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The Influence of Heaven-Hell Belief on Attitudes Towards Violence

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Abstract

We find consistent evidence that stronger levels of religiosity – ranging from belief in God to religious attendance – increase prosocial behaviour. Yet, when we delve deeper into the sub-features of religiosity, we find more complex evidence. One specific agenda is belief in heaven and hell, which research finds to operate in different correlational directions in explaining violent behaviour and attitudes. In this paper we draw on a large multiple country dataset to examine how far heaven and hell beliefs influence attitudes to violence justification (covering five types of violence ranging from corporal punishment up to terrorism). Controlling for multiple factors, hell beliefs generally increased justifiability across all types of violence, whilst heaven, generally served to decrease support for violence.

Keywords: Violence; Violent Attitudes; Religion; Public Attitudes; Crime