

Religious Value Priming, Threat, and Political Tolerance

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Paul A. Djupe¹ and Brian R. Calfano²

Abstract

The exploration of the religious underpinnings of intolerance has long focused on the effects of religious behaviors and beliefs, but has ignored a variety of important facets of the religious experience that should bear on tolerance judgments: elite communication, religious values about how the world should be ordered, and social networks in churches. We focus on the communication of religious values and argue specifically that values should affect threat judgments and thus affect tolerance judgments indirectly. We test these assertions using data gathered in a survey experiment and find that priming exclusive religious values augments threat and thus reduces tolerance.

Keywords

tolerance, religion and politics, values, experiments

There is a time and place for fear and righteous indignation . . . But fear and anger inherently limit understanding and compassion. Now is the time for us to mature into a movement that is expanding its goals and striving to reach those goals in positive ways rather than limiting ourselves to being *against* a handful of negative trends.

—Rev. Joel Hunter 2008, 20 (emphasis in original)

If 2004 represented a new high water mark of evangelical influence in American politics with the reelection of George W. Bush and the passage of antigay rights amendments in the states, then the flood waters appear to have greatly receded since. Formerly prominent Christian conservative leaders have passed from the scene, and a new crop of leaders, several of whom pastor megachurches, have emerged to speak for a new evangelicalism. While the movement's scope and theological legitimacy are debatable, its potential political ramifications are likely not. Of particular interest to political tolerance scholars are the language and political positions adopted by "new evangelical" leaders like Rick Warren, Rich Cizik, Bill Hybels, Joel Hunter, Rob Bell, Sam Rodriguez, and Jim Wallis (Fitzgerald 2008; Garofoli 2009).

Their language is consciously inclusive, pluralistic, and bridge building. It varies considerably from the rhetoric of the old religious right leadership, who "have . . . done their best to see that evangelicals continue to regard themselves as an embattled subculture" (Fitzgerald 2008). Instead, it is

common to hear from such figures as Rick Warren of Saddleback Church that "I think God likes variety. There's value in that. We should enjoy our differences" (Warren 2006), and to hear from parishioners at churches, such as Joel Hunter's Northland church in Florida, that "He pushed us out [into the community]. It's not a church that wants to gather you in with people of the same mind-set" (Fitzgerald 2008). Hearing speech like this suggests that the content of elite communication may be an important variable to consider given how closely these concepts relate to the group boundaries that shape tolerance judgments. Moreover, the level of religiosity in such churches is unlikely to be different from that in old religious right churches, highlighting that the particular values advanced in churches may be orthogonal to traditional measures of religiosity, at least within religious traditions.

Thus, in this article, we explore the effect of the promotion of inclusive versus exclusive religious values on perceptions of threat and political tolerance of least-liked groups. First, we discuss previous treatments of religion's effect on tolerance and focus more attention on factors either ignored or crudely operationalized in the literature's treatment of religion—elite communication, religious values, and social networks. We also hone in on

¹Denison University, Granville, OH, USA

²Missouri State University, Springfield, USA

Corresponding Author:

Paul A. Djupe, Department of Political Science, Denison University,
Granville, OH 43023, USA.
Email: djupe@denison.edu

the effect of religious experience on threat by proposing that threat should play a more prominent role in theorizing about the connection between religion and tolerance. We discuss the extent to which the values of concern are communicated across American religious groups and then report on survey experiment results from data conducted around Springfield, Missouri, in December 2009 to March 2010. Using these data, we show that exposure to inclusive values encourages people to reduce the sense of threat they feel from the group they most dislike, which fuels tolerance of their political presence.

Religion and Tolerance

To be sure, exploring the effect of religion on tolerance is well-trodden ground. From the earliest to the most recent studies, researchers have found that religious attributes of the believer are important correlates of the tolerance of disliked and least-liked groups. Stouffer's (1955) seminal work did not distinguish between religious beliefs and practice and focused on the difference between attenders and nonattenders. Further work emphasizes the difference between beliefs and behaviors, generally using the definition of religion as consisting of belonging, believing, and behaving (the "3B" approach—Kellstedt et al. 1996; Layman 2000; Steensland et al. 2000).

Few vest explanatory power in religious traditions, themselves, but look to variance in religious beliefs and behaviors to explain tolerance judgments. Most of this research finds that fundamentalist Christians who regard the Bible as the literal word of God hold a set of beliefs that strongly influence their political tolerance judgments (Wilcox, Jelen, and Leege 1993, 85), encouraging them to reject unbiblical lifestyles such as homosexuality (Reimer and Park 2001, 736). While some studies measure dogmatism separately (Eisenstein 2006; Gibson 2010), most argue that dogmatic religious beliefs lead to intolerance because they are unlikely to accept other beliefs and lifestyles they find contrary to the Bible (Gibson and Tedin 1988; Jelen and Wilcox 1990; Layman 2000; Reimer and Park 2001, 736; Robinson 2010; Smidt and Penning 1982; Steensland et al. 2000; Wilcox 1987; Wilcox and Jelen 1990; Wilcox and Robinson 2010; but see Eisenstein 2006, 2008).

