

FAITH AND THE FOREIGNER: EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF RELIGION ON
IMMIGRATION ATTITUDES

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Abstract

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Immigrants in the United States have often faced intolerance and negative stereotypes. We know that historical and political realities affect attitudes toward immigrants but are there underlying factors that shape attitudes toward immigrants at the individual level? Several hypotheses have been put forth in order to answer this question including the labor market, the ideological, and the cultural affinity hypotheses. This study uses data from the General Social Survey to determine whether religious affiliation or attendance affect attitudes about immigrants and immigration policy. Ordered logistic regression of data at the national level shows that Jews and the non-religious are the most likely to hold tolerant attitudes toward immigrants followed by Catholics even after controlling for a variety of socio-demographic controls. Attendance has a positive impact on openness to immigration. No significant differences exist among different Protestant groups.

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INTRODUCTION

The American public has held shifting views on the presence of immigrants in the United States and the government's policy towards the immigrant community. Restrictionist movements have taken root and spread at different moments in national history including the 1880's and the 1920's. Though from its founding the United States has been a nation of immigrants and their children, none more than a few generations removed from the newcomers, nativist tensions usually lie just beneath the surface. Since the time of the Puritans, a "drawbridge" mentality has often prevailed among each recently-settled group (Espenshade and Hempstead 1996). Already in 1914 Piatt Andrew noticed that "Immigrants who came earlier and their descendants have always tried to keep this country for those who were already here and for their kin folk (quoted in Simon 1985). Following World War II, a more tolerant attitude prevailed toward immigration resulting in the passing of the Immigration Act of 1965.

The Immigration Act of 1965, by doing away with country quotas based on racist views toward non-European peoples, both increased the overall number of immigrants entering the country and dramatically changed the ethnic make-up of immigrants. Whereas in 1960, seven of the top countries sending immigrants were European and an eighth was Canada, in 1990 six of the top ten sending nations were Asian and Mexico provided the largest group of incoming immigrants of any sending

country. By 1990 immigrants of Asian and Latin American origin made up the vast majority of the foreign-born population in the United States (Jasso et al. 2003).

Given the long history of racial-ethnic tension in the United States, the sharp increase in immigration from non-European countries caused some to view the growing number of non-white immigrants with alarm. By the late 1970's anti-immigrant attitudes began to make a comeback. Increasing anxieties about an upsurge in undocumented immigrants from Mexico and Central America also added fuel to the restrictionist debate so that by the mid-1980's and into the early 1990's nativism had once again captured the sentiments of a broad swath of the American public (Harwood 1986; Lapinski et al. 1997). Anti-immigrant movements in states such as California and Arizona have resulted in broad and controversial legislative proposals aimed at "weeding out" undocumented migrants through forced deportation and denial of social and educational resources even though vast sectors of the national economy depend on the constant supply of immigrant labor (U.S. Department of Labor 1994). Today some academics, ignoring statistical evidence to the contrary, hasten to produce stark jeremiads warning that recent increases in documented and undocumented immigration from Mexico will result in the division of the national identity from its purportedly Anglo-Protestant nature (Huntington 2004). Meanwhile politicians struggle to accommodate both the corporate executives whose business

interests depend on cheap immigrant labor and the anti-immigrant sentiments reflected in the ubiquitous opinion polls.¹

TABLE 1

HISTORICAL TRENDS IN OPINIONS ABOUT IMMIGRATION

	1964	1977	1986	1993	1995
Americans desiring increase	6%	7%	7%	7%	8%
Americans desiring same levels	46%	37%	35%	27%	28%
Americans desiring decrease	38%	42%	49%	61%	62%

SOURCE: Lapinski et al. 1997

But what are the factors that shape attitudes toward immigrants at the individual level? Are citizens simply concerned about job security and wages as a utilitarian theory would suggest or are other factors at work? This paper tests for the impact of religious affiliation and attendance on attitudes toward immigrants at the individual level. In doing so, the paper sheds light on both the topics of religion and the nature of prejudice toward immigrants. For while significant attention has been paid to religion’s impact on such issues as political views (Hunter 1991), civic participation (Verba et al. 1996), prejudice toward racial, ethnic and religious others (Allport 1954; Emerson and Smith 2000; Jackson and Hunsberger 1999) and beliefs about the poor (Hunt 2002) so far no one has closely examined the impact of religion

¹ Recent polls have shown considerable fluctuations in attitudes toward immigrants resulting from the events of September 2001 and an apparent “cooling off” of immigration fears since then.

on attitudes toward immigrants. Similarly, the literature on attitudes toward immigrants has examined a host of potential predictors but the topic of religion has been virtually ignored. Warner identified the neglect of the study of religion and immigration as a “huge scholarly blind spot” (1997:217) and he is not alone in lamenting the absence of such literature (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000; Christiano, Swatos and Kivisto 2002). Therefore a careful examination of the relationship between religion and attitudes toward immigrants using national data can both add to our understanding of religion as well as deepen our knowledge of the complex processes affecting attitudes toward immigrants at the individual level.

