the results for independents, showing the connection between the Mormon stereotypes and (a) abstention and (b) a vote for Romney (obviously, the remainder is the Obama vote). Among independents, there is a substantial rise in the percentage voting for Romney as attitudes toward Mormons become more positive—from 10 percent among those in the lowest quartile of perceptions toward Mormons to 73 percent among those in the top quartile. Voter abstention falls (that is, turnout rises) among those with positive stereotypes, but to a much lesser degree. The figure also includes a third piece of information that is vital for making sense out of the election results. Each bar represents the percentage of political independents who fall into each quartile of the Mormon stereotype measure. Since attitudes toward Mormons are pretty evenly distributed among independents, each bar is right around 25 percent. In other words, the percentage of independents with a negative view of Mormons is nearly

\(^3\) Because our dependent variable has three nominal (i.e. non-ordinal) categories, we employ multinomial logistic regression. All of the independent variables are the same as described in note 1. See the appendix to chapter 9 for the full model.
identical to the percentage of those with a positive view—suggesting that, roughly speaking, they cancel each other out.

[Figure 9.1 about here]

The second panel of Figure 9.1 displays the same results for Democrats. Notice that among Democrats with a negative view of Mormons (bottom quartile) our model shows that only 2 percent voted for Romney. However, among Democrats with the most positive view of Mormons (top quartile), 19 percent voted for Romney. Nineteen percent may not sound like a lot, but it is considerably more than 2 percent. In fact, it is an increase of over 850 percent—an interpretation that is both technically correct and highly misleading. Equally important is the fact that only 5 percent of strong Democrats have a positive view of Mormons (that is, are in the top quartile). We also see that voter abstention rises among Democrats with a positive view of Mormons, probably because they are cross-pressured (Mutz 2006). Unlike the independents—for whom attitudes toward Mormons are distributed evenly across the scale—Democrats are much more likely to have a negative perception. When we put this all together, it means that a small percentage of strong Democrats with a positive impression of Mormons voted for Romney, but they are a tiny sliver of the electorate.

The story is reversed for Republicans (panel 3 of Figure 9.1). Of those Republicans who have a negative view of Mormons, 54 percent turned out and voted for Romney, compared to 95 percent of those with a positive perception. We see some evidence for the hypothesis that anti-Mormon Republicans (bottom quartile) chose to abstain, as they stayed home in larger numbers (28 percent) than those Republicans
with the most positive perception (top quartile) of Mormons (4 percent). But in a mirror
image of the Democrats, only 8 percent of Republicans have a negative view of
Mormons.⁴

In sum, these results allow us to reconcile the statistical model with the election
results. The former shows that attitudes toward Mormons mattered a lot; the latter
suggests that they mattered little, if at all. While Mitt Romney’s Mormonism mattered a
lot to a very few voters, it mattered little to most voters. The net result is that, on
election day 2012, Mitt Romney’s Mormonism turned out to be the dog that didn’t bark.

The 2008 Campaign

When Sherlock Holmes observed the dog that did not bark, it was a vital piece of
information for cracking his case.⁵ Likewise, the very minimal effect of either pro- or
anti-Mormon attitudes on the presidential vote is vital for understanding the place of
Mormonism within American politics. As chapter 8 showed, voters’ attitudes changed
considerably between Romney’s entrance onto the presidential stage in 2008 and his
exit in 2012. In his debut performance during the 2008 Republican primaries, his
Mormonism was a significant detriment to many voters.

⁴ Our online survey, administered by YouGov/Polimetrix, has an inflated voter turnout
rate of 85 percent, presumably owing to the fact that people who participate in online
surveys are also likely to participate in elections. Thus, one should take the specific
turnout numbers with a grain of salt. However, an inflated turnout rate does not mean
we should dismiss the relationship between attitudes toward Mormons and either vote
choice or turnout.

⁵ For interested readers, the case is found in the Sherlock Holmes story, “The Silver
Blaze.”
Political science theory illuminates why voters would react strongly to the “peculiar” religious background of a relatively unknown candidate running in the primary process. Voters typically have little information about the candidates running. Not only are the candidates often unfamiliar, since they are all in the same party, primary voters cannot glean any information from their party label like in a general election. In such an environment, a little bit of information can have an outsized impact on how voters perceive a candidate. Political scientist Samuel Popkin has memorably described the “low information rationality” that characterizes voters’ behavior during primaries (Popkin 1994). We have earlier described the information that circulates on a given subject; the same holds true for candidates. Voters receive information—often limited—about candidates. If they accept the information as reliable, it is stored for retrieval until needed for a decision. At the decision point, people sample across the stored information in order to form an opinion (Zaller 1992). For candidates with a long track record in public life (e.g. Hillary Clinton), most voters will already have a lot of stored information. One more piece of information, like her religious affiliation, is not likely to make much difference—a small pebble in a large pond. For lesser known candidates, one piece of information, particularly novel information, will have a far greater impact, like a large rock in a small pond. And if that information is membership in a distinctive, even controversial, religion, it is likely to make a big splash.

As we saw in chapter 8, information about a candidate, including his or her religious background, can be framed in different ways. For example, in 1976, Jimmy Carter was a relatively obscure governor with no national political experience. Running
in the immediate aftermath of the Watergate scandal, he skillfully framed his religious piety as evidence of his moral rectitude and trustworthiness. Similarly, in 2000 George W. Bush framed his religious faith as an important element of his personal biography. It informed his social views, reinforced a cultural connection with many Republican primary voters, and provided a story of personal redemption to reassure voters worried about any youthful indiscretions.

During the 2008 primaries, we tested how voters responded to information about Mitt Romney’s background in the LDS Church. In particular, we examined how voters reacted to different ways of framing Mormonism. We did so while the primaries were underway, when Romney was still relatively unknown and a viable candidate for the Republican nomination. This study was an experiment, complementing the information we gleaned from the Gallup question about voting for a generic Mormon candidate (see chapter 8), by referring to Mitt Romney by name and providing more biographical information, more closely simulating the range of information to which voters were exposed during the course of the campaign.

