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Christian Theology and Attitudes Toward Political and Religious Ideological Groups

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Abstract

In this paper we examine the influence of Christian theology on attitudes toward various ideological groups, both political and religious. We know how religious affiliations, behaviors, and beliefs in the U.S. influence voting, political party affiliation, and specific issue attitudes, but we do not fully understand how Christian theology influences one's favorable/unfavorable attitudes to different ideological groups. Using feeling thermometers from the 2012 American National Election Survey (ANES), we test logit models for favorable/unfavorable scores toward four different ideological groups: liberals, conservatives, Muslims, and atheists. While progressive Christians are more likely to exhibit an unfavorable attitude toward groups with *political* differences, conservative Christians are not. On the other hand, conservative Christians are more likely to exhibit an unfavorable attitude toward groups with *religious* differences, while progressive Christians are not. These findings have import for understanding the religious fault lines in U.S. Christianity and how those fault lines amplify polarization.

Beginning with the success of Ronald Reagan over Jimmy Carter in the 1980 presidential campaign, social scientists have grappled with the belief that Protestant Christianity in the United States has grown into two distinct and divided camps. Several book titles, such as *Culture Wars* by James Davison Hunter and *The Great Divide* by Geoffrey Layman, are illustrative of this polarizing phenomenon. If the religious polarization between religious conservatives and progressives is as stark as has been portrayed, then one has to wonder if the animus is symmetrical between the groups. Are conservative Christians more likely to express unfavorable attitudes toward political liberals? Conversely, are progressive Christians more likely to express unfavorable attitudes toward political conservatives? Or does the friction between evangelicals and mainline Protestants run merely on religious lines, with little regard for political positions?

Given that religiously conservative Christians are more likely to express conservative social-moral issue attitudes than more religiously progressive Christians, a link between conservative Christian theology and unfavorable attitudes toward groups with opposing political ideology is often assumed, but it has been rarely studied (Froese and Bader 2008). While research has shown how conservative religious affiliations, beliefs, and behaviors in the United States influence voting behavior, political party affiliation, and issue attitudes (Guth et al. 1995; Hart 1992; Jelen and Wilcox 2003; Jones-Correa and Leal 2001; Layman 1997; Manza and Brooks 1997; Regnerus and Smith 1998), little research, if any, has examined how different Christian theological positions may shape expressions or attitudes (favorable or unfavorable) toward opposing ideological perspectives and toward the groups who express them. The objective in this study is to assess if the influence of Christian theology is more likely to manifest in favorability ratings toward political groups or toward religious groups. Therefore, using feeling thermometers from the 2012 American National Election Study (ANES), we examine the influence of Christian theology on favorable/unfavorable attitudes toward four different ideological groups (political and religious): liberals, conservatives, Muslims, and atheists.[1] Our results provide further support for the

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[1] During the course of this paper, we make many references to both political conservatism and religious conservatism. The question of whether religious identity drives political identity (or vice versa) is fraught with both theoretical and methodological pitfalls. While we make no claim to which one is the "first cause," there is robust evidence that theological conservatism is highly correlated with political conservatism. For example, in a July 2016 poll, 76 percent of white evangelicals stated their support for the Republican nominee for president (Smith 2016). Mitt Romney received 79 percent of the white evangelical vote in 2012, and George W. Bush received the same percentage in 2004 (Pew Research Center, "Election 2012 Post Mortem," 2012). Other research has suggested a strong relationship between theological conservatism and political conservatism (Guth 1993). We fully acknowledge, however, that not all political conservatives are religious conservatives, and likewise with theological and political liberals.

thesis that religion (in this case Christianity) is a more divisive than unifying force in the United States (Putnam and Campbell 2010).

CONSERVATIVE AND PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

Theological differences among Christians are often divided into differing levels of conservatism and/or progressivism. Many Protestant denominations recognized as progressive today were once the mainline Protestant denominations in the United States. Historically, many of these denominations promoted a conservative theology (Carpenter 1980; Marty 1970). Social forces of modernity, however, have moved many of these denominations away from positions of theological certainty into a more flexible doctrine focusing on societal improvement rather than personal sin (Andrain 2009; McAdams and Albaugh 2008; Olson 2011; Wuthnow and Evans 2002). The values of progressive Christians and their denominations have moved from claims of absolutism to an emphasis on tolerance and acceptance (Edles 2013; Roof and McKinney 1987; Wellman 2008). Consequently, some progressive Protestant leaders have been critical of what they perceive as judgmentalism and intergroup bigotry on the part of other Christians (McLaren 2005; Spong 1992). They argue that conservative Protestants rely too much on a literal definition of the Bible (Borg 2009; Kania 2010; Spong 1992). An overreliance on a holy text can be seen as authoritarian and contrary to a modernist perspective of truth.