Theory

A unified theory for predicting attitudes toward immigrants has yet to emerge but several hypotheses have surfaced in attempt to explain this phenomenon.

Labor Market

The labor market competition hypotheses contends that low socioeconomic status drives negative attitudes toward immigrants since persons with fewer skills and job possibilities will be the most concerned about competition from immigrants. Related to this theory is an education hypothesis contending that higher levels of education eliminate concern about job stability reducing the fear of losing one’s job to an immigrant or concerns about wage deflation. Put simply, the more education and income one has, the more positive will be one’s attitude toward immigrants.

While education does seem to predict positive attitudes in most studies (Simon 1985; Chandler and Tsai 2001), income has not always proven significant. Citrin and his colleagues found only weak evidence for the income component of a labor market effect (1997) while other studies have shown income to have a small negative effect if any at all (Wilson 1994; Chandler and Tsai 2001). Unemployment was found to predict negative attitudes toward immigrants in Canada (Palmer 1996) but very low unemployment statistics in the U.S. make this factor less important among the broader population.

Utilitarian Calculus

Some researchers have argued for a distinction between the labor market hypothesis and a related but distinct “utilitarian calculus” hypothesis which posits that *perceptions* of immigrants as representing an economic threat rather than the actuality of such a threat are what drive immigration attitudes. In a regional study of Georgia natives, Neal and Bohon (2003) found that while income was not correlated with immigrant attitudes, the perception of immigrants as an economic threat did have a significant impact. Espenshade and Calhoun (1993) also found stronger support for the utilitarian hypothesis noting that perceptions among respondents regarding the costs and benefits of immigration mattered more than did actual labor market factors. But such a theory fails to recognize the possibility that respondents may simply be appropriating the language of economic competition in order to justify deep-seated feelings of anxiety toward minority groups. Several studies have suggested that such

economic explanations voiced by those in opposition to immigration actually reflect deeper cultural misgivings toward Asians and Hispanics rather than policy views arrived at by an attempt to maximize self-interest (Citrin and Green 1990; Sears and Funk 1990).

Political Ideology

Political ideology may also be a factor in determining attitudes toward immigrants since more conservative values often coincide with an isolationist worldview that sees immigrants as a potential source of instability and insecurity. Findings regarding the impact of conservative versus liberal perspectives have been mixed (Chandler and Tsai 2001; Neal and Bohon 2003) while isolationist perspectives, naturally, are good predictors of negative attitudes toward immigrants and immigration (Espenshade and Hempstead 1996).

Identity Group or Cultural Affinity

In a study of nativism in Western Europe, McLaren (1996) found that far more important than self-interest in guiding attitudes toward immigrants was that of in-group identification and symbolic politics. The researcher noted that “predispositions” formed early on in life mean more than utilitarian estimations of gain. But what are the elements involved in forming such predispositions? According to social identification theory (Tajfel 1982) individuals tend to self-identify as members of the in-group in ways that are often at the expense of the out-

group. Indeed, identifying members of the out-group as “outsiders” may even be crucial for the maintenance of a strong in-group identity. Applied to the context of nationality, immigrants are seen to pose a threat to the social identity of natives. Furthermore, one key aspect of social identity theory is that of the clarity of differences between groups. Identifying aspects of cultural affinity with the in-group and dissimilarity with the out-group should thus be an important aspect of opinions about immigrants. Differences in language, custom and skin color should play an important role in determining one’s individual attitude. Several studies have found that Hispanics tend to have more positive attitudes toward immigrants than their white, non-Hispanic counterparts (Cain and Kiewiet 1986; Harwood 1983) though these findings have not gone uncontested (Espenshade and Hempstead 1996; de la Garza 1985). Analysis of a California poll regarding opinions toward undocumented immigrants suggests that issues of cultural affinity and symbolic politics are even more powerful predictors of attitudes toward immigrants than those of a political or economic nature (Espenshade 1995).

Religion and Immigration Attitudes

This study hypothesizes that not only economics, culture, ideology and education impact attitudes about immigration but religion also plays a role. The potential for religious impact on immigration attitudes can be hypothesized to be both positive and negative and it is important to consider the variety of possible ways in which religion might affect such attitudes.