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6 These data come from Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project 2008; see Data Appendix for details of this survey. Much (but not all) of what we report in this section has been previously published in our article “The Stained Glass Ceiling: Social Contact and Mitt Romney’s ‘Religion Problem,’” Political Behavior, 2012, 34:277-299 (Campbell, Green, and Monson 2012). Note, however, that the specific results vary slightly, since the results reported in the article are derived from a statistical model that controls for age, gender, and region. Substantively, the controls make no difference since this is a randomized experiment and so we report bivariate results here.

7 Specifically, the experiment ran from January 24th to February 4th, although 90 percent of the surveys were completed by January 28th. Romney dropped out of the race on February 7th.
We randomly assigned different groups of respondents (roughly 200 each) to read different descriptions of Mitt Romney. Everyone received this positive, boilerplate description of him:

As you know, Mitt Romney is running for president. He is a successful businessman, a former governor of Massachusetts, and the head of the 2002 Winter Olympics. He has been married for thirty-nine years and raised five sons.

Some respondents were randomly chosen to receive more information, which was added immediately following the information about his personal background. One group learned that Romney “has been a local leader in his church,” while another learned that he has been a local leader of “the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, often called the Mormon Church.” After reading the description of Romney, all respondents were asked whether the preceding information made them more or less likely to vote for him.

This method enables us to compare the reactions of voters who received only the boilerplate biography (control group) to those who received information about the additional information about his religion. By comparing the two groups we determine if adding information about Romney’s religion made voters more or less likely to vote for him. Recall that, at this time, Romney was a newcomer on the national political scene, so for many voters our information would have made a large splash.

As shown in Figure 9.2, the information that Romney was a leader in the Mormon Church had a substantially negative effect on the likelihood of voting for him.8 The figure compares the reaction of respondents in the control group—who, recall, read

8 As in chapter 7, all of the results we report in this chapter omit Mormons.
nothing about Romney’s religion—to those who received information about his religion. As shown in the figure, when Romney’s church is not identified, voters register no statistically significant reaction. But when his affiliation with the Mormon Church is explicitly mentioned, Romney’s support drops by roughly 32 percentage points.

Figure 9.2 also displays the results for evangelicals and people with no religious affiliation (the “nones”). As we have discussed previously, each group is a source of tension between Mormons and other religions (evangelicals) and secular society (nones). Both groups have a slightly more negative reaction to Romney’s Mormonism than the general population. Not surprisingly, evangelicals do not have a negative reaction upon reading that Romney has been a leader in “his church,” when it remains unidentified, while nones have a more negative reaction to the unnamed church that approaches statistical significance.⁹

[Figure 9.2 about here]

Romney was not the only candidate in the 2008 primary season to face questions about his religious background. Among his Republican opponents, Mike Huckabee was an ordained Southern Baptist pastor, which might be a problem for some voters. On the Democratic side, Barack Obama faced the double whammy of controversial comments made by the pastor of his Chicago church, Jeremiah Wright, and the rumor that he was actually a Muslim. To gauge the relative impact of concerns about Romney’s LDS background compared to the concerns raised about other candidates, we conducted a parallel set of experiments during the primary season. Since

⁹ Results are similar for respondents with high versus low religiosity.
Romney, Huckabee, and Obama were all relatively unknown to most voters, for contrast we also tested voters’ reactions to information about the religious background of Hillary Clinton, as she was extremely well known.

In each case, members of the control group read a boilerplate description of the candidate while another randomly-selected group read the same description with additional information about the candidate’s religion. As with the Romney experiments, we limited our descriptions to information that was factually correct, using language with a neutral tone. This undoubtedly limits the effects we observe as far more incendiary, and often inaccurate, information circulates during a political campaign.

Table 9.1 contains the descriptions of these candidates’ religious backgrounds provided to the subjects in the respective experimental groups.  

10 Here are the full descriptions of the candidates used in the experiments.

As you know, Hillary Clinton is running for president. She is a graduate of Yale Law School and the former First Lady. She is currently a U.S. Senator, representing the state of New York. She has been married for thirty-two years and raised a daughter. Hillary Clinton has also been an active layperson in the United Methodist church.

As you know, Mike Huckabee is running for president. He is a former governor of Arkansas. In 2003, he lost 110 pounds after being diagnosed with Type II diabetes and is a spokesman for living a healthy lifestyle. He has been married for thirty-three years and raised three sons. Mike Huckabee has also been an ordained Southern Baptist pastor.

As you know, Barack Obama is running for president. He is a former community organizer in Chicago and a best-selling author. He is currently a U.S. Senator, representing the state of Illinois. He has been married for sixteen years and has two daughters. Barack Obama is a member of the Trinity United Church of Christ. (1) Some people have said his church is hostile to Whites and promotes Black separatism. (2) Some people have said that he must be a Muslim, because his paternal grandfather was a Muslim.
Figure 9.3 displays how each description affected voters’ likelihood of voting for the candidate in question. Not surprisingly, the effect for Clinton was small and statistically insignificant. Not only did most Americans already have their minds made up about her, Clinton’s background as a United Methodist, a mainline Protestant denomination, was unlikely to cause voters as much concern as the other candidates’ religions. Huckabee’s background as a Southern Baptist minister triggered a significant negative reaction but, at 13 percentage points, was far less than the concern elicited by disclosure of Romney’s Mormonism. Voters’ reaction to information about Obama’s alleged Muslim background and his pastor were highly negative—a little smaller and the latter a little larger, respectively, than the “Mormon effect.” All told, in 2008 Romney’s Mormonism was as large a political liability for him as two of the most explosive charges leveled against Barack Obama.

