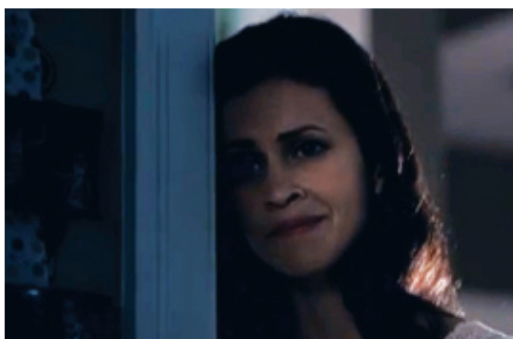
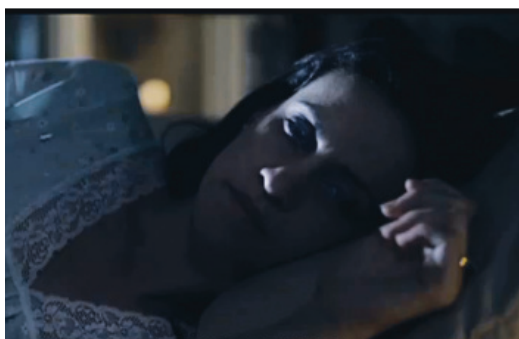


# Attack Ads for Jesus

Your greatest source of strength might also be your biggest political blind spot. BY ANNE VICKMAN



**I**f you've found God, but haven't yet settled on a presidential candidate, there's a film clip the politicians would like to show you.

It's dark and scary, filled with hard-angled statistics and sinister music, and it's designed to do one thing: scare a vote out of you. *Romney loves firing people! Obama is a socialist!* Attack ads have always been popular among the political set, but now researchers are finally beginning to understand *why* they work.

The answer, say Harvard psychologists, is a connection between intuitive thinking and belief in a higher power. In a study, Amitai Shenhav, David Rand, and Joshua Greene found that cognitive style—the way people process information—can influence, and even predict, belief in God. And this, in turn, might provide insight into how we form other deeply held convictions, like political beliefs.

Shenhav and his colleagues analyzed how subjects used intuition- or reflection-based thinking to answer several math questions, such as “A bat and a ball cost \$1.10 in total. The bat costs \$1 more than the ball. How much does the ball cost?”

According to the study, those who, incorrectly, said 10 cents were intuitive thinkers. They responded quickly using gut instinct. They were also more likely to believe in God. Reflective thinkers, who stopped

## **SLEEPLESS IN AMERICA**

How can the conservatively dressed, married mother portrayed in Crossroad GPS's “Wake Up” commercial get any rest in such uncertain times?

to analyze before answering (and got the correct response, 5 cents), were less likely to worship a higher power.

Political operatives seem to read the results as a call for factually loose attack ads. Think of it this way: 92 percent of Americans report a belief in God. That means an enormous majority of voters are likely intuitive thinkers—and therefore susceptible to these types of commercials. “Most ads are developed to

strike an emotionally responsive chord,” says Tobe Berkovitz, an associate professor of advertising at BU and a nationally recognized expert in political campaign communication. “The music, the imagery, the facts and figures—all these things are targeted toward a gut reaction rather than a cerebral reaction.”

So this election season, you can forget the warm introductions to candidates. “If anything is going to get attention, it's the slash-and-burn attack,” Berkovitz says. “That's not going to do any good for democracy, but it might do well for [a] candidacy.”

## URBAN INDEX



2011 WAS  
ROUGH ON MBTA  
WORKERS.

# 86

Number of  
reported  
assaults on T  
drivers, January  
1 to December 7.

# 28

Percent  
increase over  
the same  
period in 2010.

# 28

Percent  
of those  
incidents that  
involved spit.

# 1

Number of  
spit samples  
collected for  
the MBTA's new  
DNA testing  
program.

# 0

Number of  
arrests that  
have resulted  
so far from  
testing.

SOURCE: BOSTON  
INSPECTORAL  
SERVICES