Religion is often a key element in the construction of national identity (Smith 2003) providing the building blocks for constructing and maintaining a broadly-held conception of peoplehood. When a repertoire of national images and symbols develops that is highly restrictive, changing demographics such as an influx of immigrants from another faith tradition, can lead to the exclusion of some or all of these newcomers (Smith 2003:259). Religious difference and religiosity can also increase the salience of ethno-cultural boundaries within a nation providing an adherent with a means for identifying and maintaining distinctions between one's own group and the ethno-cultural "others," a practice which has sometimes led to ethnic intolerance and even violence (Kunovich 1999).

Today's immigrant population represents a religious spectrum that is far more diverse than the current native-born population. While two thirds of the present immigrant population is Christian (compared with 82 percent among the native born) a much smaller percentage is Protestant. A full 42 percent of immigrants are Roman Catholic, almost twice as many as among the native population and 17 percent is outside the Judeo-Christian tradition compared with four percent among natives (Jasso et al. 2003). Given the religious heterogeneity represented by immigrants – who also display higher birth rates – and their much lower numbers of Protestants, one might expect to find negative attitudes toward the immigrant community by the dominant Protestant majority.

Another way to understand the potential for a negative religion impact is with the use of the concept of prejudice. While anti-immigration attitudes may not

invariably represent “prejudice” in the active sense, Allport’s definition of prejudice as “thinking ill of others without sufficient warrant” (1954: 6) can be an appropriate descriptor for some negative attitudes toward immigrants which, as we have seen, are often based more on cultural and identity threats than on actual competition for resources. Drawing on Allport’s and others’ work regarding religion and prejudice is one way to theorize the varied role religion could play in shaping attitudes toward immigrants (Allport 1954; Hunsberger 1995).

In his chapter on “Religion and Prejudice” of the classic *The Nature of Prejudice*, Gordon Allport is careful to note that “Religion makes prejudice and it unmakes prejudice” (Allport 1954). Allport theorizes that the reality of group threat among religious groups can be the cause of in-group favoritism and out-group derogation resulting in prejudice toward religious and ethnic others. For example, Allport contends that dominant religious groups such as Protestants tend to express prejudice toward groups of inferior social status such as non-European (1954).

At the same time, religion may also play a positive role in affecting immigration attitudes. Allport refers to a “universal ethic of love” among all of the major religions. Clearly though, some religious groups are less concerned than others with instilling such an ethic in the lives of the faithful. Key to understanding the potentially positive role of religion in shaping attitudes toward immigrants is the ethic of compassionate service to the stranger. Several Biblical texts such as Exodus 23:9 and Leviticus 19:33 record the Biblical Yahweh enjoining his people to treat the foreigner with special respect “since you too were once strangers in Egypt.” Such

injunctions, while holding special significance for those of Jewish faith are an accepted part of sacred revelation for Christians as well and are thus theologically binding for both Jews and Christians. In addition, Jesus' ethic of unconditional mercy and active compassion toward the stranger (Matthew 25; Luke 4) could provide impetus among Christians for a positive perspective regarding immigration as an act of mercy and an opportunity for compassionate service. Nepstad (2004) and Smith (1996) have documented how some religious communities, especially those aligned with the Central American Sanctuary network, have taken such texts seriously by welcoming undocumented immigrants at considerable risk to themselves and in inconvenience to their families. However, such religious communities usually comprised a tiny minority within their own denominations. For the majority a gulf between doctrine and practice exists that has all too often extinguished the possibility of positive ethical impact of religious faith on the practice of tolerance and compassion.

Another potential mechanism for producing a positive religious impact is the cooperative, ritual nature of religious worship experiences. Several theorists have noted the positive impact of contact under the right circumstances with ethnic others, including Hispanics and immigrants, (Dixon and Rosenbaum 2004; McLaren 2003). Religious worship settings are both voluntary and cooperative and as such hold the potential for a unique opportunity to construct positive immigrant-native relationships and to deconstruct negative stereotypes (Warner 1997). On the other hand, the very nature of American religious congregations as voluntary societies has kept them

largely homogenous allowing congregations to reproduce and even, in some cases, exacerbate the racial and ethnic segregation of society at large (Emerson and Smith 2000). This phenomenon weakens the potential for increased inter-racial and inter-ethnic contact. The nature of immigrant congregations as cultural and social resources for survival in a strange land (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000) diminishes even more the potential of congregations to serve as contexts for dismantling negative stereotypes about immigrants.

Religion could nevertheless be a resource catapulting adherents into community involvement resulting in contact with immigrants. Wuthnow studied the impact of attendance on “status-bridging social capital” but found that church-goers were not more likely to hold friendships with a Hispanic person than non-church-goers as a direct result of attendance. Nevertheless, he hypothesized that the positive impact of church attendance on community volunteering could be an indirect impetus for creating such relationships (2002).