Dogmatism is not the only religious belief mechanism affecting tolerance. Religious people may place a higher value on authority, which groups with unconventional views and practices may be seen to undermine (Owen, Wald, and Hill 1991; Wald, Owen, and Hill 1989). By now, a broad literature has shown that authoritarianism predicts political attitudes, including tolerance (e.g., Barker and Tinnick 2006; Feldman 2003; Mockabee 2007). Tellingly, very few explorations of religious effects on tolerance have included authoritarian tendencies, and

religion's relationship to prejudice has been shown to rely heavily on the presence of authoritarianism (Laythe et al. 2002; see also Canetti et al. 2009). Relatedly, others place emphasis on the views of God individuals have. Those who believe in a wrathful God are more likely to be intolerant (Froese, Bader, and Smith 2008).

Religious practice, most often captured by high attendance in fundamentalist churches, can also lead to intolerance by encouraging religious individuals to remain cloistered in cohesive social groups without exposure to dissonant beliefs (Green et al. 1994, 32; Reimer and Park 2001, 736; though see Neiheisel, Djupe, and Sokhey 2009). This sequestered atmosphere is the opposite of the cosmopolitan lifestyle associated with more secular individuals that feeds tolerant attitudes (Green et al. 1994, 29).

There are problems facing this collection of work that Eisenstein (2006) details: (1) the religion measures used across studies are variable, (2) studies focused on religious effects often lack controls suggested by other tolerance studies, (3) the samples are occasionally not of the general population but of elites, and (4) the statistical methods used may not be state of the art. When Eisenstein attempts to correct for these inadequacies, she finds a mild *positive* effect on tolerance from religiosity, no effect from doctrinal orthodoxy, and weak indirect effects from both through other variables.¹ One finding of note is that doctrinal orthodoxy has weak effects boosting threat perceptions.

Gibson (2010) agrees with Eisenstein's characterization of the literature's weaknesses, but comes to different conclusions. Using a "religious traditionalism" measure that sums highly religious responses to a variety of behavior and belief items, Gibson finds a weak relationship with intolerance that persists in the face of a powerful set of controls. Admitting that traditionalism also affects tolerance through dogmatism, he finds no evidence that traditionalism affects threat perceptions.

Still, at least four things are missing from even these most recent studies, and all relate primarily to the conception of religious experience. First, the 3B approach makes reference to social settings of religion through the highly aggregated dummy variables of religious traditions, but it lacks any explicit operationalization of exposure to communication in religious organizations relevant to tolerance judgments. The effect of information is one of the preoccupations of the more general tolerance literature (e.g., Marcus et al. 1995; Mutz 2002), so work along this line helps to bring investigations of religion in tolerance judgments more in line with dominant trends in the literature.

One could conceptualize a number of additional items to measure regarding the tolerance-relevant information individuals could be exposed to in their religious experiences. They might include explicit arguments to tolerate

others or strip them of their rights, information regarding the motives and actions of out-groups, the degree of threat posed by out-groups, and the values that should govern the world and people's lives. These all might reasonably appear in sermons or occupy the discussions people have in houses of worship, each should bear on the degree to which people tolerate least-liked groups, and none of them have been measured in houses of worship as of yet.

What has been measured in houses of worship suggests that failing to capture the degree to which congregants are exposed to political cues in church is a serious oversight. Houses of worship have been found to contain sometimes considerable political diversity (e.g., Neiheisel, Djupe, and Sokhey 2009), though not if you look solely at discussion partners (Mutz and Mondak 2006). Moreover, the current conceptions of religion leave no space for elites. This is a curious omission in our view because religious elites often have views at odds with congregants (see, for example, Djupe and Calfano 2012b; Djupe and Gilbert 2009; Djupe and Neiheisel 2008), advance numerous policy-relevant arguments in public spaces, including in their sermons (Djupe and Gilbert 2003; Guth et al. 1997), and often draw media coverage for their acts promoting tolerance and intolerance. Gathering such information systematically would not only help to unpack what differences between religious traditions mean but also expand our thinking beyond religious labels to understand the varied impact of religious experiences on how we treat others. Some of this work has begun (see Djupe and Calfano forthcoming; Robinson 2010) but is in its infancy.

Work on religion and tolerance has thus far avoided capturing explicitly the social networks of believers, especially those that flow through their houses of worship. To be fair, previous work has discussed the social network concept as it applies to congregations, though has been forced to operationalize it rather crudely with such measures as church attendance. Small advances have been made. Putnam and Campbell (2010), for instance, find new evidence for the long-established effect of intergroup contact on tolerance, but they do not assess the degree to which individuals are exposed to difference in their intra-religious networks. Furthermore, casual assumptions in the literature, that evangelical's networks are closed and homogeneous, for example, do not withstand empirical scrutiny. Djupe and Calfano (2012a) find that the social networks of evangelicals do not differ significantly from those of members of other religious traditions (using data from the 2000 American National Election Study [ANES]).

Evangelical networks may have more members of the same faith (Putnam and Campbell 2010; Schwadel 2005), but the substance of their networks in terms of their political agreement, discussion, expertise, coworkers, and relatives

do not differ from those of members of other religious traditions. Moreover, and importantly, in new survey data from American Muslims, tolerance depends, in part, on the interplay between disagreement with and the in-group status of a discussion partner (Djupe and Calfano 2012a). That is, social interaction of American Muslims with non-Muslims builds political tolerance as long as they agree on political matters; disagreement between American Muslims and non-Muslims breeds intolerance (as does agreement among Muslim discussion partners). Thus, "religion" may help encourage tolerance not only by exposing people to a diversity of views within the congregation but also by helping to build bridges with other like-minded people beyond congregational walls. The effect of disagreement, then, is an important moderating force on the effect of "bonding" and "bridging" relationships (see Putnam 2000).