Recall from chapter 8 that, historically, Democrats have had a stronger aversion to Mormon presidential candidates than Republicans. That pattern is also borne out in our Romney experiment, as the Mormon effect for Republicans was a drop of 25 percentage points, compared to 36 points for Democrats. Among Democrats there is

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11 The survey was fielded from March 21 to April 9, 2008, after the controversy over Obama’s pastor had become national news and Obama had delivered a very high profile speech in response to the controversy. He gave that speech on March 18, 2008.
12 Likewise, we see virtually the same results for self-described voters in Republican versus Democratic primaries.
also a negative and statistically significant reaction to describing Romney as a leader in his unnamed church, albeit smaller than the Mormon effect (13 percentage points).

*Contact and Knowledge*

Even though this experiment shows that, on balance, voters’ reaction to Romney’s Mormonism was negative, recall from chapter 7 that general impressions toward Mormons are a mixture of both positive and negative (and not every voter reacted negatively to Romney’s religion). And, as we also demonstrated in chapter 7, two factors in particular foster a positive perception of Mormons: a close personal relationship with a Mormon and factual knowledge about Mormonism. We further find that both close contact and factual knowledge also ameliorated, at least partially, the negative reaction to Romney’s Mormonism when he first appeared on the political scene in 2008.

Figure 9.4 displays the reaction to the description of Romney as an active Mormon among voters with low, medium, and high factual knowledge about Mormonism. Among those with low knowledge, describing Romney as a Mormon

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13 The quiz of factual knowledge about Mormonism in 2008 differs from the one in 2010, discussed in chapter 7. It consisted of four true-false questions, which provided little differentiation (i.e. the test was too easy). Specifically, the quiz was worded:

- Of the following statements about practicing members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, indicate which are true:
  - Practice polygamy (have more than one wife) [False]
  - Do not drink alcohol [True]
  - Give 10% of their income to their church [True]
  - Do not believe in the Bible [False]
drops his support by 48 percentage points, compared to 36 points among those with a medium level of knowledge, and 20 points among those with high knowledge. Even though greater knowledge “buffers” a negative reaction to Romney’s Mormonism—a 20-point drop is obviously less than a 48-point drop—it is still noteworthy that the reaction was negative across the board.

Figure 9.5 makes a similar comparison, but this time by the degree of reported social contact with a Mormon. In chapter 7, we were introduced to the faint possibility of a curvilinear relationship between degree of contact and perceptions of Mormons. Now we see much stronger evidence that a moderate level of contact does more harm than good for attitudes about Romney. Among people with the least and most contact with Mormons, the negative reaction to Romney’s Mormonism is about the same—a drop of roughly 20 percentage points in support. But among those in the middle (who know a Mormon but only as an acquaintance) the effect is twice as large: a decline of 43 percentage points.

[Figures 9.4, 9.5 about here]

These results reflect the reactions to Romney’s Mormonism in the absence of any further information, thus providing a baseline in the absence of the back-and-forth in a political campaign. Of course, political campaigns are designed to increase what voters know about a candidate, whether positive or negative. Just as important is how such information is framed. Scholars of framing effects distinguish between “frames in thought” and “frames in communication” (Chong and Druckman 2007; Druckman 2001). The former refers to what we might think of a pre-existing condition—the attitudes or
opinions that people hold on a given matter. The latter refers to the way information on a given matter is presented in public discourse by the media, politicians, and other opinion shapers. Framing effects result from the interaction of the two. Thus in the 1976 Democratic primaries Jimmy Carter could exploit the fact that many Americans had a pre-existing frame in thought that religious people are trustworthy by introducing the frame in communication that being a Sunday school teacher signaled his integrity.

As shown by the way voters reacted upon reading of his involvement in the Mormon Church, Romney definitely faced negative frames in thought about Mormonism. Among these, one of the most potent is the claim that Mormons are not Christians. As we saw in chapter 7, evangelical Protestants, a key constituency in the Republican primaries, are especially likely to hold this belief. Labeling Mormons as non-Christians thus has potential political implications. A majority of Americans (and an even greater share of Republicans) believe the United States was founded as a “Christian nation,” and thus may not want a non-Christian to lead it (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2006). The presidency has quasi-religious trappings, as exemplified by the office’s many public ceremonies and patriotic rituals with religious undercurrents—examples of what Robert Bellah (1967) has aptly described as America’s civil religion. If, as we suggested in chapter 7, saying that Mormons are not Christians is often another way of saying that “Mormons are not like me,” voters may likewise be reluctant to have a president whose religious beliefs are not like theirs.

There are counter-currents within the collective American psyche that could dampen, perhaps negate, any potential concern that Mormons are not Christians. To
address those potential concerns, Romney introduced two counter-frames in his December 2007 speech “Faith in America” (see chapter 8). The first echoed John F. Kennedy’s argument for religious tolerance in 1960, where he faced antagonism toward his Catholicism. Both Kennedy and Romney drew on the widespread frame in thought among Americans in favor of religious freedom, guaranteed by the separation of church and state. Romney consciously referenced Kennedy and argued that “a person should not be elected because of his faith nor should he be rejected because of his faith.” In doing so, he was tapping the deeply-held American value of religious freedom. Call this the “separationist” counter-frame.

As you will recall from chapter 8, Romney did not stop with deploying Kennedy’s argument about religious freedom. Unlike Kennedy, Romney felt he had to reassure religious conservatives that he shared their values, even if not the same theology, and that all religious communities supported a common moral perspective:

There is one fundamental question about which I often am asked. What do I believe about Jesus Christ? I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Savior of mankind. My church’s beliefs about Christ may not all be the same as those of other faiths. . . It is important to recognize that while differences in theology exist between the churches in America, we share a common creed of moral convictions. And where the affairs of our nation are concerned, it’s usually a sound rule to focus on the latter—on the great moral principles that urge us all on a common course.

(Romney 2007)
Call this the “common values” counter-frame, a central feature of Romney’s alliance strategy.

