

Welcoming the Stranger: Anti-Muslim Sentiment Among Ann Arbor Christians

Kallan M. Larsen

University of Michigan

2018 Sociology Honors Cohort

Cohort Advisor: Barbara Anderson

Faculty Advisor: Fatma Müge Göçek

Acknowledgments:

I would like to thank Professor Anderson for her stories, guidance, and positive attitude from day one of this process. To Professor Göçek – thank you for the much-needed reassurances you provided whenever we met together, both those related to this thesis and those not. To Z – thank you for commiserating with me and inspiring me to work harder. To my parents – thank you for raising me to believe that everyone’s faith journey is different; that belief is foundational to this research and the research I hope to pursue throughout my career.

ABSTRACT

With continued terrorist attacks perpetrated by the Islamic State, Islamophobia runs rampant in America. Though certain Christian politicians' public opposition to accepting refugees from Muslim-majority countries is widely publicized, many Christian teachings contradict this stance. This research examines how religiosity and political affiliation influence anti-Muslim sentiment among Christians in Southeast Michigan. I hypothesized religiosity would be negatively correlated with anti-Muslim sentiment and that political affiliation would have a stronger effect on opinion than religiosity. Eighty-eight respondents recruited from Ann Arbor congregations and religious organizations completed an online survey about their religious background, religiosity, and political affiliation, as well as their perceptions of Islam and relationships with Muslims. Four supplementary interviews were conducted with respondents in order to contextualize their survey responses. Religiosity, authoritarianism, and political affiliation were not significantly related to composite scores of anti-Muslim sentiment. Conservatives were more likely to have an unfavorable opinion of Islam. Interviews indicated strong religious support for political opinions, but whether this relationship was causal or coincidental was unclear. Further research is needed on the influence of religion across the spectrum of political belief.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	4
BACKGROUND.....	8
EMPIRICAL QUESTION.....	16
METHODOLOGY.....	16
HYPOTHESIS.....	18
RESULTS.....	18
DISCUSSION.....	27
CONCLUSION.....	29
REFERENCES.....	29
APPENDIX.....	32

Since September 11, 2001, Islamophobia has risen dramatically. Today, many Americans believe the United States is in an ideological war against Islam, and the Islamic extremists around whom American political discourse revolves seem to hold similar beliefs. However, the equating of religious extremists who subscribe to Islam with the religion of Islam itself has led to backlash against Muslim Americans in the United States.

Proposed homeland solutions have only escalated in scale since 9/11, with various politicians proposing a national registry for Muslims as an added security measure. In the wake of terrorist attacks in Paris and San Bernardino, California in late 2015, hate crimes against Muslims tripled (Lichtblau 2015). Fear of succeeding terrorist attacks is often cited as the reason for halting refugee resettlement or immigration from predominantly Muslim countries, as seen with President Donald Trump's January 2017 Executive Action, as well as legislation proposed and passed far before the 2016 election.

In the face of such opposition, American Muslims are forced to repeatedly remind those around them that “not all Muslims are terrorists.” Religious leaders of both Muslim and non-Muslim backgrounds have joined the conversation about religious extremism. Indeed, much of the hostility toward Muslims seems to come from the religious (Christian) right. In a 2006 open letter to Pope Benedict XVI, 38 Muslim scholars addressed disparaging remarks the pope had made about ‘Holy War,’ writing, “If a religion regulates war and describes circumstances where it is necessary and just, that does not make that religion war-like, anymore than regulating sexuality makes a religion prurient.” That such a large group of Muslims would convene to address the head of a

powerful world religion is indicative of the significance of anti-Muslim sentiment.

Islamophobia is made all the more complicated by the intersection of racism with religious prejudices. Racism and religious biases are sometimes difficult to distinguish in research, especially if the target of prejudice holds both a minority racial and minority religious identity. It may be impossible for targets of discrimination to determine the motivation behind the discrimination they experienced, unless the discriminator explicitly states the reason. Raymond Taras (2011) writes, “Racialization, race, and differential racism have all become more endemic to Islamophobic stigmatizing of Muslims today than was the case in the past.” Many targets of Islamophobia are actually not Muslim, but misconceptions and a lack of knowledge about religious diversity leads people to commit similar crimes against other people with similar skin tones under the pretense of anti-Muslim action. Thus, anti-Muslim prejudices are potentially harmful to more than just Muslims themselves.

Despite attempts to correct the narrative and challenge harmful stereotypes, many Americans and American media sources continue to portray Islam as enemy number one. When religion is one of the first reported characteristics of a Muslim criminal, violent crimes committed by Muslims are effectively attributed to Islam itself. Anti-Muslim sentiment grows as people are unable to separate the actions of few from their Muslim neighbors, colleagues, classmates, and fellow Americans.