Of course, religion need not be seen as a monolithic entity with singular effects on immigration attitudes. For example, church attendance and adherence to a given tradition has been shown to lead to differing levels of social trust among distinct religious groups (Welch et al. 2004). Thus, the present study tests a number of hypotheses dealing both with effects unique to a tradition as well as the potential impact of religious attendance in any denomination.

HYPOTHESES

H1: Evangelicals will hold more negative views about immigration than mainline Protestants and other religious groups.

I have already mentioned the potentially negative impact of the fusion of national and religious identities. Wuthnow notes a “fracture line” that distinguishes two different understandings of civil religion among Protestants in the U.S. According to Wuthnow, liberal Protestants subscribe to a civil religion that extols the country’s “broader vision of humanity” while conservative Protestants seek to underline the unique religious role and identity of the nation (1988: 254). This ideological divide in addition to the disproportionate representation of Evangelical Christians among the Christian Right with its emphasis on a notion of “Christian America” (Chaves 2004) could be expected to cause a tendency among Evangelicals to favor restrictionist immigrant policies in order to stem the growing religious diversity in America (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000). Furthermore, some theorists have noted the negative impact of “bonding” social capital in promoting in-group favoritism and out-group derogation. This being the case, we can expect that Evangelical Christians, with their relative strength of internal relationships and bonding social capital within largely mono-ethnic congregations (Emerson and Smith 2000) to display more negative attitudes toward immigrants, who typically represent

both ethno-cultural and often religious “others.” Additionally, Welch found that one segment of Evangelicals, Pentecostal Christians, tend to display significantly lower levels of social trust before controlling for attendance (2004). Finally, Dixon and Rosenbaum (2004) found that Christian fundamentalism is often associated with “right wing authoritarianism” and for this reason correlates positively with prejudice against blacks and Hispanics.

Conversely, if Evangelicals display no differences in attitudes toward immigrants from those of other religious traditions or if Evangelicals have more positive immigration attitudes, we may conclude that the above hypothesized relationships are not in effect or that any number of positive factors create a counterbalance. Such factors could include an increased internalization of the ethic of compassion toward the stranger or a view of the local immigrant community as a potentially rich “mission field” for evangelization.

A second hypothesis regards the impact of being Catholic on attitudes toward immigrants.

H2: Catholics will hold more positive views about immigrants and immigration than Protestants.

Several studies have noted the disproportionately high number of Catholic parishes holding services in Spanish (Chaves 2004; Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000).

While not all Spanish-speakers are immigrants, most Catholic services conducted in Spanish serve an immigrant community of Latin American. A significant number of Vietnamese immigrants also attend Catholic services. As noted earlier the cooperative and ritual-laden context of a religious service may lead to an increase in social interaction between immigrants and natives especially given the nature of the traditional Catholic parish drawn along geographic boundaries rather than social interests. Furthermore, Catholics may be less likely to identify with an “Anglo-Protestant” notion of America and thus feel less threatened by religious and ethno-cultural others (Wilson 2001; Allport 1954). Many Catholics have memories of being the religious and immigrant outsiders themselves and as such might feel less inclined to engage in out-group derogation (Hunt 2002).

Another reason to look for a positive Catholic correlation regards the on-going emphasis of Catholic social doctrine on supporting the rights of immigrants in any context (Blume 2003). Finally, given the international nature of the Roman Catholic church, Catholics may tend toward an understanding of the church as a global body rather than one that is bound to a particular national identity and thus be less inclined to worry about large-scale immigration.

Alternative findings while disqualifying the above connections, might also point to the likelihood that the “drawbridge” mentality has already set in among Irish, Italian or Polish Catholics feeling the need to protect their newly-won place among the respectable of middle-class Americana. In addition, it may be that the dual nature of many Catholic worship services, held separately for Spanish- and English-

speakers, disqualifies the possibility of a positive contextual effect or even increases hostilities if Hispanic worshippers are seen as encroaching on a local, formerly-Anglo parish. Such ethnic turf wars in the Catholic church took place between Irish and Polish Catholics of a century ago (Christiano et al. 2002).

H3: Religious attendance will be correlated with positive attitudes about immigration.

While perhaps not a direct cause of increased social ties, we can hypothesize that church-goers on average are less-inclined toward social isolation and therefore have a higher likelihood both to interact with immigrants and to tend to view them with less suspicion. Furthermore, we may posit that church attendance may be representative of an adherent's having "internalized" religious doctrine including the ethics of compassion and service while simple self-identification with a religious tradition apart from the active involvement of attendance may be more representative of a symbolic or "status-based" religious identity that some have seen as a cause of negative stereo-typing toward out-groups (Altmeyer and Hunsberger 1992; Laythe et al. 2002; Allport 1954).