Last, the literature on religion and tolerance has barely considered the role of threat, except as a control in a few instances (e.g., Canetti et al. 2009; Gibson and Tedin 1988; though see Eisenstein 2006; Gibson 2010). The dominance of threat perceptions in shaping political tolerance has been clear since early work (Stouffer 1955). It is now commonly understood that if a group is thought of as threatening in some way that the tolerance of that particular group will decrease (Gibson 1998, 2006; Marcus et al. 1995). For example, following the September 11, 2001 attacks, the perceived threat from Muslims was high and attacks against Muslims increased (American Academy of Religion 2001). Both egocentric and, especially, national (sociotropic) feelings of threat can be effective in stimulating protective actions (Huddy et al. 2002), though egocentric threat is far less common or effectual (e.g., Gibson 2010, 166). A focus on the religious inspirations of threat perceptions is particularly warranted given the general lack of inquiry into the sources of threat (Gibson 2006).

Thus far, the connection of threat to conventional measures of religion in this literature has been mixed, as noted above. Gibson (2010) found no relationship between religious traditionalism and threat, whereas Eisenstein (2006) found a weak relationship of doctrinal orthodoxy and threat. One reason for the inconsistencies, we suspect, is that existing religiosity measures do not convey the motivations of the activity or the content of religious information conveyed to congregants—the values by which they are guided. If religious involvement is directed to reaching out to the community, whether for evangelism or service, the political ramifications should differ from when religious engagement is directed in toward the self or the congregation.² That is, existing measures that focus simply on religious beliefs and behaviors ignore the religious values that orient the believer's public attitudes and behaviors.

We see a straightforward connection between religion and threat perceptions. The process of reaching out to new members encourages people to think outside of their immediate social group to consider others, which serves to reduce the risk of interacting with others. However, emphasizing boundaries with the world focuses attention on the in-group and raises the risk of contamination from worldly forays. Thus, promotion of reaching out to non-members should serve to reduce threat and increase tolerance. Promoting tension with the world should do the opposite—increase the threat posed by out-groups and thereby decrease tolerance. This is the same essential force motivating Gibson and Gouws' (2000) investigation of social identity effects on tolerance in the South African public, though they did not assess the plasticity of those identities as we do here.

We do not believe that this feeling of tension with the world is hard-wired. Instead, the degree of tension felt by individual members is easily manipulated (see Sherif et al. 1961; Tajfel 1970) and can be derived from a variety of information sources. An especially potent one should be religious groups that individuals look to in order to shape the extent to which and how they engage the world. Other members may be involved in this process, but we suspect that clergy are especially important cue-givers who can prime inclusion or exclusion, and thus either weaken or reinforce in-group identities.

To summarize this discussion, we believe that the literature investigating religious influence on tolerance needs to take into account communication with adherents from within social networks and from religious elites. Information from both sources can, among other things, work to shape the values individuals hold that can either shrink or expand group boundaries. How these bounds are drawn, in turn, shapes whether out-groups are more or less threatening and, therefore, whether they should be extended basic political rights. This understanding enables a more fluid, dynamic religious influence, suggesting that religious forces may promote or undermine support for tolerance in society in demonstrable ways.

From here, we briefly turn to validate our use of these religious values by positioning them in a broader context, arguing that they are reflective of the central drivers of the religious economy in the United States. Then, we review existing evidence about the actual presentation of these religious values, as we have measured them, by clergy across a wide spectrum of American religion. This will help motivate and contextualize the survey experiment we perform to demonstrate the effects of religious value priming.

The Religious Economic Roots of Inclusion

It has long been observed that the First Amendment allowed for a free, vibrant, and competitive market in

religious options for Americans. In this competitive religious economy, religious firms have to contend for adherents, which dictates some differentiation in product, but generally an inclusive approach to nonadherents (Finke and Stark 2005; Stark and Finke 2000). Although there are multiple dimensions that differentiate churches, one of the more potentially significant for understanding of tolerance is the degree of tension a religious group perceives and pursues. Tension, as Stark and Finke (2000, 143) describe it, is “the degree of distinctiveness, separation, and antagonism between a religious group and the ‘outside’ world.” The degree of tension between the religious group and the world is at the heart of the classic distinction between church and sect (Johnson 1963; Niebuhr 1929; Troeltsch 1931). Church and sect are polar opposites meant to define the space in which religious groups compose their public orientations. “Churches,” in Troeltsch’s view, were large, inclusive bureaucratic structures that accepted all who were born in to them, whereas “sects” were small, exclusive, insular groups who required decisions to be made by adults. Later work jettisoned many of these components to focus on the degree of rejection of the community (Johnson 1963; see also Iannacone 1988).

As Finke and Stark (2005) argue, more sect-like churches have been the fastest growing because of two processes: they engage in vigorous outreach efforts and they emphasize tension with the world to promote member retention (see also Iannacone 1992). These two processes may themselves live in tension as higher boundaries with the world may inhibit vigorous (or at least successful) outreach efforts and a pure focus on outreach efforts inhibits providing for members. But, as American religious history shows, those groups that are able to adopt a sect-like tension with the world *and* engage in vigorous outreach efforts have been the most successful by gaining new members and retaining existing ones.