Members of the religious right are outspoken about their faith and often use it as a justification for their political decisions. Many of these same political leaders are quick to denounce Islam and discuss the dangers of allowing Muslims to enter the United States.

However, certain Biblical passages seem to provide definitive support for welcoming immigrants and refugees. For example, Matthew 25:31-40 (KJV) reads:

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

The idea of serving God through service to others is found throughout the New Testament, such as in the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 (KJV):

And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour? And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

The idea of welcoming those from other backgrounds is also found in the Old Testament, as in Deuteronomy 24:14 (KJV), which reads: “Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates.” Interpretations of each of these scriptural passages may vary, but the obligation to show kindness to fellow human beings, regardless of their background, is a common thread throughout.

Is the religious right representative of the most religious sector of American Christianity? If so, how do they reconcile anti-Muslim sentiment and policies with such teachings? Despite the compassion encouraged by scriptural passages, religious people have been found to display prejudices more often than non-religious people (Bohman and Hjerm 2012). In fact, Altemeyer found that religious ethnocentrism could “statistically account for all of fundamentalism’s positive connections with other prejudices” (2003:24). However, tendency to self-identify as religious is confounded by political identity, and religiosity is notoriously difficult to measure.

Assuming, on the other hand, that policies popular among members of the religious right are not necessarily popular among Christians as a whole, what is the ideological difference that drives some Christians to the right and others to the left? Prather (2016) states that there exists a chasm within Christianity between those who side with the “law” of God versus the “grace” of God. This viewpoint is drawn from MacWilliams’ finding that authoritarianism was the most significant predictor of one’s preferred candidate in the 2016 election. He defines authoritarians this way: “Authoritarians obey. They rally to and follow strong leaders. And they respond

aggressively to outsiders, especially when they feel threatened” (2016). If there truly is a divide between authoritarian and non-authoritarian Christians, this difference in belief regarding the nature and character of God could explain an apparent disregard for certain teachings in the Bible. Circumstantially, those teachings may take a backseat to the principle of obedience. Even beyond one’s experience in religion, “authoritarians value conformity, sameness, and convention, and this translates into intolerance of groups...that are outside of the mainstream” (Kalkan, Layman, and Uslaner 2009:850). Thus, authoritarianism could have a multi-faceted impact on a Christian’s political tendencies.

Assuming exposure to Christian teachings that encourage “welcoming the stranger,” this research seeks to determine the root of anti-Muslim sentiment, particularly in the context of immigration and the refugee crisis, among Christians in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Are Christians with a high level of anti-Muslim sentiment actively ignoring certain Christian teachings, or are their religious leaders conveying a political agenda at church? Is the issue independent of religious belief altogether, and if so, why is the influence of religious beliefs on this issue insignificant?

BACKGROUND

Theoretical Foundations

Active members of Christian congregations are likely to have a strong sense of community within their religious institutions, and it is therefore possible that they do not engage in much interpersonal contact with members of other faiths, including Muslims. Allport (1954) developed Social Contact Theory, which holds that interpersonal contact

conditioned on the bases of equal status, superordinate goals, intergroup cooperation, support of authority, and personal interaction can reduce prejudices between majority and minority groups. Merely identifying with a religious group may make one more likely to favor the in-group and oppose the out-group (Hall, Matz, and Wood 2010).

The sociological concept of “the stranger” as advanced by Georg Simmel (1950) perfectly embodies the way immigrants are often viewed in the United States. Rather than visitors or complete outsiders, strangers are those unfamiliar to a group who come to stay in close proximity to the group. Though their physical proximity may be close, they are distanced from the group in cultural practices, whether that be religion or language. Those who believe the culture of Islam is too far distant from America’s “Judeo-Christian” roots may believe Muslim immigrants are unable to fully assimilate into American culture and thus will forever remain strangers. The existence of immigrant communities across the country provide fuel to support the argument that they do not wish to assimilate into American culture.

Group threat theory, originally advanced by Blumer (1958), asserts that groups seek to allocate resources for themselves to gain advantage for their own groups. Thus, any threats, real or perceived, to economic or political power as well as moral values are portrayed as targeting their own group. If American Christians believe Muslims are unable or refuse to assimilate into American culture, they are likely to view increased visibility of Muslims with suspicion. Examples of this in the context of Muslim immigration include the idea of Sharia law being spread throughout America, Muslims wishing to come to America for the express purpose of endangering it, immigrants taking

the jobs Americans would otherwise hold, and Christian values slipping away. The opposition to perceived cultural threat is displayed through nativism.

By depreciating Muslims' religion and cultures, American Christians succeed in portraying themselves in a more favorable light in comparison. This is in keeping with Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory (1979), which holds that people have a desire to cultivate a positive self-image for their own social groups. Group conflict theory holds that feelings of prejudice toward an outgroup (in this case, Muslims) may arise when there exists a real or perceived conflict over resources. These prejudices manifest themselves through acts of discrimination against the outgroup.

