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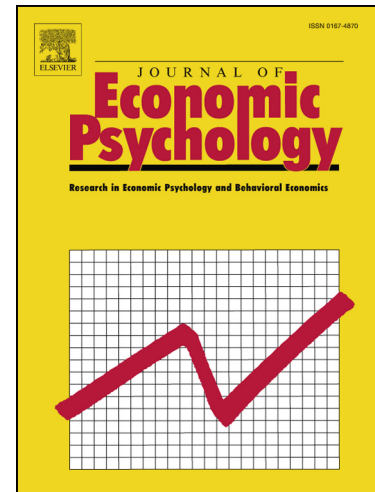
Moralizing Gods and Armed Conflict

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Moralizing Gods and Armed Conflict

Ahmed Skali*

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Abstract

This research documents a robust empirical pattern between moralizing gods, which prescribe fixed laws of morality, and conflict fatalities, using spatially referenced data for Africa on contemporary conflicts and ancestral belief systems of individual ethnic groups prior to European contact. Moralizing gods significantly increase casualties at the local level, even after controlling for a rich set of local geographic and socio-economic features, and all country-specific determinants of conflict. The identification strategy draws on the evolutionary psychology roots of moralizing gods as a solution to the collective action problem in pre-modern societies. The results suggest the relationship is causal: a one standard deviation increase in the likelihood of emergence of a moralizing god increases casualties by 18 to 37% approximately.

JEL Classification: D74, O55, Z12

Keywords: Conflict; Commitment Problem; Religion; Africa; Cooperation

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