We designed our experiment to test reactions to the frame that Mormons are not Christians, thus taking what was a latent frame in thought among some voters and ensuring that it was a frame in communication for all of the respondents in this particular treatment group. Accordingly, a random selection of subjects not only received the boilerplate biography of Romney and the information that he was a local leader in the Mormon Church, but they also read that “some people believe Mormons are not Christians.” Still another group of subjects received all of that information plus the separationist counter-frame:

*Others say that Mitt Romney’s religion should not be an issue in the campaign, since a person’s faith should be irrelevant to politics.*

Yet another group received the common values counter-frame:

*Others point out that Mormons believe in Jesus Christ, and that they have the same values as members of other faiths.*

Here, too, these statements would have been frames in thought for some of our respondents. By articulating them, they became frames in communication.

Figure 9.6 displays how voters reacted to the frame and counter-frames. As expected, telling—or reminding—voters that Mormons are sometimes described as non-Christians drove support down for Romney by roughly 30 percentage points. Interestingly, this is about the same reaction elicited by simply mentioning that Romney is an active Mormon. The two counter-frames lessen the negative reaction, but do not neutralize it completely. In each case, hearing the “not Christian” frame followed by a
counter-frame led to a drop in Romney’s support of about 20 percentage points—roughly ten points less than those who were only exposed to the “not Christian” frame.

As we would expect, evangelical Protestants had a stronger reaction to the “not Christian” frame than the general public—their support for Romney dropped by roughly 40 points. Evangelicals were also largely not persuaded by the counter-frames. With the separationist counter-frame, Romney’s support among evangelicals dropped 32 points. Evangelicals appeared to be a little more receptive to the common values counter-frame, as it led to a decline of “only” 27 points.

[Figure 9.6 about here]

Political campaigns do not occur in a vacuum, as the information that circulates is filtered through voters’ own opinions and experiences. The real test of a frame in communication is how it interacts with frames in thought. For some voters, especially evangelicals, George W. Bush’s story of personal redemption echoed a familiar and no doubt inspiring narrative. To others, particularly people with little sympathy for evangelicals, it might have seemed naïve at best and cynical at worst. Similarly, we were interested in knowing how the impact of the “not Christian” frame and the two counter-frames varied according to the ameliorating factors of knowledge about Mormonism and personal contact with Mormons.

Figure 9.7 displays how voters reacted to the frame and two counter-frames according to their degree of factual knowledge about Mormonism. As expected, voters with the least information about Mormonism reacted most negatively upon reading the “not Christian” frame (64 percentage points!). The counter-frames were partly
ameliorative, with the common values argument modestly more persuasive than the separationist one. Among voters with medium information about Mormons, the counter-frames were more effective—the common values frame weakens the negative reaction to the point that it no longer meets the threshold for statistical significance. For voters with a high level of knowledge, the counter-frames produce a muted response. While the differences are slight, there is even a hint that the counter-frames actually decrease support for Romney. The general pattern for the different levels of knowledge comports with our expectations. Less pre-existing knowledge about Mormons means that the information introduced through the campaign was novel, thus making a bigger splash and having a bigger effect. More knowledge means that further information hardly makes a wave.

[Figure 9.7 about here]

The pattern for social contact once again has a curvilinear pattern. As shown in panel 1 of Figure 9.8, people who do not know a Mormon react quite negatively to the information that Mormons may not be Christians (a drop of 29 percentage points). But, upon hearing either counter-frame, their concerns are mostly assuaged, as the drop in support for Romney is slight and, in statistical terms, insignificant. (The counter-frames are equally effective.) Each frame and counter-frame makes a splash, as they have little of the information gleaned from personal relationships. In contrast, people who have close contact with a Mormon (panel 3, Figure 9.8) are hardly affected at all by the frame or the counter-frames—the slight negative effects are substantively small and
statistically insignificant. These people have already made up their minds about Mormons, and so the information we presented in the experiment has little to no effect. We see a very different result for people who have a moderate amount of contact with a Mormon. They react negatively to the claim that Mormons are not Christians, but their likelihood of voting for Romney barely budges upon hearing either counter-frame. This non-effect is consistent with the earlier finding that it is also the people with moderate contact who have the strongest negative reaction to Romney’s Mormonism.

[Figure 9.8 about here]

Let us pause to summarize what we have learned thus far about voters’ reactions to information about Mitt Romney’s Mormonism, circa the 2008 primary season.

1. *Romney’s Mormonism Mattered, and Not in a Good Way*

Identifying Romney as an active Mormon, not just an active churchgoer, produced a substantial, negative drop in his support. In relative terms, the drop in Romney’s support was comparable to the negative effect of Obama’s association with Pastor Jeremiah Wright, an issue that threatened to derail Obama’s 2008 nomination bid. Specifically, framing Mormonism as a non-Christian religion triggers a negative reaction among voters; counter-framing only partially ameliorates that negative reaction. Importantly, in 2008 the information that Romney is a Mormon was novel, as many voters would have been unaware of that fact. More generally, few Mormons had run for president.

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14 The cell sizes are small, so statistical significance is not very informative.
Not since the 1968 campaign of Mitt’s father, George Romney, had voters been faced with a Mormon presidential candidate was both devout and viable.\(^{15}\)


The “Mormon effect” was less among people with greater factual knowledge of Mormonism. Similarly, voters with the least factual information about Mormons have the strongest negative reaction to the frame that Mormons are not Christians.

3. *A Little Social Contact Leaves a Big Impression*

People who have a moderate degree of contact with a Mormon—know a Mormon in passing—had a stronger negative reaction to Romney’s Mormonism than either people with no contact or close contact. Like people with no contact, they evince a strong negative reaction to the “not Christian” frame; like those with close contact, the counter-frames do not affect their opinion. We might call this a reverse Goldilocks effect. In the fairy tale, Goldilocks always find the middle option to be “just right.” For Romney, the people who have experienced middling contact with Mormons were his biggest problem.