Many conservative Christian denominations were started as attempts to reform the movement of mainline denominations away from what was often considered "the fundamentals" of the faith. One of those fundamental truths is the relevance given to the Bible. Conservative Christian theology promotes the idea that the Bible is God's word (Fullerton and Hunsberger 1982; Hempel and Bartkowski 2008; Kellstedt and Smidt 1993). Because of this belief, such Christians envision the Bible as a guide book for how to live and believe. Accepting the Bible as more authoritative makes conservative Christians less willing to be flexible in their seeking of truth. This critical theological difference means conservative Christians are less likely to adopt modern social innovations such as same-sex marriage (Baunach 2012; Olson, Cadge, and Harrison 2006; Sherkat et al. 2011), abortion (Hoffmann and Johnson 2005; Strickler and Danigelis 2002), and divorce (Ellison, Wolfinger, and Ramos-Wada 2013; Stokes and Ellison 2010), in part due to their allegiances to traditional values and practices in the Bible.

Divisions based on conservative and progressive ideology also characterize Catholicism (Starks 2009). While in the past, the division centered on birth control and women's ordination (Manning 1997; Weaver 1999), current conflict among Catholics often mirrors the culture war issues that exist in general society (Starks 2009). Catholic laity have been increasingly divided on where their theological

guidance should be located, with traditional Catholics deferring to the authority of the Vatican and progressive Catholics questioning the relevance of the church hierarchy (Manning 1997; Starks 2009). The conflict in Catholicism mirrors that in Protestantism in the question of either relying on traditional authority or accepting modern interpretations of their religious traditions.

There are basic differences between conservative and progressive Christians, but the location of authority and reliance upon that authority is at the heart of those differences. Progressive Christians emphasize human agency and tolerance as the source of their values. They are attracted to the concepts of rationality and human wisdom as guides for their attitudes, focus on issues of inequality and modernity, and view social problems as systemic and structural in nature as opposed to individualistic (Cronin 2011; Dorrien 2006; Wilson 1999). Conversely, conservative Christians rely upon authoritative scripture as the final word on their moral vision. They hold to a traditionalist mindset whereby their beliefs must line up with the information found in the Bible. Indeed, Mockabee (2007) documents that beliefs about the Bible are a vital predictor of how individuals develop their political beliefs. Thus, whether an individual envisions the Bible as God's word is a valuable indicator of the different Christian perspectives and how those perspectives shape one's attitudes toward other political or religious groups.

SOCIAL IDENTITY AND GROUP EFFECT

One of the most basic means of understanding social identity is by in-groups and out-groups. People with the same identities (values) are grouped together, while those who do not agree are placed outside the group (Uslaner 2000). Frequently, those who share similar values work together to accomplish relevant political goals in the same way that groups who share similar values tend to be concerned with the welfare of each other (Shkodriani and Gibbons 1995). Conversely, out-groups are often seen as threats to the unity and success of the in-group (Montali et al. 2013; Schneider 1992). This perception of "us vs. them" has a number of important ramifications including the inevitable demonization of out-groups, while also providing the in-group a level of consistency and cohesion that helps to maintain its stability even during periods of difficulty (Ledgerwood and Chaiken 2007; Price and Oshagan 1995; Zou, Morris, and Benet-Martínez 2008).

While it is common for citizens of a country to develop a shared national identity, it is possible for an individual to develop a sub-national social identity that becomes their primary means of understanding the world (Howard 2000; Phinney 1990). Religion is one such basis for this type of in-group social identity in the United States (Regenerus and Smith 1998). "[Scholars] have tended to understand religion as 'a fundamental category of identity and association' that is 'capable of grounding both solidarities and identities' (Warner 1993:1059), a boundary that

fosters belonging" (Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartmann, 2006: 212). In addition, patterns of behavior associated with one's religious in-group not only help to define in-group status but also allow for out-group demarcation as well (Yancey, 2017). As such, religious individuals can see those of other faiths (or no faith at all) as proponents of competing systems of meaning (Edgell et al. 2016; Greeley and Hout 2006). That said, religious identity often correlates with political identity as religious fault lines are clearly visible in partisan politics (Putnam and Campbell 2010; Regenerus and Smith 1998).