As noted earlier, religious attendance may lead to increased opportunities for status-bridging social capital between natives and immigrants, though the attendance effect on such capital remains a highly contested claim (Wuthnow 2002). Finally, religious attendance could be an indirect cause of increased social trust among adherents to certain denominations. For example, Welch and colleagues found that

attendance at worship dramatically increased levels of social trust among Pentecostals (2004).

A non-confirmation of this final hypotheses or a negative finding could suggest that the reinforcement of racial-ethnic segregation in American congregations holds equally true for immigrant-non-immigrant relations.

DATA AND METHODS

The 1994 wave of the General Social Survey provides excellent indicators of both religion and attitudes toward immigrants. Produced annually and biennially since 1972 by the National Opinion Research Center of the University of Chicago, the survey is both highly respected and incorporates historical continuity of design and wording. The 1994 survey uses a split ballot design in order to survey just under 3000 randomly-selected respondents in 90-minute, in-person interviews with a 78% response rate. The split-ballot design meant that half of the respondents answered the questions regarding immigrant attitudes leaving an available sample population of N=1474.

One drawback of the GSS method is that the sampling frame includes only English speakers since interviews are only conducted in English, a fact that should be taken into account when assessing attitudes toward immigrants since many of those who do not speak English well enough to be interviewed could be hypothesized to have more positive attitudes toward immigrants creating a biased sample. In order to reduce the possibility of bias, my statistical analysis will include controls for immigrants, thus reducing the need for concern on this issue.

I am not alone in my choice to utilize the GSS for examining attitudes toward immigrants. Other studies have used the same 1994 survey for similar purposes (Chandler and Tsai 2001; Wilson 2001).

Dependent Variables

I use two dependent variables in order to capture two dimensions of attitudes: opinions about policy and affective feelings toward immigrants themselves. Following the example of other researchers (Chandler and Tsai 2001; Wilson 2001; Espenshade and Hempstead 1996) I will construct my first dependent variable using the *letin* variable (N = 1397) which represents the question “Do you think the number of immigrants from foreign countries who are permitted to come to the United States to live should be increased a lot, increased a little, left the same as it is now, decreased a little, or decreased a lot?” Because of the scarcity of respondents in each of the “increased” categories some researchers have chosen to collapse the five categories into three: “increased,” “decreased” and “keep the same”. While simplifying the categories for comparison with historical trends is useful, I have chosen to keep the distinctiveness of the 5-category variable with added benefits for robust results.

A second dependent variable, *immpush* (N = 1383), will serve as a more explicit measure of the attitudes toward immigrants themselves. It is based on the question, “Immigrants are getting too demanding in their push for equal rights.” Responses are once again coded on a five-category scale ranging from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree.” One could make the argument that the response to this question represents an affective-neutral perception rather than an attitude with positive or negative content. However, I argue that since the question as posed refers

to “equal rights” as “too demanding”, it is a reasonably valid measure of an affectively negative stance toward immigrants. For simplicity and readability, I have recoded both dependent variables by changing the direction of the sign. A positive coefficient on the *letin* variable represents a more “positive” view by denoting openness to immigration while a positive coefficient on the *impush* variable shows an inclination to see immigrants as too demanding.

Independent Variables

Steensland and colleagues noted the importance of employing distinct categories for separate Protestant traditions and for this reason I will employ the *reltrad* variable for distinguishing among religious traditions (Steensland et al. 2000). Whereas using the GSS self-reported denominational variable results in an abundance of religious categories the *reltrad* variable uses a systematic and theoretically sound recoding of denominational categories, attendance and race in order to produce seven religious categories: Evangelical, Black Protestant, Mainline, Catholic, Jewish, Other Religion, and non-affiliated. Using *reltrad* will also allow me to test hypotheses regarding Evangelicals with added precision. I have operationalized depth of religiosity as attendance at religious services. The ordinal variable *attend* measures the frequency of attendance at religious services in nine categories from “never” to “several times a week”.