\(^{15}\) Recall from chapter 8 that, since George Romney’s abortive presidential bid in 1968, two more Mormons had run, but one was not devout (Morris Udall) while the other was never a serious contender (Orrin Hatch).
The 2012 Campaign

With these results from 2008 in mind, it might seem as though Romney’s Mormonism should have mattered a great deal to a great many voters in the 2012 general election. After all, the degree of factual knowledge did not increase in 2012. Between 2010 and 2012, the average score on our Mormon knowledge quiz did not change substantially; the average score was 2.02 in 2010 and 2.17 in 2012. Likewise, using different measures, a Pew survey also found that factual knowledge about Mormons did not increase in 2012—in spite of countless media stories about the LDS Church and Mormon culture (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2012d). Nor did we see an increase in self-reported contact with Mormons between 2008, 2010, and 2012. In 2008, 15 percent had a close relationship with a Mormon. It was 13 percent in 2010 and 14 percent in 2012—fluctuations all within the margin of error.\(^\text{16}\) With a steady level of knowledge of and contact with Mormons, it might have appeared that Romney’s Mormonism would prove to be a big electoral liability. As noted in chapter 8, many observers at the time expected as much.

And yet it was not. To underscore that point, Figure 9.9 displays what happened when we replicated our original Romney experiment in October 2012, as Romney was in the closing stage of a heated Republican nomination contest.\(^\text{17}\) Everything about the

\(^{16}\) These figures come from the 2008 Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project, and the 2010 and 2012 Cooperative Congressional Election Studies. See Data Appendix for details.

\(^{17}\) We ran our experiment on the 2012 Mormon Perceptions Study, which is described in Data Appendix.
experiment was the same,\(^{18}\) but while the direction of the results remained the same, the magnitude substantially decreased. In 2008, identifying Romney as a Mormon dropped his support by roughly 25 points for Republicans, 35 points for Independents, and 36 points for Democrats. In 2012, the negative effect was about 12 percentage points for all three groups.

[Figure 9.9 about here]

We see an even more dramatic decline in the effect of the “not Christian” frame. In particular, Figure 9.10 displays the change in effect for evangelical Protestants—a group that is both heavily Republican and most likely to consider Mormonism to be a non-Christian religion (see chapter 7). In 2008, the “not Christian” frame caused a 40-point drop in Romney’s support among evangelicals and a 27-point decline among non-evangelicals. By the 2012 general election, it had no statistically significant effect on either evangelicals or non-evangelicals.

In other words, our experiments reinforce the story told by the analysis of how attitudes toward Mormons affected the 2012 presidential vote. There may have been an effect, but it was small and likely inconsequential.

What explains the “case of the disappearing Mormon effect?” Actually, there is little mystery. In early 2008, voters were still forming an opinion about Romney, as he was in his first national campaign. By late 2012, voters had been exposed to a lot of information about Romney—first as he ran the gauntlet of the Republican primaries, then as the GOP nominee. When we did our survey in October of 2012, only weeks

\(^{18}\) The biography was exactly the same, except that we updated the number of years that Mitt and Ann Romney have been married.
before election day, most voters had learned enough about Romney to have made up their minds about him. For many voters, information about Romney’s religion was no longer novel. As just one indication that voters had undergone a learning process, in 2008 about half of our respondents could correctly identify Romney’s religion. By the fall of 2012, this had risen to 68 percent. Although it is worth noting that this still means that even when the presidential campaign had its greatest salience, roughly 1 in 3 Americans did not know Romney is Mormon.

Thus any bits of information we included in our vignettes were small pebbles, leaving barely a ripple. This is not to say that Romney’s Mormonism had no effect on voters’ attitudes toward him. Rather, by the time of the general election those voters who cared about his religious background had already incorporated that information into their assessment of him. By way of analogy, this is similar to the way that investors account for the available information about a firm when trading its stock. At any given point in time, the stock price reflects what investors know about that company. In the case of the 2012 election, most Republicans who may have been inclined toward a negative reaction to Romney’s Mormonism were more concerned with ousting President Obama from the White House.

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19 A December 2012 Pew survey found a nearly identical 65 percent of Americans could identify Romney’s religion. However, a November 2011 Pew survey found that only 39 percent of Americans could identify Romney’s religion. We found a higher percentage in 2008. The difference could be that some voters could recall Romney’s religion in the midst of the 2008 primary race but it slipped their mind by the fall of 2011. It could also be that drawn for the online Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project 2008 was more politically knowledgeable than the sample drawn for the Pew telephone surveys. It could also be because we used different standards for determining a correct answer. Or it could be because of sampling variability.
To summarize what we have learned from our analysis of the 2012 presidential election:

1. **Novelty Wears Off**

In the 2008 Republican primaries, Romney was largely unknown. Thus, information about him—particularly his membership in an “exotic” religion—had a large effect on voters’ perceptions. However, by the general election of 2012, Romney had become a household name. Accordingly, the novelty of learning about his background had worn off including, and perhaps especially, information about his religion.

2. **Context Matters**

In the 2012 general election, Romney was no longer one among many Republican hopefuls vying for the party’s presidential nomination. He had become the party’s standard-bearer against a Democratic president with exceedingly low approval among Republicans. When given a choice between a dislike for Obama and a dislike of Mormonism, the former overwhelmed the latter.

We should not dismiss the significance of the diminishing impact of Romney’s Mormonism the longer he was in the public eye. The dog that didn’t bark—at least not much—suggests that many voters had no problem voting for a Mormon in the context of the 2012 election, even those voters with theological concerns about Mormonism.
Although a small majority of voters chose Obama over Romney in 2012, the vast majority of that majority did so for political, not theological, reasons. We find it especially telling that our 2012 experiment shows that Republicans, Democrats, and Independents alike all had a similarly mild reaction to the description of Romney as a devout Mormon. While the decision to vote for Romney was largely determined by voters’ partisanship, reactions to his Mormonism were the same regardless of party.