At their core, in-groups and out-groups are social constructions. Given their value as reference groups, understanding the relative place of a given group as either an in- or an out-group can only be done in comparison to one's evaluations of other social groups. For attitudes toward political groups, if prevailing contemporary sentiment is correct, then conservative Christians should exhibit unfavorable ratings towards liberal groups (an out-group) while simultaneously having favorable leanings toward conservative groups (an in-group). Conversely, based upon prevailing contemporary sentiment, progressive Christians should view liberal groups as more compatible with their perspectives (an in-group attachment) while simultaneously having unfavorable attitudes toward conservative groups (an out-group). In terms of attitudes toward religious groups, if there is a unifying Christian identity wherein progressive and conservative Christians view each other as part of their in-group, then both progressive and conservative Christians should exhibit similar favorability attitudes toward Muslims and atheists. If progressive and conservative Christians have different favorability ratings to what are seemingly both of their religious out-groups, however, then this discrepancy calls into question the existence of a unifying Christian identity in the United States.

DATA AND METHODS

The data for this study comes from the 2012 American National Election Study (ANES). Our research strategy is the utilization of logistic regression models that explore feelings of favorability or unfavorability among self-identified Christians. As such, the dependent variable is respondent attitudes, using feeling thermometers, towards four different groups. To assess the attitudes of Christians toward politically different groups, we selected liberals and conservatives, as they represents the two dominant ideological groups in contemporary U.S. politics. To assess the attitudes of Christians towards theologically different groups (arguably both are Christian out-groups), we selected Muslims and atheists.[2] This strategy provides us with complementary, but distinctive, ways of assessing how

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[2] These two religious groups are competitors towards Christians for different reasons. Muslims may be seen as competitors since they promote a non-Christian religion, and atheists may be seen as competitors as they challenge the entire notion of the supernatural.

conservative and progressive Christians react to those with whom they politically and theologically disagree.

The feeling thermometer is a widely used measure that has traditionally been included in the ANES time series. It is a 100-point scale where 0 indicates a very cold or unfavorable feeling while 100 indicates a very warm or favorable feeling, and a rating of 50 indicates neutrality. Feeling thermometer questions and ratings are typically asked about political objects (presidential candidates, social issues, groups, or institutions). Put differently, favorable/unfavorable attitudes can attach themselves to individuals as well as to social groups. To comprehend the role favorable and unfavorable attitudes play in the construction of in-groups and out-groups, we have to compare the appraisals of different groups to each other. An in-group should be a group enjoying more favorable feelings toward it than other groups, even if the actual level of favor is low, and an out-group should be a group experiencing more disfavorable feelings toward it than other groups, even if the actual level of favor is high.

The ANES asks the respondent to describe their feelings (favorable to unfavorable) of twenty-seven distinct social groups. Higher numerical scores are used to indicate more warmth towards a social group. The most straightforward way to use the feeling thermometers is to compare the means of each relevant group between conservative and progressive Christians. Such a comparison provides an incomplete assessment, however, as it does not account for the possibility that individuals may have a propensity to rank all groups relatively high or low. For example, a conservative Christian may give political liberals a low ranking of 25. But if the respondent's average ranking of all groups is 25, then our interpretation of the low ranking of political liberals should go from those liberals being an out-group to them being a group with no special emotional connection for the respondent. Without a norming procedure of the thermometer rankings, it is difficult to make assessments of whether respondents have a willingness to like or dislike a given social group. It is possible to look at the standard deviations to gain an understanding of whether global scores are shaped by wide or narrow ranges of scores; however, even standard deviations would not inform us whether the score spread is driven more because of rejection or acceptance of a group. A better way to get at this information is to look at individuals who rank a group significantly (in this case measured by a standard deviation) above or below others. This dichotomous measure necessitates use of logistic modeling rather than OLS.

Thus, to capture favorable/unfavorable attitudes towards liberals, conservatives, Muslims, and atheists, we averaged all twenty-seven thermometer scores for each respondent. We then compared the scores given to a particular group to the average score for all twenty-seven groups.[3] If the respondents indicated a thermometer score

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[3] The utility of standardizing feeling thermometers by comparing individual thermometer scores to an overall mean was first suggested by Wilcox, Sigelman, and Cook (1989).

for conservatives a standard deviation above the mean of all thermometer scores, then they were designated as pro-conservative. For example, a respondent with a mean score of 50 for all twenty-seven groups with a standard deviation of ten would be designated as pro-conservative if that respondent ranked conservatives 60 or higher. Likewise, if the respondents indicated a thermometer score for conservatives a standard deviation below the mean of all thermometer scores, then they were designated as anti-conservative. The same technique was used to indicate favorable/unfavorable attitudes towards liberals, Muslims, and atheists. Standardizing the thermometer scores in this manner is the best way of capturing both favorability and unfavorability toward each group in question. Using just a mean does not allow for the possibility that within the same group, there may be a significant number of individuals who like another group alongside a significant number of individual who do not like that group.