Communication of Inclusive/ Exclusive Values

These values were not created for their analytic value, but are presented in congregations across the United States to varying degrees. We draw on two data sources to describe the degree to which these values are actually communicated in American houses of worship. The first is the 2009 Cooperative Clergy Study (CCS), coordinated by Corwin Smidt at Calvin College. Common content was fielded to nine denominations that covered the theological spectrum of American Protestantism.³ At our request, each survey included our measures of inclusive and religious values, asking clergy, “How often do you preach on the following values in your sermons?” Each had responses coded 1 = *never*, 2 = *sometimes*, 3 = *often*, and 4 = *very often*. The wording of the values was as follows:

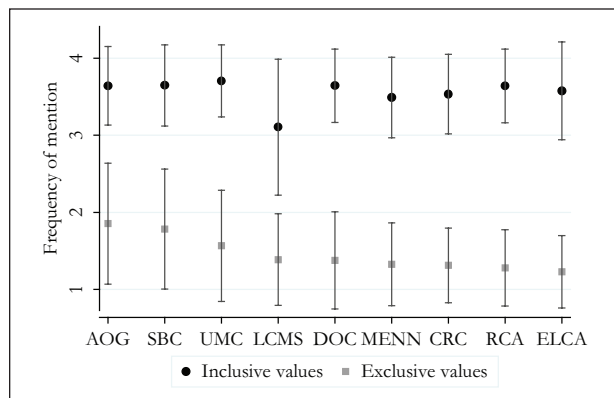


Figure 1. The mean frequency of addressing inclusive and exclusive religious values by clergy in nine Protestant denominations (with ± 1 SD caps).

Source: 2009 Cooperative Clergy Study.

AOG = Assemblies of God; SBC = Southern Baptist Church; UMC = United Methodist Church; LCMS = Lutheran Church Missouri Synod; DOC = Disciples of Christ; MENN = Mennonites; CRC = Christian Reformed Church; RCA = Reformed Church of America; ELCA = Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The y-axis is coded as follows: 4 = very often, 3 = often, 2 = seldom, and 1 = never.

Inclusive values

- To be true to your faith, it is important to “love the stranger as yourself.”
- To be true to your faith, it is important to invite others to church even if the church begins to change as a result.

Exclusive values

- To be true to my faith, it is important to shop as much as possible at stores owned by other people of my faith.
- To be true to my faith, it is important to keep company with other people of my faith.

A factor analysis confirmed the division of the items along inclusive/exclusive lines.⁴ Figure 1 shows the means by denomination of the two value types (caps are standard deviations), averaging across responses to the two questions. It is evident that all denominational clergy report presenting inclusive values at high rates (see black circles), with most approaching “very often.” The one exception is Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod clergy. Still, the rate of presenting an inclusive value does not vary significantly between mainline and evangelical Protestant clergy. Expressions of exclusive values (gray squares) are nowhere near as common as inclusive values. The bulk of clergy in these samples report “never” presenting these values, but some are more likely to present them than others. Specifically, the evangelical Assemblies of God and

Southern Baptist Church ministers present exclusive values at nearly twice the rate of clergy in other denominations (their average approaches “seldom”). These denominations vary considerably in their theological conservatism (Guth et al. 1997), making the degree of consistency in their value presentations all the more striking. While it would seem that clergy would emphasize one value set over another, the two are positively correlated ($r = .173, p = .00, n = 2,800$),⁵ which backs the twin goals of religious organizations—the evidently more important goal of recruiting new members (inclusive) while maintaining social and moral boundaries (exclusive; Stark and Finke 2000).

We also surveyed a snowball sample of clergy in congregations listed by the Greene County, Missouri citizen sample, which we will describe in more detail below. The sample was only 7 percent Catholic but otherwise Protestant or nondenominational and included mainline and evangelical congregations. We included the same values items here, though asked only if they were “essential to being a good Christian” (as compared with the frequency of their presentation). Again, a factor analysis confirmed the inclusive/exclusive division.⁶ Agreement with the essentiality of inclusive values was near universal and variation among religious traditions in this sample was insignificant. As with the CCS data, there was significant variation ($p = .01$) in agreement with the importance of exclusive values with evangelicals likely to agree ($M = 2.9$) and mainline Protestants and Catholic clergy split between agree and disagree ($M = 2.5$). Therefore, whether asked in terms of agreement or presentation frequency, adoption of inclusive values is more common than exclusive values, and evangelicals are more likely to adopt and present exclusive values than mainline Protestant or Catholic clergy. Moreover, these values are present in roughly the proportions predicted by advocates of the religious economy model (e.g., Stark and Finke 2000).

Experimental Design and Data

During the winter of 2009–2010, we conducted an original phone-based, survey-embedded experiment of an adult, largely evangelical sample to assess the effects of religious value priming. Using CATI technology, we conducted the experiment using subjects garnered from a Random Digit Dial call sample of 5,000 landline telephone numbers in Greene County, Missouri.⁷ Greene is the county home of Springfield, known as a central location for American evangelicals (it is home to the international headquarters of the Pentecostal Assemblies of God), and is directly north of Christian County, Missouri—identified by Chinni and Gimpel (2010) as a quintessential epicenter of evangelical Christianity in the United States. The sample contained a significant number of evangelical subjects (56%).⁸ For the conduct of an experiment, what is most necessary is variance across

key groups (Mutz 2011)—here, evangelicals and non-evangelicals (see also Druckman and Kam 2011). However, the sample does not resemble the nation and that is a limitation, but the results will be suggestive that any effects we find will be present in samples from other populations.

In the end, 772 subjects agreed to begin participation in the survey experiment, resulting in a response rate (*rr*) of 17.5 percent.⁹ Because of the random assignment of and exposure to the treatments that were done via the CATI software, the presence of attrition, clustering, or failure to treat violations are not of concern in these data (see Boutron, John, and Torgerson 2010)—successful randomization was achieved. The experiment itself constituted a simple 1 × 2 design, with subjects randomly assigned to a cell that varied exposure to a battery of either “inclusive” or “exclusive” religious values. The specific language used to capture the two values is listed above before the “Experimental Design and Data” section.