**Did Mitt Romney Affect Attitudes Toward Mormons?**

Throughout 2011 and 2012, Mormonism was subject to extensive public attention—so much so that pundits regularly began referring to the “Mormon Moment” (M. Bowman 2012b). In journalistic parlance, a “news hole” opened up for stories about all things Mormon. There were articles about fashion among LDS hipsters (Williams 2011), Mormon cuisine (Moskin 2012) and, of course, *The Book of Mormon* musical on Broadway (Zoglin 2011). In the course of reporting on Mitt Romney’s biography, journalists introduced many Americans to numerous aspects of Mormonism, including his time as a missionary in France (Evans 2012), his temple marriage to Ann (Kantor 2012), his considerable financial contributions to the LDS Church (Podhoretz 2012), and his service as a bishop and stake president (Ertl 2012). Although we have already seen that this media attention did not lead to an increase in knowledge about Mormonism, the media attention to all things LDS suggests that public attitudes toward Mormons might have changed.
At first blush, it would appear that they have not. In our 2008 survey, 49 percent had a very favorable opinion of Mormons and 7 percent had an opinion that was very favorable. In 2012, 51 percent had a favorable opinion while 8 percent were very favorable—increases so small as to fall within the margin of error. Likewise, between 2007 and 2012, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life found that the percentage of Americans who say that Mormons are not Christians has remained at 31 percent.20

Similarly, the general perception of Mormons held steady. Panel 1 of Figure 9.11 displays the nearly flat line in general perceptions of Mormons, as measured on a 0-100 scale, from 2006—before Mitt Romney entered the political stage—to 2012.21 However, a closer look reveals that there has been a notable change in the distribution of opinions about Mormons. In the second panel of Figure 9.11, we break out how Republicans, Democrats, and Independents have each perceived Mormons over the period from 2006-2012. In 2006, there are no partisan differences; Mormons receive the same rating

20 In the surveys we have conducted, we have actually found a slight increase in the percentage saying that Mormons are not Christians, from 36 percent (2008) to 43 percent (2010) to 41 (percent). Our results differ from Pew surveys in 2007, 2011 and 2012, at least in part, because Pew uses telephone surveys while we have administered ours online. The Pew surveys have a sizeable fraction of “don’t know” responses, because in a telephone survey respondents can easily volunteer that they do not know the answer, whereas our online survey did not have an explicit “don’t know” option. In 2012, 18 percent of Pew survey respondents said they did not know whether Mormons are Christians, compared to 16 percent in 2011 and 17 percent in 2007. When we put our results alongside Pew’s, we can either conclude that the percentage of Americans who think Mormons are not Christians stayed the same (Pew) or increased slightly (our data). Either way, the percentage did not decrease. See Data Appendix for details of the 2007, 2011, and 2012 Pew surveys.
21 The flat line is especially noteworthy given that these data came from different surveys and are thus subject to the vagaries of what are known in the polling business as house effects, or variations in sampling, question wording, weighting and so on that produce systematic differences across survey research firms.
across the party spectrum. By 2012, a wide party gap opened up. Republicans became more much favorable toward Mormons, Independents became slightly more so, and Democrats became sharply less favorable.

Like an object being acted on by equal and opposing forces, the net result is that the overall attitude toward Mormons did not move. Likewise, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life found that between 2011 and 2012, Republicans became more likely to offer a positive one-word impression of Mormons, while Democrats became less likely.\(^22\) Republicans also became more likely to say that their religion has “a lot in common” with Mormon beliefs, while Democrats did not change (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2012e). In chapter 8, we found a similar pattern with Gallup survey data on support for a generic Mormon candidate.

[Figure 9.11 about here]

In our politically polarized times, perhaps we should not be surprised that attitudes toward the religion of the Republican presidential nominee would split along party lines. When so much in American society takes on political meaning, why not the perceptions of a religion, especially the religion of the Republican presidential nominee?

Whether a matter of surprise or not, the partisan inflection in attitudes toward Mormons complicate our assessment of the 2012 presidential election. For while Mitt Romney’s Mormonism did not, in the end, have much of a direct effect on the presidential vote, this does not mean Mormonism has ceased to matter at the polls.

\(^{22}\) Specifically, in November 2011, 23 percent of Republicans offered a positive one-word response compared to 35 percent of Republicans in December 2012. Among Democrats, the percentage of positive responses dropped from 26 percent to 19 percent.
Another experiment indicates that Mormon candidates for other offices risk a negative reaction to their religion. In the fall of 2012, we tested people’s likelihood of voting for a mayoral and gubernatorial candidate when he was and was not identified as a Mormon. As in the Romney experiment, we provided a baseline, boilerplate biography of a fictitious candidate, and then in the experimental group added that the candidate was “active in the Mormon Church.”

Figure 9.12 contains the results, broken out by Republicans and Democrats. In both cases Democrats had a sharp aversion to the Mormon candidate, comparable to the negative effect that information about Romney’s religion produced in early 2008, when he was relatively unknown. Among Democrats, support for this hypothetical candidate dropped by roughly 40 percentage points once he was identified as Mormon. Among Republicans, support dropped a little, but the effect is not statistically significant.

[Figure 9.12 about here]

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23 The full experimental treatments were worded as follows. Respondents were assigned to either the mayoral or gubernatorial experiment. The text in bold was not included in the description given to the control group.

Jim Anderson is running for mayor/governor of a mid-sized city/state close to yours. He is forty-two years old, married, and a father of three school-age children. He started a successful local real estate company. He has also been the president of the local Rotary Club and is an active member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, also known as the Mormon Church. Anderson was re-elected twice to the state legislature.
Is the “Mormon effect” among Democrats because of religious bigotry? Not necessarily. With limited information about these hypothetical candidates, including no party label, most Democrats likely inferred that this candidate was a Republican. After all, the Republicans’ presidential nominee was Mormon. And as we showed in chapters 4 and 5, Mormons are mostly Republicans and generally conservative. Similarly, Mormons’ highly publicized and tightly organized movement to muster support for California’s Proposition 8 has likely also contributed to the perception of Mormons as politically active social conservatives squarely under the Republican umbrella. And of course, the 2012 Republican presidential nominee was a Mormon as well.

These inferences are not merely hypothetical, as we have empirical confirmation that voters are largely aware of Mormons’ Republican-ness. In the same 2012 survey, we asked our respondents whether members of different religious groups are Republicans, Democrats, or “an even mix of both.” As many people describe Mormons as “mostly Republicans” (59 percent) as say the same about evangelicals (61 percent)—when the latter are often referred to as the base of the Republican Party.