Our primary independent variable of interest is a measure of Christian theology (progressive versus conservative). We have chosen to focus on a theological definition of progressive/conservative Christianity rather than a denominational one given the work of Wuthnow (1989; 1996) indicating the relatively lower importance of denominations and the higher importance of religious identity as a conservative, moderate, or liberal. Results tied to denominational differences are likely to be watered down due to the inclusion of some theological progressives in "conservative" denominations and some theological conservatives in "progressive" denominations. Furthermore, this problem is compounded when taking Catholics into consideration since that religious designation can cover theological conservatives and progressives. Thus, to assess accurately the power of theological beliefs to shape favorability scores, we focus on a theological measure.

To sort self-identified Christians into progressive Christian or conservative Christian categories, we used the ANES question about religious affiliation and included those who are Catholic or "other" Christians (there is no category for Protestants) to create a subset of Christians. With that subsample of Christians, we then used a question about the Bible as the word of God to determine if a person was a conservative or progressive Christian. The question provided three possible answers: 1) that the Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally word-for-word, 2) that the Bible is the word of God but not everything in it should be taken literally, word-for-word, and 3) that the Bible is a book written by men and is not the word of God. A Christian answering this question with the first answer is labeled a conservative Christians, while one answering with the second or third answer is labeled a progressive Christian.[4] A dummy variable is utilized to

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[4] Since we combine the second and third answers together, we likely overstate the number of progressive Christians in our sample. It is quite possible that certain individuals do not think that the Bible should be taken literally but generally have a conservative theological outlook in other ways. If our sample of progressive Christians includes Christians with a generally conservative

represent Christian conservative.[5] This approach is consistent with previous research that used attitudes towards biblical inerrancy as the sole measure to operationalize potential theological fundamentalism (Sherkat and Darnell 1999; Sherkat et al. 2011), evangelicalism (Hunter 1983), and orthodoxy (Freeman and Houston 2011; Roy 2016) within the Christian faith. Kellstedt and Smidt (1993) contend that biblical authority has relevance in America.

Furthermore, this methodology operationalizes an important theological difference between progressive and conservative Christians. As previously suggested, an important dividing line between conservative and progressive Christians is the accepted approach to authority of the Bible or the church.[6] These differences in attitudes towards authority are theoretically linked to larger differences in how each type of Christian interprets their religious beliefs and the instructions in how to live out this faith system. This approach is a more valuable way to operationalize differences between conservative and progressive Christians than self-selection since, for example, some politically progressive but theologically conservative Christians may designate themselves to be progressive Christians. Such misdesignations would make it difficult to assess the potential of theological distinctions to shape the favorable/unfavorable attitudes of Christians.

While this measure of Christian theology is our primary independent variable of interest, we recognize that using a doctrinal measure to categorize progressive versus conservative Christianity is controversial to some (especially those in political science rather than sociology). Therefore, we also include denominational

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theological outlook, then distinctions between the two groups should be more difficult to document. Any significant findings from our work must arise in spite of this operationalization difficulty, which thus provides us with more confidence in the strength of those findings.

[5] Of course there are other ways of assessing theological distinctions as pointed out by Mockabee, Wald, and Leege (2009). They explore notions of sin and other theological distinctions as a measure of theological progressiveness. We used the 2007 Baylor Religious Survey to compare a question about whether God is angry at a respondent's sin and the respondent's assessment of the Bible as the word of God. We found the two variables were strongly related ($r = 0.42$) among the Christians in the sample. Furthermore, the Bible variable was also correlated with whether a respondent self-defined as theologically liberal ($r = 0.248$). Thus, we have confidence that a respondent's perception of the infallibility of the Bible is related to other aspects of theological conservatism/liberalism.

[6] There is a conceptual difference between authority of the church and authority of the Bible. This difference is indicated by the fact that among Christians, non-Catholics are more likely to see the Bible as the literal word of God than Catholic Christians (47.5% vs. 22.4%; $p < 0.001$). Catholics who place a great deal of authority in the church should be more likely to place a great deal of authority on the Bible, but we have no data to support this contention. It has been observed, however, that Catholicism tends to be less politically and theologically conservative than conservative Protestantism (Olson and Carroll 1992; Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2014). If such observations are accurate, then it is not surprising that fewer Catholics accept the Bible literally than non-Catholics. Since the ANES lacks a question about church authority, the best substitute is using the question on biblical authority to operationalize progressive Catholic Christians.

dummy variables for mainline Protestant, black Protestant, and Catholic with evangelical Protestant as the reference group.