We contemplate priming values to be akin to a sermon, though of course many communicative mechanisms could serve to prime religious values (such as WWJD [What Would Jesus Do?] bracelets or the posters that “festooned” the sanctuary described by Wald, Owen, and Hill 1988). When stripped to their essence, most sermons are attempts to cajole, remind, and reconnect with particular beliefs and values. That is, many sermons are attempts to elevate the importance of some criterion or criteria in members’ subsequent decision-making processes. That houses of worship emphasize weekly, if not more frequent, reconsideration of what it means to be faithful suggests that repeat reminders are thought to be necessary to lead a good life.

This conceptualization is also important from the standpoint of experimental design assumptions. As Gaines, Kuklinski, and Quirk (2006) point out, one of the inherent drawbacks in many survey experiments is the inability of researchers to credibly assume that subject response is not confounded by any prior “real-world” exposure to the treatment. The strength of our design, however, is that it does not assume that subjects are blank slates in their cognitive encounters with inclusive and exclusive values. We fully expect that subjects may have some dint of these values in their heads prior to random exposure to our treatments. Because our assumption is that value exposure is part of the ongoing reception of value-based cues directed at congregants, the possibility of prior exposure among our subjects does not present a significant threat to the transmission mechanism itself. In fact, we presume that it enhances the credibility of the effects we may find. That said, an intriguing line of future research certainly includes the isolation and comparison of preexposure value salience.

The survey components that were uniform for all respondents include religious identity, belief, behavior

Table 1. The Content Controlled Tolerance and Threat to Country Judgments of Respondents.

Least-liked groups	Percentage selecting	Mean threat to country	Mean intolerance level
Islamic fundamentalists	8.6	3.2	2.7
Illegal immigrants	5.1	3.1	3.2
Gay rights activists	6.5	2.8	2.5
KKK	27.0	2.7	2.7
Nazis	33.4	2.7	2.5
Pro-choice groups	5.1	2.6	2.3
Atheists	8.4	2.7	2.5
Christian fundamentalists	5.9	2.3	2.0
Average (SD)		2.7 (.83)	2.6 (.63)

Source: 2010 Springfield Area Study.

KKK = Ku Klux Klan.

measures, party identification, a political knowledge battery, a tolerance battery, a social network battery, indicators concerning approval of the pastor, and standard subject demographic measures (specific variable coding is available in supplementary files, <http://prq.sagepub.com>).

Results

We use the scheme for measuring tolerance created by Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus (1982), in which the survey allows the respondent to generate a least-liked group to assess tolerance judgments. Thus, this procedure for measuring tolerance is “content-controlled,” which led Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus to suggest that there is a pluralistic intolerance in America. We presented respondents with a list of eight groups that are often disliked in American politics and allowed them to choose one they “liked the least.” The distribution of their choices is presented in Table 1. A slim majority selected a virulently racist group (either the Ku Klux Klan [KKK] or Nazis), and the rest were distributed almost evenly among the remaining six groups. Evangelicals were significantly less likely to pick fundamentalists, of course, and were significantly more likely to pick gay rights activists and atheists, though the percentage differences were not large.

We asked whether the group picked was a “grave threat to the country as a whole.” The degree of threat to the country ascribed to these groups by those who picked them as their least-liked groups was not equivalent, as the second column of Table 1 shows. Illegal immigrants and Islamic fundamentalists were seen as the most threatening (significantly so), whereas fundamentalists were seen as significantly less threatening compared with all other groups.

We used a set of questions to gauge tolerance taken from Marcus et al. (1995), asking whether group members should be banned from seeking the presidency, the group should be outlawed, and members should have

their phones tapped, in addition to whether group members should be allowed to teach in public schools, make a speech, and hold public rallies. As Table 1 shows, tolerance judgments (averaged across these measures) also differ by the least-liked group selected.¹⁰ Showcasing a shift from almost a decade ago, illegal immigrants and not Islamic fundamentalists are the least tolerated. Christian fundamentalists are the best tolerated, on average, in this sample. These results show the imperfect relationship between threat and tolerance. There is still a strong linear increase in intolerance as threat rises, though with fairly wide standard deviations, that confirms the relationship seen repeatedly in the literature.¹¹

Our key test of the effect of exposure to inclusion versus exclusion is accomplished by randomly exposing respondents to one of two sets of questions about support for inclusive or exclusive values as discussed above. It is the mere exposure to these sentiments that we are interested in, not their responses to them. We did examine their agreement with these sentiments and the distributions of their responses, which show that those primed with inclusive values overwhelmingly agree with them, with below 10 percent who disagree. A slim majority disagreed with the shopping value, but about 70 percent agreed that it is important to keep company with the faithful.¹² Nevertheless, as noted, our key independent variable is whether respondents were asked the inclusive (1) or exclusive (0) value set.