TABLE 2
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Dev.
LETIN Decrease or increase immigrants to us	1397	1	5	2.0709	1.009264
IMMPUSH Immigrants are getting too demanding	1383	1	5	3.6471	1.10773
EVANG Evangelical (omitted variable)	1474	0	1	0.264706	
MAIN Mainline Protestant	1474	0	1	0.196065	
BLACPROT Black Protestant	1474	0	1	0.082768	
RCATHLIC Roman Catholic	1474	0	1	0.25441	
RJEWISH Jewish	1474	0	1	0.026459	
OTHRELIG Other relig dummy	1474	0	1	0.035471	
NONAFF Not religiously affiliated	1474	0	1	0.092266	
BLACK R is black	1474	0	1	0.13365	
HISPORIG Fam orig from MX, PR or other hisp nation	1474	0	1	0.03867	
SEX Respondents sex (male=0)	1474	0	1	.552239	
AGE Age of respondent	1472	18	89	45.88111	16.99894
DEGREE Rs highest degree	1467	0	4	1.457396	
INCOME91 Total family income	1403	1	22	15.0114	5.178815
BORN1 R is Immigrant	1465	0	1	0.07099	
ATTEND How often R attends religious services	1454	0	8	3.702201	2.65705
POLVIEWS Think of self liberal (1) or conservative (7)	1418	1	7	4.14598	1.372885
IMMUNITE Immigrants will bring national disunity	1237	1	4	1.99	.939

Control Variables

A variety of indicators have been used in order to test the various hypotheses regarding predictors of opinions toward immigrants and it would be difficult to incorporate all of them into this study. I will use the typical socio-demographic controls such as race, income, age and sex as well as educational status by level of degree. Age is coded as a continuous variable. I control for Hispanic ethnicity in the socio-demographic controls. I also use a control for non-native status in order to separately gauge the impact of immigrant status on attitudes about immigration.

An additional control, political views, is framed as a scale with seven categories ranging from “extremely liberal” to “extremely conservative.” In a final set of regressions I employ the variable *immunity* as a control for measuring the amount of religious impact is due to the perception that immigrants cause disunity within the nation. This variable reflects response to the question “Immigrants are making it harder to keep the country united.” Responses are measured in a four-category scale ranging from “Not very likely” to “very likely”.

Methods

Because my dependent variables contained only five categories, I used ordered logistic regression in order to assess the impact of religion on immigration attitudes. While the use of ordinal regression diminishes the possibility for direct

interpretation of the reported coefficients, we can nevertheless use the reported coefficients to get a sense of the strength of the estimates. For example a variable with a very large, positive coefficient and a high significance shows that a one-unit increase on this variable brings a very high odds of moving from “decrease a little” to “keep the same” or from “keep the same” to “increase a little.” Listwise deletion was employed without drastically reducing the sample size even in the full models.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

I use a series of five models in order to measure separately the impact of religion, socio-demographics, immigrant status, attendance and ideology on attitudes about immigration. Table 3 shows the results of an ordinal regression on the *letin* variable for openness to immigration. A positive coefficient such as that of education indicates a positive correlation between educational attainment and openness to immigration. The negative coefficient of income indicates a negative relationship between higher income and openness to immigration.

Table 4 shows the impact of the same independent variables on the more strictly attitudinal *immpush* variable. In this case a positive coefficient means that respondents of this category were more likely to agree with the statement that immigrants are getting “too demanding” about their rights while a negative coefficient signifies a rejection of this assessment and therefore a more “positive” attitude. In both Table 3 and Table 4, Evangelical is the omitted category, thus all comparisons are to this group. Finally, Table 5 shows a set of regressions on the *letin* variable similar to those used in Table 3 with the difference that *all* Protestants were included as a single category in the omitted variable. Thus the final comparison is between Protestants as a whole and other non-Protestant groups. In addition, the fifth model in Table 5 replaces political conservatism with the *immunite* variable representing an assessment of immigrants as bringing disunity to the nation.

My results were not inconsistent with the broader findings of most studies on immigration attitudes. Tables 3 and 4 show that outcomes on both variables, *letin*, and *impush* coincided in most aspects. Education provides one of the most important indicators for predicting opinions about immigration policy and regarding immigrants themselves. The results show that those with more education tend to have more favorable attitudes toward immigrants. A conservative political ideology negatively predicts openness to immigration and positively predicts a view of immigrants as “too demanding.” Age is a negative predictor of immigration attitudes and policy opinions, while income predicts respondents’ policy opinions (*letin*) but not their attitudes toward immigrants (*impush*). Interestingly, and in contrast to the labor market hypothesis, higher incomes are associated with a desire to see a reduction in the number of immigrants allowed into the country.