**Conclusion**

Much is rightly made of John F. Kennedy’s victory in the 1960 presidential election as a giant leap for religious tolerance in America. In winning that election, Kennedy demonstrated that the Constitution’s promise that there shall be no religious test for office was true in fact as well as law, at least for Catholics. However, while Kennedy was the first Catholic to win, he was not the first to run. That distinction
belongs to Al Smith, who ran as the Democratic presidential nominee in 1928. During the 1928 campaign, Smith faced virulent anti-Catholicism in a landslide loss to Herbert Hoover (Prendergrast 1999). There were many reasons for Smith’s loss and so it would not be accurate to pin it all on his religion. But neither should we dismiss the hostility and even bigotry directed toward him because of his religion.

In assessing Romney’s 2012 campaign, is he the Mormons’ Kennedy or Smith? Superficially, he resembles Smith. After all, both lost. The data we have presented in this chapter, however, suggests that Romney resembles Kennedy after all. Or, at least, his 2012 run for the White House was more like 1960 than 1928. During his first presidential run in 2008, Romney’s Mormonism was definitely a drag on his political support. While Americans highly knowledgeable about Mormonism or who have a close relationship with a Mormon expressed little concern about his religion, such people were in relatively short supply. But in 2012, Romney’s Mormonism faded as an issue. In not winning the presidency, he may not have broken through the stained glass ceiling, but perhaps he made it more like an open window. Romney is a Mormon candidate who lost a presidential election, not the candidate who lost because he was Mormon. The difference is significant.

While Romney’s campaign represents a significant step toward the widespread acceptance of Mormons, suspicions remain. Specifically, our findings regarding social contact are worth noting. Recall that it is people who know a Mormon in passing who react most negatively to Mormonism, and are the most impervious to changing their mind. We suspect that the explanation for the negative reaction among people with
only moderate contact lies in Mormons’ distinctiveness, which is apparent to those who have a Mormon acquaintance. Their distinctiveness apparently raises suspicions.

Furthermore, Mormons’ tendency to form strong bonds with fellow Mormons likely limits the sort of close relationships between Latter-day Saints and “gentiles” that soften those suspicions. Mormons who are concerned with fostering a positive perception of their faith should take note of our findings. Warm feelings toward Mormons result from close relationships with people outside of the sacred tabernacle; just living and working alongside non-Mormons without forming tight connections is not enough. In fact, shallow relationships of this type may do more harm than good.

Throughout this book, we have argued that Mormons are a vestige of the ethno-religious cleavages that once defined American politics. The strong identification of Mormons with the Republican Party in the public eye adds still another dimension to their ethno-religious nature. In the heyday of ethno-religious political alliances, denominations and parties were intertwined, just as Mormons today are tightly coupled with the Republican Party. Accordingly, it is entirely rational for a voter who leans Democratic to oppose a Mormon candidate, in the absence of little other information.

Rational or not, however, the blurry lines in the public eye between their church and the Republican Party should give Mormons pause.

Mormonism did not cost Mitt Romney the presidency in 2012, but his presidential bid has shaped attitudes toward Mormonism. Although Romney’s time on the national stage did not lead to greater knowledge of the LDS religion nor a change in whether Mormons are thought to be Christians, it did lead to a sharp partisan divide in
how Mormons are perceived. They rose in favor among Republicans and fell in the eyes of Democrats. Romney leaves a legacy of intensifying partisan relevance for Mormonism; whether this legacy lasts remains to be seen. Should it last, Mormons may find the religious mission of the LDS Church hampered by its close association with one party. On this, chapter 10 has more to say.
Works Cited


Figure 9.1

Mormon Stereotypes and the 2012 Presidential Vote

Figure 9.2

Source: Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project, 2008
A black border represents a statistically significant effect (p < 0.05, one-tailed test)
Table 9.1 Descriptions of Candidates' Religious Backgrounds, 2008 Experiment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Religious description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hillary Clinton</td>
<td>“is an active layperson in the United Methodist Church”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike Huckabee</td>
<td>“has been an ordained Southern Baptist pastor.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barack Obama (controversial church)</td>
<td>“Some people have said his church is hostile to Whites and promotes Black separatism.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barack Obama (actually a Muslim)</td>
<td>“Some people have said that he must be a Muslim, because his paternal grandfather was a Muslim.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 9.3

Reactions to Presidential Candidates' Religion 2008

Likelihood of Voting for Candidate (relative to baseline)

Source: Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project, 2008
A black border represents a statistically significant effect (p < 0.05, one-tailed test).
Figure 9.4

![Bar chart showing likelihood of voting for Romney](chart.png)

**Factual Knowledge About Mormonism**
"Romney was a local leader in the Mormon Church"

Source: Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project, 2008
A black border represents a statistically significant effect (p < 0.05, one-tailed test).
Figure 9.5

Source: Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project, 2008
A black border represents a statistically significant effect (p < 0.05, one-tailed test).
Figure 9.6

Source: Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project, 2008
A black border represents a statistically significant effect (p < 0.05, one-tailed test).
Figure 9.7
Reaction to “Not Christian” Frame and Counter-Frames, by Knowledge of Mormonism

Source: Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project, 2008
A black border represents a statistically significant effect (p < 0.05, one-tailed test).
Figure 9.8
Reactions to “Not Christian” Frame and Counter-Frames, by Contact with Mormons

Source: Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project, 2008
A black border represents a statistically significant effect (p < 0.05, one-tailed test).
Figure 9.9

The Negative Effect of Romney’s Mormonism Declined from 2008 to 2012

"Romney was a local leader in the Mormon Church"

Likelihood of voting for Romney (relative to baseline)

Source: Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project, 2008 and Mormon Perceptions Study, 2012
A black border represents a statistically significant effect (p < 0.05, one-tailed test).
Figure 9.10

The Claim That Mormons Are Not Christians Ceased to Have an Effect Between 2008 and 2012—Even Among Evangelicals