We turn now to multivariate tests of our key hypothesis on the effects of religious values on the threat posed by the least-liked group and tolerance with a suite of control variables derived from the literature. Given the coding of the dependent variables, we expect a significant negative effect from exposure to inclusive values (decreasing threat) and a negative relationship with intolerance (decreasing it), though we suspect it will be insignificant once threat is controlled for. That is, we expect a significant indirect effect from inclusive values on tolerance working through threat. Following a long line of research, we expect that evangelicals (captured through their "born again or evangelical" identity¹³) will be more intolerant of their least-liked group, but there is no expectation linking this identity to threat levels. We suspect, though, that evangelicals and those reporting greater guidance from their faith will find their least-liked group more threatening. Those taking considerable guidance from their faith should also be less tolerant, which is often attributed to a reflection of the kinds of messages communicated in churches. The educated should be more tolerant (Golebiowska 1995; Stouffer 1955), but there should be little relationship between threat and education (Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus 1982). Those placing more priority on authority by selecting the importance of obedience over consideration in child rearing should see

Table 2. Path Model Estimates of Assessed Threat Posed by a Least-Liked Group and Tolerance for the Activities of a Least-Liked Group ($n = 261$).

	Threat to Country			Intolerance		
	β^*	SE	Δ	β^*	SE	Δ
Inclusive value exposure	-.22	.10**	-.22	.05	.07	
Threat to country	—			.40	.04***	.66
Political disagreement	-.02	.05		-.01	.03	
Female	.14	.10 [†]	.14	.03	.07	
Born again	.06	.11		.15	.07**	.15
Religious guidance	.08	.06 [†]	.16	-.06	.04 [†]	-.11
Ideology	-.02	.04		.03	.03	
Political knowledge	.08	.05 [†]	.16	-.09	.04***	-.18
Education	-.01	.02		-.02	.01**	-.14
Obedient	.24	.11**	.24	-.06	.07	
Constant	2.47	.34***		2.05	.24***	

Source: 2010 Springfield Area Study.

Model statistics for threat: $R^2 = .06$, $\chi^2 = 17.29\psi$; Model statistics for tolerance: $R^2 = .33$, $\chi^2 = 126.53\psi$. Δ refers to the predicted change in the dependent variable given a 0–1 change in dichotomous independent variables or a ± 1 SD change in other variables.

* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$ (two-tailed tests); [†] $p < .10$ (one-tailed test); $\psi < .05$ (one-tailed χ^2).

their least-liked group as more threatening and be less tolerant of them. We also include a measure of exposure to disagreement in political conversation, which has been found to increase tolerance of disliked groups (Ikeda and Richey 2009; Mutz 2002).

We specify a path model and use ordinary least squares (OLS) to estimate the coefficients. A path model is particularly useful in this case given our hypothesis that exposure to inclusive values will indirectly affect tolerance through its direct effect on threat. The model itself is quite simple, with every independent variable posited to affect the dependent variable threat, which in turn is added to the list of independent variables affecting tolerance.

Threat Results

The first column of results in Table 2 concerns the respondents' assessment of the gravity of the threat posed by their least-liked group. It offers support for our contention that exposure to inclusive values reduces the degree of threat ascribed to least-liked groups. On average, such exposure decreases perceptions of threat by about 7 percent (.22 points). While this is not an enormous effect, it is equivalent to the effect of authority-mindedness (favoring obedience), which increases threat perceptions by 8 percent (.24 points). It also stands above the statistically very marginal, threat augmenting effects of greater religious guidance (.16 points), greater political knowledge (.16 points), and being female (.14 points). There are no relationships between education, ideology, and evangelical identity with threat in these data.

Because there has been no full test of the effects of religious variables on threat, it is hard to make comparisons. To the extent threat is considered in investigations of religious effects on tolerance, it is specified as a purely exogenous effect on tolerance (e.g., Eisenstein 2008, 47; but see Gibson 2010, 167, where he finds little relationship between religious traditionalism and threat). The significant priming effect indicates that group boundaries are malleable, an effect that surely accretes with the balance of messages to which people are exposed. This analysis suggests a refocus of energy on how religion expands and contracts group boundaries to deflate or inflate the threat posed by outsiders (see also Theiss-Morse 2009).

To begin this investigation, we can take advantage of the experimental design that controls exposure, allowing us to assess how individual attributes may affect how the religious values are processed. It is possible, for instance, that evangelicals are more receptive to exclusive values given their higher frequency of exposure and thus respond with a greater sense of threat when primed. The interaction between evangelical identity and value exposure was not significant ($p = .77$) nor was the interaction with religious guidance ($p = .78$). While these null results do not confirm anything in particular, of course, we might infer that they are insignificant because believers are accustomed to hearing both value sets (see Figure 1). More importantly, this brief analysis indicates that the population responds similarly to these value presentations, which then pins the source of variation on communication. However, we did find a significant interaction between value priming and obedience ($p = .02$), with one particular cell driving the significant result (data not shown). Only those seeing obedience as important and primed with exclusive values saw their least-liked group as more threatening; the other cells ranked their group about .4 points less threatening. This affords us a way of thinking about religious effects in a more carefully measured and theorized way. Perhaps religion is most importantly captured as a community that provides a distinctive set of messages that resonates differently depending on the personalities of the people in the pews. This stands in contrast with measures of individually owned beliefs and behaviors and testing this will require a different set of research designs going forward.