TABLE 3
ORDINAL REGRESSION FOR OPENNESS TO IMMIGRATION (*LETIN*)

Independent Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Mainliner	.036	-.019	-.047	-.010	-.067
Black Protestant	.121	.004	.060	.127	.080
Roman Catholic	.410**	.340*	.259	.266	.212
Jewish	1.317**	1.145**	1.153**	1.302**	1.191**
Other Religion	.209	.109	-.104	-.034	-.068
Nonaffiliate	.542**	.391	.314	.547**	.495*
<i>Sociodemographic Controls</i>					
Black		.083	.032	-.056	-.086
Hispanic		.878**	.661*	.605*	.483
Sex		.060	.068	.028	-.012
Age		-.005	-.008*	-.009**	-.007*
Education		.267**	.263**	.241**	.233**
Income		-.031**	-.029**	-.030**	-.026*
<i>Immigrant Status</i>					
Immigrant			1.128**	1.132**	1.120**
<i>Attendance</i>					
Religious Attendance				.063**	.067*
<i>Ideology</i>					
Political Views					-.098*
<i>N</i>	1392	1333	1328	1316	1284
<i>R</i> ²	.025	.064	.088	.094	.091

SOURCE: General Social Survey, 1994

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

The role of religion in predicting immigration attitudes appears less-than-straightforward. My first hypothesis, that Evangelical Christians as a unique group hold more negative attitudes about immigration than other religious groups has little support in the data. Mainline Protestants and Black Protestants, for example show no

significant differences with Evangelicals in any of the models for either attitudes or policy opinions. The differences between Evangelicals and Jews, Catholics and non-affiliates, where they exist are therefore not suggestive of any unique characteristics of Evangelical as distinct from other Protestant groups.

The second hypothesis, that Catholics hold more favorable views about immigrants and immigration receives more support in the data. Table 3 shows that at the bivariate level, Catholic respondents were significantly more open to immigration than Evangelicals and this positive correlation survives the addition of controls for socio-demographics. Controlling for immigrant status caused the Catholic effect to drop slightly below the $p < .05$ level. And while adding attendance nearly brings the Catholic effect back up to significance, controlling for political ideology adds explanatory power that once again diminishes the Catholic effect.

On the other hand Table 4 shows that being Catholic makes little difference in the way one views immigrants themselves. After adding socio-demographic controls, we see no more significant Catholic effects.

TABLE 4
ORDINAL REGRESSION FOR PERCEPTION OF IMMIGRANTS AS “TOO DEMANDING” (*IMMPUSH*)

Independent Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Mainline Protestant	.001	.106	.097	.095	.109
Black Protestant	-.090	-.036	-.039	-.034	-.054
Roman Catholic	-.341**	-.123	-.119	-.115	-.061
Jewish	-1.283**	-.915**	-.915**	-.942**	-.863**
Other Religion	-1.096**	-.756**	-.743*	-.752*	-.771**
Nonaffiliate	-.645**	-.380*	-.375*	-.412*	-.382
<i>Sociodemographic Controls</i>					
Black		.036	-.031	-.016	.146
Hispanic		-.672*	-.658*	-.657*	-.649*
Sex		.114	.118	.118	.179
Age		.017**	.017**	.017**	.016**
Education		-.341**	-.340**	-.339**	-.334**
Income		-.001	-.000	.002	.002
<i>Immigrant Status</i>					
Immigrant			-.048	-.050	-.082
<i>Attendance</i>					
Religious Attendance				-.008	-.033
<i>Ideology</i>					
Political conservatism					.186**
<i>N</i>	1379	1320	1317	1305	1277
<i>R</i> ²	.031	.108	.107	.107	.127

SOURCE: General Social Survey, 1994

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Thus the Catholic hypothesis appears to receive some support. Catholics hold more positive views about allowing immigrants to enter the country but this effect is largely explained by the fact that immigrants make up a greater percentage of the

American Catholic community. Because of the lack of difference among Protestants, a final set of regressions was run on the *letin* variable in which the omitted category included all Protestants. Table 5 shows that the Catholic effect appears more pronounced when compared with Protestants as a whole. Here Catholic affiliation remains significant in four of the five models, retaining significance at the $p < .05$ level even after controlling for immigrant status and religious attendance. Finally, the addition of a control for the view that immigrants bring disunity leaves the Catholic effect insignificant. Since being Catholic bears a significant, negative correlation with the “immigrants bring disunity” view, Model 5 suggests that it is in part because Catholics do not see immigrants as a threat to national unity that they remain more open to continuing or increasing immigration.

TABLE 5
ORDINAL REGRESSION FOR OPENNESS TO IMMIGRATION
(ALL PROTESTANTS AS COMPARISON GROUP)

Independent Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Roman Catholic	.382**	.347**	.273*	.263*	.226
Jewish	1.289**	1.154**	1.170**	1.300**	1.322**
Other Religion	.181	.115	-.095	-.047	-.131
Nonaffiliate	.515**	.398*	.326	.541**	.477*
<i>Sociodemographic Controls</i>					
Black		.090	.078	-.022	.081
Hispanic		.878**	.660*	.600*	.434
Sex		.060	.068	.027	-.093
Age		-.005	-.008*	-.009**	-.007*
Education		.266**	.261**	.241**	.143**
Income		-.031**	-.029**	-.030**	-.032*
<i>Immigrant Status</i>					
Immigrant			1.128**	1.129**	1.322**
<i>Attendance</i>					
Religious Attendance				.063**	.053**
<i>Ideology</i>					
Immigrants bring disunity					-.709**
<i>N</i>	1392	1333	1328	1316	1265
<i>R</i> ²	.024	.064	.087	.094	.195