Source: Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project, 2008 and Mormon Perceptions Study, 2012

A black border represents a statistically significant effect (p < 0.05, one-tailed test).
Figure 9.11

Overall, General Perceptions of Mormons Have Held Steady

The General Perception of Mormons Have Become Politically Polarized

Overall, General Perceptions of Mormons Have Held Steady

The General Perception of Mormons Have Become Politically Polarized
Figure 9.12

Source: Mormon Perceptions Study, 2012
A black border represents a statistically significant effect (p < 0.05, one-tailed test).
**Chapter 9, Appendix**

**Table 9A.1 Multinomial Logit Model of the 2012 Presidential Vote**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>Vote for Romney</th>
<th>Vote for Obama</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Party identification (3 categories)</td>
<td>1.642***</td>
<td>-1.359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mormon stereotypes (quartiles)</td>
<td>-0.889***</td>
<td>0.324**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelical Protestant</td>
<td>1.013**</td>
<td>-0.126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mormon</td>
<td>-0.008</td>
<td>0.321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Catholic</td>
<td>0.704</td>
<td>0.200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainline Protestant</td>
<td>1.150**</td>
<td>0.331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No religion</td>
<td>-0.559</td>
<td>-0.731*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secular salience</td>
<td>-0.151</td>
<td>0.216**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity</td>
<td>-0.211</td>
<td>-0.724***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.041***</td>
<td>0.034***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>0.298</td>
<td>-0.192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (Female)</td>
<td>-0.629**</td>
<td>0.096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>-0.827</td>
<td>1.221**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>-0.220</td>
<td>0.325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coefficient</td>
<td>Standard Error</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.571***</td>
<td>(0.131)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.455***</td>
<td>(0.110)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-3.828***</td>
<td>(1.182)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-1.466</td>
<td>(0.974)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>851</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R-squared</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Did not turn out to vote is the omitted category.
Appendix

This material appears in chapter 7, and might be helpful as context for our discussion of Mormon stereotypes.

Stereotypes

The mixture of positive and negative perceptions comes into sharper focus when we compare the perceptions of Mormons to those of other religious groups. In the Mormon Perceptions Survey our team conducted in the fall of 2012, we asked a representative sample of Americans if a series of potential stereotypes—both critical and complimentary—applied to Mormons. Depending on the stereotype, we compared Mormons to Catholics, Jews, or Muslims or, in some cases, to all three groups. We did not make these stereotypes out of whole cloth, but drew on terms that are plausibly associated with each group within the public consciousness. For example, on the positive side we have seen that many Americans associate Mormons with strong families, an idea that could be associated with Muslims and Catholics as well. As a negative example, Mormons are also thought by some to have strange beliefs, which, in a predominantly Christian nation, might also be the case for Jews and Muslims. Figure 7.5 displays results for all of the stereotype items.

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24 For a similar, and enlightening, discussion on Catholic stereotypes, see Greeley and Hout (2006, chapter 12).

25 Each stereotype item had five response categories, from which we created an additive scale using the following values for each response: strongly agree (+2), agree (+1), neither agree nor disagree (0), disagree (-1), and strongly disagree (-2). Figure 7.5 displays the mean value for each stereotype. Thus, a number below 0 means that the average respondent disagrees with the stereotype, while one above 0 indicates agreement.
Our survey included four positive stereotypes: members of the group in question are patriotic, caring, friendly, and have strong families. Of these four, Mormons score highest on strong families, more so than Muslims and just edging out Catholics. They also receive relatively high marks for being patriotic, caring, and friendly—about the same as Jews or Catholics.

The list includes one ambiguous stereotype, namely that Mormons are rich. Since this perception is also sometimes repeated as a stereotype for Jews as well, they are the group we use as a benchmark. We classify this stereotype as ambiguous because, in the context of contemporary America, viewing a group as rich could be either a compliment or criticism. When applied to Jews, the stereotype of being “rich” has often had a negative connotation, as it might invoke such anti-Semitic imagery as Shylockian moneylenders. Outside of any specific anti-Semitic tropes, in some circles deriding “the rich” is a populist rallying cry. On the other hand, for many Americans being rich is a matter of aspiration, not derogation—whoever is being described. Whatever its valence, Americans are more likely than not to describe both Jews and Mormons as rich.

Our negative stereotypes include being insular, having strange beliefs, being intolerant of other religions, having disrespect for women’s rights, and not thinking for themselves. Mormons are perceived as being about as insular as Jews (again, a longstanding anti-Semitic stereotype), but less so than Catholics. Mormons and Muslims are equally likely to be perceived as having strange beliefs, while Jews are not thought
to have strange beliefs at all (although neither do Americans generally disagree with that characterization of what Jews believe). Mormons are also less likely than Muslims to be described as intolerant of other religions. Mormons are not seen as especially disrespectful of women—compared to Muslims, who are, and Catholics who are not by a slight margin. The average American disagrees, slightly, that Mormons “can’t think for themselves”; they also disagree that this phrase describes Catholics.

Thus each of these religious groups faces a blend of positive, negative, and neutral reactions; some tilt more to the positive, others to the negative. Here, too, Mormons are viewed less positively than Catholics and Jews, but more positively than Muslims.

Just as the ethno-religious groups of the past had both allies and antagonists, these multiple sources of data demonstrate that Mormons’ distinctiveness as a peculiar people works both for and against their popular perception. One should notfacilely assume that Mormonism elicits universally negative reactions. Rather, the received wisdom about Mormons includes both good and bad although, on balance, the scale tips toward the negative.
Figure 7.5

Positive Stereotypes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strong families</th>
<th>Patriotic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mormons</td>
<td>Mormons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>Muslims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholics</td>
<td>Catholics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Caring         | Friendly |
|                |          |
| Agree          | Agree    |
| Disagree       | Disagree |
| Mormons        | Mormons  |
| Muslims        | Jews     |
| Catholics      | Jews     |

Ambiguous Stereotype

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rich</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mormons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Negative Stereotypes

Source: Mormon Perceptions Study, 2012