Finally, we used a variety of other independent variables to control for factors previous research indicated can influence support for political perspectives. Age is measured with a 13-point scale. Female, black, Hispanic, other race, and regional variables for north central, northeast, and west were included in the analysis. Education is measured with a 5-point scale, and income is measured with a 28-point scale. We converted the political viewpoint variable into a 7-point scale measuring political conservatism with higher values indicating more political conservatism. Church attendance is measured with a 7-point scale with higher numbers indicating higher levels of church attendance.

FINDINGS

In Table 1 we record frequencies of key independent variables as they reflect the Christians in the ANES sample. Conservative Christians are significantly more likely to be female, non-white, less educated, politically conservative, less wealthy, live in the South, and attend church more often than progressive Christians. These findings are consistent with other research on differences between conservative and progressive Christians (Bader et al. 2006; Guth et al. 1996; Kohut et al. 2001; Lugo et al. 2008). It is possible that the differences we see between conservative and progressive Christians are tied to their differing political ideology rather than theological perspectives. Controlling different social and demographic factors will allow us to assess whether these differences are tied to the distinctive nature of conservative or progressive Christians.

Table 1: Comparison of Conservative Christians and Progressive Christians with Selected Social and Demographic Variables

	Conservative Christians	Progressive Christians	Total
Female	57.9%	52.5%***	54.6%
	(758)	(1,099)	(1,857)
White	48.3%	67.1%***	59.8%
	(631)	(1,399)	(2,086)
Black	26.8%	10.9%***	17.0%
	(350)	(228)	(578)
Hispanic	19.9%	18.0%	18.7%
	(260)	(375)	(635)
Under Age 40	25.6%	25.5%	25.5%
	(330)	(529)	(694)

Bachelor Degree or above.	19.0% (247)	41.0%*** (852)	32.5% (1,099)
Liberals	16.9% (181)	26.0%*** (509)	22.8% (690)
Conservatives	52.7% (565)	40.1%*** (785)	44.6% (1,350)
Income More than $100K	8.8% (110)	23.2%*** (473)	17.7% (583)
Income $50K – $100K	25.2% (316)	30.7%*** (625)	28.6% (941)
Evangelicals	61.0% (797)	43.4%*** (905)	50.2% (1,715)
Mainline Protestant	10.4% (136)	12.6%* (264)	11.7% (402)
Black Protestant	9.5% (124)	3.1%*** (64)	5.5% (189)
Catholic	21.0 % (275)	45.5%*** (951)	36.0% (1,226)
West	17.3% (226)	22.2%*** (465)	20.3% (691)
North Central	20.6% (269)	24.3%* (509)	22.9% (778)
Northeast	11.3% (148)	18.0%*** (377)	15.4% (525)
Attend Church at Least Weekly	43.4% (565)	20.8%*** (434)	29.4% (999)
Total N	61.5% (2,092)	38.5% (1,309)	100% (3,401)

* p < 0.05; *** p < 0.001
Percentages reflect only those who answered questions of a given variable and not the entire sample.
Source: 2012 American National Election Studies

In Table 2 we look at the results of logistic analysis on whether a respondent is either pro-conservative, anti-conservative, pro-liberal, and/or anti-liberal.[7] Adhering to a conservative form of Christianity does not significantly predict whether a conservative Christian has favorable attitudes towards political conservatives (pro-conservative column) or unfavorable attitudes towards political liberals (anti-liberal column). This theological construct, however, does significantly predict unfavorable attitudes towards political conservatives and favorable attitudes towards political liberals. According to the odds ratios, conservative Christians who

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[7] Please note that 13.3 percent of the respondents were pro-conservative, 16.3 percent were anti-conservative, 5.3 percent were pro-liberal, and 31.6 percent were anti-liberal.

accept the Bible as the literal word of God are half as likely as other respondents to have unfavorable attitudes towards political conservatives and have only a 45 percent likelihood of having favorable attitudes towards political liberals after controlling for all independent variables.