Manipulation Check

Our contention is that exposure to inclusive values regarding how to be true to one's faith encourages people to consider the interests of people beyond the in-group, thereby lowering boundaries with the world and reducing threat perceptions. We have corroborating evidence to back this claim from another effect of exposure to inclusive values. The survey asked respondents about the

people with whom they discuss politics—their political discussion partners. In one question, respondents were asked the extent to which their discussion partners know each other, from “none of them know one another” (1) to “all of them know one another” (5). Those exposed to inclusive values described their social networks as containing fewer people who knew each other—thus, a broader, more inclusive set of people. The average score for those exposed to inclusive values was 3.3 (closer to “some of them”), whereas those exposed to exclusive values scored 3.6 (closer to “most of them”)—a significant difference ($t = 2.03$, $p = .04$, $n = 356$). Notably, the networks across the two treatment groups are not significantly different in other important respects such as their levels of disagreement ($p = .25$) or their discussion rates ($p = .73$), and are only different in the representation of insular ties. Thus, this manipulation check suggests that exposure to inclusive values works in precisely the way we suggest.

Tolerance Results

The results for our model of tolerance lie in Column 2 of Table 2. Easily, the dominant effect in the model is threat, validating the dominant finding in the tolerance literature. Moving from one standard deviation below the mean to one above boosts intolerance by .66 points (on a 1–4 scale). Other effects are significant but pale in comparison with the effect of threat. Political knowledge and education both decrease intolerance by about a sixth of a point. These effects are just a bit larger than the effects of born again/evangelical status and religious guidance. However, these religious effects work oppositely—evangelicals are .15 points more intolerant of their least-liked group, whereas those receiving above average religious guidance are .12 points more tolerant (in a very statistically marginal effect). Of course, those two variables are correlated ($r = .43$), but further analysis does not suggest that these effects simply cancel each other out and instead suggests an interaction effect ($p = .10$), which is shown in Figure 2. Religious guidance (on the x -axis) has essentially no effect among evangelicals (gray line), but it does significantly *decrease* intolerance among nonevangelicals (black line), in whose congregations tolerant, inclusive messages are perhaps more likely to be heard. Or, following Figure 1, we might expect nonevangelical churches to have fewer exclusionary messages presented. The effects are only distinguishable at the highest end of the religious guidance scale as the confidence intervals in the figure suggest,¹⁴ which reinforces the interpretation that guidance is a blunt proxy for communication effects in congregations.

As we expected, exposure to inclusive values has no effect on tolerance judgments directly nor do exposure to difference in the social network and authority-mindedness. Instead, both inclusive values and authority-mindedness

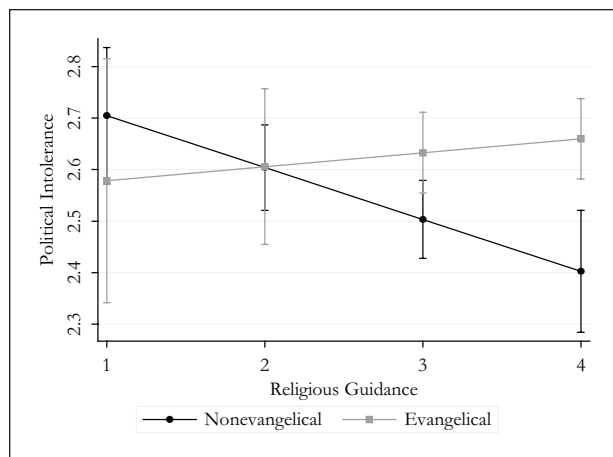


Figure 2. The interactive effects of evangelicalism and religious guidance on political intolerance (with 85% confidence intervals).

Source: 2010 Springfield Area Study.

work indirectly through shaping threat assessments. Further analysis confirms significant, indirect effects from inclusive value exposure ($-.09, p = .03$) and from obedience ($.10, p = .03$)—both shift tolerance views by about a tenth of a point. We argue that this pattern makes sense, because exposure to difference through the lowering of group boundaries may not change how people think of disliked groups, but will affect the stakes of exposure to information from them—the threat level. That is, people still dislike their selected group, but will believe that the provision of views from that group will not significantly undermine the state.

At this stage, it is important to distinguish this analysis in form and content. Although previous work has thought about and inferred the kinds of messages conveyed in churches, the measures have been weak proxies. Church attendance and religious guidance (as used here, too) do not capture information content and do not determine information reception (Djupe and Gilbert 2009). Thus, although the literature on religious effects on tolerance continues to find links between individual religious beliefs and behaviors and tolerance judgments, there is no way to distinguish whether the relationships are actually due to cognitive structures or collective experiences. The worth of this experimental design is in its ability to provide a collective experience (exposure to a value), therefore removing doubt about whether effects are due to exposure or adoption. The evidence is suggestive that there are different intercepts for religious groups and that they do not respond differently to these religious values. This serves to focus our attention on exposure—the distribution of value presentations, among other messages, in houses of worship—while keeping an eye on how individual attributes may condition the effects of exposure.

Conclusion

We believe that the literature on religious effects on tolerance has reached a fork in the road. We have probably learned as much as we can from the typical measures of religiosity, broad religious attachments, and religious beliefs. Instead, this literature needs to bear witness to how religious contexts shape the sociology and psychology of how people interact with and think about out-groups. Primarily, this entails measuring exposure to information and other practices in houses of worship that bear on how much groups are perceived as threatening and how much those (and which) groups are disliked. This dictates a focus on information provision from, especially, religious elites who report conveying just the values we inquire about with some frequency. But the religious experiences that people have extend beyond communication from elites to interaction in and outside small groups and activities with other congregants, with whom they might disagree.

One of the realms of information in which religion is heavily concerned is values, dictates about how the world should be ordered. Thus, it is surprising that very little inquiry in religion and politics research has concerned itself with the values most often communicated in houses of worship (but see Legee and Kellstedt 1993; Mockabee, Wald, and Legee 2007). It strikes us as particularly relevant to consider values that reinforce or undermine group boundaries.