SOURCE: General Social Survey, 1996

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

The final hypothesis, that attendance positively impacts attitudes about immigration, receives mixed support depending on which of the dependent variables

is in question. While most of the independent and control variables showed similar behavior on both dependent variables, attendance was highly significant in one set of regressions and not so in the other – an attribute shared only by income, immigrant status and “other religion” variables. Frequency of attendance at worship shows a highly significant positive correlation with openness to immigration and no correlation with the view of immigrants as too demanding. That is, church attenders tend to be generous about immigration policy but hold views about immigrants themselves that do not differ from opinions held by those who rarely if ever attend religious services. This is a curious finding and as such casts doubt on the notion that church attenders may have more contact with immigrants resulting in more positive views about them. The current findings seem to suggest that church attenders are simply less likely to allow negative opinions about immigrants to translate into restrictionist views about immigration.

Additional Findings

While not alluded to in the above stated hypotheses, the positive and highly significant Jewish effect in both models should not be overlooked. Jewish respondents, showing by far the largest coefficient of any of the dichotomous variables, are both less inclined to support restrictionist immigration policies and more likely to hold positive views about immigrants than all of the other religious groups. This finding is consistent with classical theory about religion and prejudice (Allport and Kramer 1946; Allport 1954) suggesting that the experience of being an

out-group in society can make an identity group much more reticent toward out-group derogation towards other marginalized groups, especially when such groups present little or no threat to their own group. Jews, especially secular and Reform Jews, may also have a more “cosmopolitan” outlook that welcomes difference and reduces the inclination toward protecting the current mix of ethnicities represented in the nation. Finally, as an ethno-religious group, Jews have a historical-theological memory of being a “stranger in a strange land” -- one that stretches over nearly three millennia. Thus the open stance toward immigration and positive attitudes about immigrants held by Jews should come as little surprise.

Two other tendencies regarding the role of religion that deserve mention are that of the “other religion” and the “non-affiliated” groups. Tables 3 and 5 show that members of non-Judeo-Christian religious traditions, while displaying no differences with the dominant Protestant traditions on issues of immigration policy opinion, are nevertheless significantly more inclined to hold positive attitudes about immigrants themselves. While the casual observer would be tempted to regard this relationship as stemming from the non-Western religious communities made up largely of immigrants, this impact holds even after controlling for immigrant status.

Meanwhile non-affiliates seem to be significantly more positive in their opinions about immigrants and immigration. Table 3 shows non-affiliates with a strong tendency to hold more open views of immigration and Table 4 shows non-affiliates holding less negative attitudes toward immigrants until political conservatism is added. This last finding may suggest that an explanation could be

found relating to what Hout and Fischer called “the rise of the religious none’s” (2002). These authors examined a sharp increase in the percentage of Americans claiming no religious affiliation during the mid-1990’s -- at which time the data for this paper was compiled – and concluded that the new religious “non-affiliates” were made up largely of political moderates and liberals wishing to distance themselves from organized religion with its increasing public ties to social conservatism. Such a trend could help to explain why “non-affiliated” respondents in this study tend to hold more open to immigration as well as why political ideology appears to explain the negative impact of non-affiliates on the view of immigrants as too demanding.

CONCLUSION

Does religion play a significant role in shaping attitudes about immigrants and immigration? The answer offered here is a qualified “yes.” The data show that attendance at religious services can explain a significant portion of the variation on openness to immigration. Religious affiliation, meanwhile, can explain some of the variation in both openness to immigration and attitudes toward immigrants. These results hold true even after controlling for all of the predictors held to predict such attitudes in previous studies. It is too early, however, to make any bold claims about the causal nature of such religious effects. While it may be tempting to make claims regarding a moral-theological impact from the more “pro-immigrant” religious traditions of Jewish, and to a lesser degree Roman Catholics, it appears likely that at least the Catholic effect is in part explained by the fact that Catholics do not feel a cultural threat from immigrants. The positive impact of attendance on openness to immigration is worthy of special note since religious non-affiliates (who attend rarely if ever) seem to carry the same positive impact. More work needs to be done in order to better specify the causal nature of religious effects found here and the use of qualitative or longitudinal data could help to illuminate the causal mechanisms at work. In the meantime, scholars would do well to include religious affiliation and attendance factors in their models when studying attitudes toward immigrants. This work is an initial step in that direction.

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