The relative power of conservative Christian status slightly varies between assessment of pro-liberal and anti-conservative. As it concerns assessment of favorable attitudes towards political liberals, beta coefficients indicate that only political ideology has a clearly stronger effect size than assessment of the Bible. In the assessment of unfavorable attitudes towards political conservatives, however, racial categories as well as political ideology have a stronger effect size than whether a Christian considers the Bible as the literal word of God. On the other hand, in the models assessing favorable attitudes towards political conservatives or unfavorable attitudes towards political liberals, the beta coefficients of conservative Christians are relatively low. Different theological assessments of the Bible matter just about more than any other variable when measuring pro-liberal or anti-conservative perceptions. But theological assessments matter very little when measuring anti-liberal or pro-conservative perceptions. Theologically conservative Christianity is more likely to predict an unwillingness to reject political conservatism than a willingness to reject political liberalism. Consequently, Christian progressives are more likely to reject political conservatives than Christian conservatives are to reject political liberals, indicating that progressive Christians are less willing to condone political ideas or groups with which they disagree than are conservative Christians.[8]

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[8] In addition to the models in Tables 2 and 3, we also ran models with religion interaction variables. The variables were Religious Attendance x Christian Conservative, Religious Attendance x Catholic, Religious Attendance x Black Protestant, Religious Attendance x Mainline Protestant, Christian Conservative x Catholic, Christian Conservative x Black Protestant, and Christian Conservative x Mainline Protestant. The addition of these variables did not alter the findings of the Christian Conservative variable except for the case of Pro-Liberal. In that model Christian Conservative was no longer significantly negative (p = 0.320). Given the high correlations between the main and interactive effects (for example the r between Religious Attendance x Christian Conservative and Christian Conservative is 0.824), the persistence of all but one of our findings in spite of this potential multicollinearity provides us more confidence in those findings.

Table 2: Betas and Odds Ratios Assessing Pro-Conservative, Pro-Liberal, Anti-Conservative, and Anti-Liberal

	Pro-Conservative	Pro-Liberal	Anti-Conservative	Anti-Liberal
Female	0.187	-0.499**	-0.189	-0.164
	(1.206)	(0.607)	(0.828)	(0.849)
Black	-1.763***	0.231	0.964***	-1.212 ***
	(0.172)	(1.260)	(2.623)	(0.298)
Hispanic	-0.347	0.298	0.539**	-0.484**
	(0.707)	(1.347)	(1.715)	(0.616)
Other Race	-0.668*	0.162	0.299	-0.241
	(0.513)	(1.176)	(1.348)	(0.786)
Age	-0.013	-0.003	0.053**	-0.003
	(0.987)	(0.997)	(1.054)	(0.997)
Education	0.044	0.255**	0.187**	0.103*
	(1.045)	(1.291)	(1.205)	(1.108)
Political Conservatism	1.183***	-1.070***	-0.936***	1.112***
	(3.264)	(0.343)	(0.392)	(3.039)
Income	0.030	-0.094*	0.083	0.133**
	(1.030)	(0.910)	(1.086)	(1.143)
Mainline Protestant	-0.055	-0.318	-0.067	-0.059
	(0.947)	(0.727)	(0.935)	(0.942)
Black Protestant	-0.369	-0.597	0.210	-0.353
	(0.691)	(0.550)	(1.234)	(0.703)
Catholic	-0.391*	-0.247	0.061	0.059
	(0.676)	(0.781)	(1.063)	(1.061)
North Central	0.420**	0.316	0.163	0.027
	(1.522)	(1.372)	(1.177)	(1.028)
North East	-0.209	0.322	-0.263	-0.096
	(0.811)	(1.380)	(0.769)	(0.909)
West	-0.050	-0.221	-0.197	0.061
	(.951)	(.802)	(.822)	(1.062)
Religious Attendance	0.000	-0.099	-0.039	0.063
	(1.000)	(0.906)	(0.962)	(1.065)
Christian Conservative	0.140	-0.799**	-0.719***	0.025
	(1.150)	(0.450)	(0.487)	(1.253)
Nagelkerke R^2	0.355	0.307	0.346	0.436
-2 Log Likelihood	1418.319	736.960	1590.249	2158.546

N = 2,443; the reference category for each analysis is a white evangelical Protestant living in the South.

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

In Table 3 we look at favorable and unfavorable attitudes towards two religious out-groups.[9] The theological attitudes of Christians do not significantly matter for either Muslims or atheists when it comes to accepting these groups as in-groups. But they do matter when it comes to rejecting them and considering them as out-groups. Conservative Christians are 64 percent more likely to reject Muslims and 70.6 percent more likely to reject atheists as out-groups after application of the independent variables. Furthermore, other than black, conservative Christian has the greatest effect size in measuring disfavor towards either of these groups. The betas of this variable in both the anti-Muslim (0.498) and anti-atheist (0.51) models indicate more powerful effects than for all other independent variables except for race.