As we argued above, these concerns are given compelling motivation by the dominant approach to understanding religious groups in society in the sociology of religion—the supply side, religious economies model. By and large, political scientists interested in religion and politics in the United States have avoided considering the implications of this model and it has been to the detriment of our understanding of the American public.

One potential implication of considering the effects of promoting inclusive values versus exclusive values is in what David Kirkpatrick (2007) referred to as the *evangelical crackup*—the growing separation of evangelical Protestants from the Republican Party. This claim is of significant dispute (see, for example, Kim 2011; Smith and Johnson 2010), but it is obvious that the old guard, public leadership of Christian conservatives—Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, James Kennedy, and James Dobson, to name a few—has died or faded from public life and the influence of the organizations they once led appears to have receded as well. In their place, a new group of leaders has received considerable media attention, variously referred to as *new evangelicals* (Fitzgerald 2008; Garofoli 2009), *holy mavericks* (Lee and Sintiere 2009), and as, at best, *unorthodox* in a host of online discussions and blog posts. The names often listed in this circle include Rick Warren, Rich Cizik, Bill Hybels, Joel Hunter, Rob Bell, Sam Rodriguez, and Jim Wallis. If old

school evangelicals focus on sin and personal decision making, new evangelicals, at least to an extent, look outside themselves and the church to see what about the world can be saved. What is most important to this story is how they talk about their social and political agenda. These new leaders focus on inclusion, pluralism, and bridge building, rather than exclusion, unity, and bonding. It is not lost on many that this difference in emphasis mirrors the earlier division of denominations into what would become the mainline and evangelical. We believe that the promotion of a more inclusive orientation toward the world that characterizes the new evangelicals is a driver of a new evangelical politics that is more tolerant and focused on social justice, though with important limitations.

Our work also suggests to more general investigations of tolerance that they consider social communication beyond social networks and short of societies. To be sure, work has considered group affiliations and identities. But, if America is still the democracy of associations “religious, moral, serious, futile, extensive, or restricted, enormous or diminutive” (Tocqueville [1840] 1994), then we need to devote greater attention to understanding the interpersonal, communicative dynamics that compose the associational experience.

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Notes

1. Although Eisenstein’s judgments about the literature are sound, there are reasons to question the religious effects she finds. For instance, the sample is from Northern Indiana where the evangelicals are predominantly Democrats.
2. It is also possible that intolerance fuels evangelism as a way to rid the world of sin. The potentially varied forces driving evangelism as they relate to tolerance remain to be worked out.
3. The denominations surveyed (the primary sponsor for each denomination is in parentheses followed by the final *n* and the response rate [*rr*]) included the Assemblies of God (John

C. Green, *n* = 208, *rr* = 21.1), Christian Reformed Church (CRC; Corwin Smidt, *n* = 370, *rr* = 53.3), Disciples of Christ (Christopher Devine, *n* = 335, *rr* = 34.9), Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (Laura Olson, *n* = 272, *rr* = 34.1), Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (Jeff Walz and Steve Montreal, *n* = 359, *rr* = 41.7), Reformed Church of America (Corwin Smidt, *n* = 312, *rr* = 50.9), Southern Baptist Church (James Guth, *n* = 248, *rr* = 25.4), United Methodist Church (John C. Green, *n* = 282, *rr* = 28.7), and the Mennonites (Kyle Kopko, *n* = 520, *rr* = 53.6).

4. The factor loading scores on the two factors (varimax rotated) are as follows (*n* = 2,905):

	Factor 1	Factor 2
Stranger	.76	.34
Invite	.76	.32
Shop	.38	.70
Company	.33	.70

5. Inclusive and exclusive value presentations are significantly and positively correlated with each other within each denomination as well, all at least at the .05 level with the exception of the CRC, in which *r* = .09 and *p* = .09.

6. The varimax rotated factor scores are as follows (*n* = 43):

	Factor 1	Factor 2
Stranger	.59	.05
Invite	.58	.23
Shop	.11	.47
Company	.26	.42

7. The survey experiments were conducted using a direct dial protocol with CATI technology in a computer call lab under the authors’ supervision during weeknights between 4:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. between December 2009 and March 2010. The average completion time for the subjects was sixteen minutes and seventeen seconds.

8. Beyond the high percentage of evangelicals in the sample, it is also 59 percent women, overwhelmingly white (96%), and reasonably educated (a third have bachelor’s degrees or more). The sample figures are a bit more white, female, and educated than Greene County according to the 2010 Census, which means it is also more white, female, and educated than the population in Missouri or the nation.

9. This percentage was calculated by excluding the 558 numbers from the sample list that were coded with a “nonworking” disposition.

10. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) test of the difference in threat across least-liked groups indicates that they are not equivalent, as well (*F* = 3.26, *p* = .00, *n* = 340). Tolerance judgments, likewise, differ by group picked as least liked (*F* = 7.32, *p* = .00, *n* = 369).

11. A graphical presentation of this relationship can be seen in our online supplemental materials as Figure A1.
12. These distributions can be seen in online supplemental materials (Figure A2).
13. Although a number of respondents, including some Catholics, indicate a “born again” or “evangelical” status, this measure is limited to self-identified Protestants and “other Christians” (who are quite likely to be in nondenominational congregations).
14. Schenker and Gentleman (2001) argue that placing 95 percent confidence intervals around 2 means to distinguish them is far too conservative a test. To reflect 95 percent confidence level difference in means test results, visual displays should use 85 percent confidence intervals around each mean.

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