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Several studies have shown the importance of confidence and even overconfidence in participating in warfare. Some researchers have proposed that religion is an evolutionary adaptation for the capacity to participate in warfare, in part due to its ability to enhance confidence during intergroup violence. Though previous literature has presented compelling theories to support this notion of religion as an adaptation—at least in part—for war, no previous research has addressed this hypothesis in an empirical, experimental setting.

This study aimed to test whether supernatural salience would in fact increase confidence in performance prior to and after intergroup combat. In the context of paintball wars, experimentally manipulated state perceptions of supernatural agency, primed via a pre-battle visualization, induced greater confidence prior to battle and enhanced confidence and perceptions of performance after the battle, in subjects primed with supernatural cognition than in subjects in a neutral condition. Implications for evolutionary mechanisms activated by supernatural cognition for the purposes of ingroup coordination during competition with outgroups are discussed.