To comprehend the implications of this finding, we have to assume that the strong rejection of these groups by Christian conservatives, rather than relative acceptance by Christian progressives, is the most salient explanatory factor. Indeed, using our methodology for assessing unfavorable attitudes, only 1.1 percent of the Christian progressives reject Muslims and just .5 percent reject atheists.. Christian progressives are not highly supportive of non-Christian groups (they are not more likely to have favorable attitudes toward Muslims and Atheists, e.g., be pro-Muslim / pro-Atheist). While Christian progressives indicate an unfavorable attitude towards political groups, Christian conservatives find groups that theologically differ as the focal point for their disfavor.

Ultimately, for progressive Christians, the qualities most likely to be shaped by theological differences between Christians are favorable attitudes towards political liberals and unfavorable attitudes towards political conservatives. On the other hand, for conservative Christians, the qualities most likely to be shaped by theological differences between Christians are unfavorable attitudes towards non-Christian religious groups. Thus, we argue that there is something distinctive in the decision of Christians about the relevance of the Bible in their lives that is linked to progressive sensibilities of accepting or rejecting political groups and linked to conservative sensibilities of accepting or rejecting religious groups. If belief about the Bible is a useful definer of differences between conservative and progressive Christianity, then our results suggest that *political* disfavor is more salient for Christian progressives, but *religious* disfavor is more salient for Christian conservatives.

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[9] Please note, 1.3 percent of the respondents were pro-Muslim, 27.1 percent were anti-Muslim, 0.7 percent were pro-atheist, and 45.6 percent were anti-atheist.

Table 3: Betas and Odds Ratios Assessing Pro-Muslim, Pro-Atheist, Anti-Muslim, and Anti-Atheist

	Pro-Muslim	Pro-Atheist	Anti-Muslim	Anti-Atheist
Female	-0.297	-0.246	-0.330***	0.123
	(0.743)	(0.782)	(0.719)	(1.131)
Black	0.171	-2.643*	-1.003***	0.623***
	(1.187)	(0.071)	(0.367)	(1.864)
Hispanic	-0.390	-1.038	0.103	0.489***
	(0.677)	(0.354)	(1.109)	(1.631)
Other Race	-0.290	-0.216	0.041	0.370*
	(0.748)	(0.806)	(1.042)	(1.448)
Age	-0.109*	-0.149*	0.064***	0.039**
	(0.897)	(0.862)	(1.066)	(1.040)
Education	0.062	0.450*	-0.224***	-0.192***
	(1.064)	(1.568)	(0.799)	(0.825)
Political	-0.284*	-0.599***	0.249***	0.209***
Conservatism	(0.74)	(0.550)	(1.283)	(1.233)
Income	-0.305*	-0.383*	-0.031	0.002
	(0.737)	(0.682)	(0.970)	(1.002)
Mainline	-0.776	-0.928	0.069	-0.073
Protestant	(0.460)	(0.395)	(1.072)	(0.930)
Black	0.303	1.595	-0.526	0.236
Protestant	(1.354)	(4.928)	(0.100)	(1.266)
Catholic	-0.103	-0.150	0.031	-0.068
	(0.902)	(0.861)	(1.032)	(0.935)
North Central	1.172**	-1.152	-0.319**	0.151
	(3.230)	(0.316)	(0.727)	(1.163)
North East	0.797	0.393	-0.085	-0.270*
	(2.220)	(1.481)	(0.919)	(0.764)
West	0.687	-0.663	-0.252*	-0.307**
	(1.987)	(0.515)	(0.778)	(0.736)
Religious	0.053	0.263	-0.022	0.176***
Attendance	(1.054)	(1.300)	(0.978)	(1.192)
Christian	-0.748	-0.431	0.498***	0.551***
Conservative	(0.473)	(0.650)	(1.646)	(1.736)
Nagelkerke R^2	0.089	0.180	0.130	0.145
-2 Log	312.423	167.591	2638.431	3085.834
Likelihood				

N = 2,443; the reference category for each analysis is a white evangelical Protestant living in the South.
* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

CONCLUSION

In 2010 Putnam and Campbell put forth an argument in their book *American Grace* that religion in the United States has the potential to divide us, but that potential has never truly been realized. Instead, they contend that religious tension in the United States is relatively muted compared to other nations. They claim that despite the fact that the United States is simultaneously religiously diverse and highly religious, "interreligious relations exhibit more comity than conflict" (Putnam and Campbell, 2010: 494). They believe that the reason for this rests in Americans' ability to "bridge" relationships with those who are of a different religious background. They ground this bridging concept in the larger literature of social contact. Gordon Allport contends that there are a number of necessary ingredients for contact to diminish prejudice, most notably that the individuals must share common goals and have intergroup cooperation (Allport 1979). In light of our findings of pervasive unfavorability from many corners of American religion, it seems that this social contact could not lead to the bridging described by Putnam and Campbell.

There is a general belief within some subcultures that Christian conservatives are highly motivated by a desire to reject out-group members (Bolce and De Maio 2008; Yancey and Williamson 2012). Yet our findings indicate that both Christian conservatives and progressives are equally likely to have unfavorable attitudes toward out-groups. Christian progressives are more likely than Christian conservatives to register disfavor toward those groups that are politically different, whereas Christian conservatives are more likely to direct unfavorable attitudes toward those groups with whom they have theological differences.[10]

Relative to Christian progressives, Christian conservatives do not have unfavorable attitudes toward groups where they have political disagreements or differences. This finding may be the result of the importance that Christian conservatives place upon theological conformity. A strong emphasis on theological homogeneity may enable Christian conservatives more easily to accept those with whom they politically disagree. Just as there are theological dimensions whereby Christian conservatives are relatively likely to reject those theologically different, there are political dimensions whereby Christian progressives are relatively likely to reject those politically different. Those who adopt a progressive form of Christianity may prioritize political goals more than those adopting a conservative Christian ideology. Put differently, progressive Christians may, arguably, have

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[10] We are not claiming that rejection of those politically different does not exist among Christian conservatives or that rejection of those religiously different does not exist among Christian progressives. Rather, our findings indicate that the propensity to have unfavorable attitudes toward political out-groups is stronger among Christian progressives, while the propensity to have unfavorable attitudes toward religious out-groups is stronger among Christian conservatives.

more in common with liberal political ideology than they do with conservative Christian theology. For progressive Christians, political liberals may be a salient in-group in ways that conservative Christians are not. Such a priority may not be surprising given the emphasis Christian progressives place on structural change and social justice relative to their conservative co-religionists (Gauer 2005; Todd et al. 2015; Wellman 2008). Theological orientations that address structural change and social justice, such as Black and Liberation Theology, tend to cncern themselves more with contemporary issues rather than a spiritual afterlife. If Christian progressives are less otherworldly than Christian conservatives, then political victories may be relatively more important to them than theological agreement. Future research should investigate the degree of saliency political values have within the progressive Christian subcultures relative to their religious values as well as the degree of saliency that theological values have within the conservative Christian subcultures relative to their political values.

Both conservative and progressive Christians lay claim to the mantle of being Christian. In theory both groups should perceive some degree of commonality with each other. If this degree of commonality is powerful, then it is quite plausible that theological differences would have no effect on which groups would experience favorable or unfavorable attitudes from Christians. Our study, however, indicates different priorities between conservative and progressive Christians. It is not only that conservative Christians have favorable attitudes towards different groups than progressive Christians, but it is also the case that these groups have fundamentally different priorities in their decisions on whom they will engage in social interaction. There is possibly so much social distance and epistemological contrasts between conservative and progressive Christians that they may be distinctive social groups. We cannot conclusively and authoritatively make an argument that it is reasonable to discuss these groups as theologically distinct, but our data suggests that they may be socially distinct to the degree that researchers should consider them different religious groups. Such an argument has important social scientific implications when considering the status, power, and numerical advantage of Christians in the United States. If these two groups do not function together socially, then assessments of Christianity's influence must take into account the socially divided nature of the religion. Our research suggests that conservative and progressive Christians deserve study as different religious entities.

It is reasonable to argue that nearly all, if not all, social groups have a propensity towards unfavorable attitudes towards certain social out-groups. Our results suggest that Christian conservatives may not be more likely to have unfavorable attitudes than other social groups. Indeed, they may show relatively favorable attitudes towards groups with whom they have political disagreements. Theories of ethnocentrism (Axelrod and Hammond 2003; LeVine and Campbell 1972; Sumner 1906) suggest that all social groups perceive themselves to be

superior to other social groups. These perceptions of superiority may not be global in nature, but rather certain dimensions that are highly central to the social identity of a group may be the areas where ethnocentrism can turn to intolerance. If so, then our research is not just about measures of favor or disfavor but about the very fabric of conservative and progressive Christians.

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