Durkheim's theory of symbolic boundaries (1915) details a method of creating social change in reaction to a perceived injustice. Following the 9/11 attacks, a boundary between Christianity and Islam arose naturally, as the terrorists who attacked identified themselves as Muslim, which could easily be portrayed as the opposite of the Founding Fathers' largely Christian backgrounds. An attack on America became an attack on its values, and "American values" was used synonymously with "Christian values." Barth (1998) expands Durkheim's theory when he speaks of ethnic boundary making. Because of the confounded ethnic and religious prejudice many Muslims face, two tandem boundaries exist between white Christians and Muslims of color.

Religion and Opinions on Immigration Policy

Relationships between religion and attitudes toward immigration vary significantly by country – part of the reason being that different countries receive immigrants from various cultures and countries due to geographical proximity. However, the relationship

of the state with religion can also have a large impact on whether views toward immigration are largely positive or negative. In countries where religion is highly regulated, citizens are less concerned with immigration (Bohman and Hjerm 2012). Research has shown that Eastern Europeans are more likely to be intolerant toward immigration than Western Europeans (Doebler 2014). Different approaches to policy within a country can also have a substantial impact on how immigrants are perceived (Heizmann 2016). In the United States, religion has been found to be related to opinions about some aspects of immigration, such as deportation and social services, but not to views about the permanence of the constitution or public education for the children of immigrants (Davidson and Garcia 2014).

Opinions on immigration also vary according to religious affiliation – though the effects are not clearly positive or negative. Religious humanitarianism has been found to be expressed primarily toward other members of one’s religious group, meaning that religiosity does not make one free from prejudice (Hall, Matz, and Wood 2010). Being part of the majority religion has been associated with a higher likelihood of holding negative attitudes toward immigrants, suggesting the perceived threat to one’s culture is more pronounced when one is part of the majority (Bohman and Hjerm 2012). In Europe, Protestants, likely because of the individuality of their religion and the tendency for their religion to be separated from the state, were less likely to hold anti-immigration beliefs than Catholics (Bohman and Hjerm 2012). In the United States, however, Evangelical Protestants – with the exception of Evangelical Black Protestants – were the most likely to support deportation and refusal of social services for immigrants (Davidson and Garcia

2014).

Whether religious affiliation or religiosity is more important in determining one's opinions on immigration is unclear. Though some Christian groups may be more tolerant than others, secular Americans are the most likely to support immigrants staying in the United States permanently (Smith 2006). In one study, the only respondents with a lack of racial prejudice toward immigrants were Agnostics (Hall, Matz, and Wood 2010). In Europe, however, religious people were found to be more positive toward immigration than non-religious people (Bohman and Hjerm 2012).

It is possible that the nature of one's belief in God was far more important than religious affiliation in influencing opinions on immigration (Doebler 2014). Conservative motivators of religiosity have been associated with racism as well (Hall, Matz, and Wood 2010). However, frequent church attendance has been repeatedly associated with higher support for social justice for immigrants and liberal views of immigrants' rights, suggesting religiosity may be the most important factor in determining the source of one's opinions on immigration (Davidson and Garcia 2014; Smith 2006). Overtly high religiosity may have a negative effect on opinions of immigration, as religious fundamentalism has been strongly related to intolerance, with less defined religious affiliations inversely related to intolerance (Doebler 2014).

Though important, religion is far from the only determinant of opinions on immigration. Increased educational levels lessen anti-immigration sentiment, as do higher socioeconomic statuses (Heizmann 2016). People who count immigrants among their friends or family are more likely to nurture positive attitudes toward immigration (Moore

2002). In 2014, Lipka found that religious beliefs were perhaps decreasing in importance regarding influencing opinions on immigration. Only 7% of those surveyed cited religious beliefs as the most important factor in influencing immigration opinions. Respondents were far more likely to cite education, personal experience, or media exposure as the most significant determinants. Contact with immigrants is also likely to increase favorable views regarding social justice for immigrants (Davidson and Garcia 2014). The question of Muslim immigration specifically poses an interesting dilemma: in one study, Muslim citizens were viewed less favorably than non-Muslim immigrants (Doebler 2014).

While some literature exists about religious attitudes and immigration in the United States, most of it focuses on attitudes toward Hispanic immigrants and illegal immigration or border control, not on Muslim immigrants. It is likely that this will change in the coming years, as Muslim immigration is an increasingly controversial issue. The literature concerning attitudes toward Islam in the United States fails to consider the impact of religion. Similar research has been conducted in a European context, since Europe experiences a much higher influx of Muslim immigrants due to its proximity to Muslim-majority nations. Though such research is valuable, the unique religious context of the United States, especially as it relates to governmental policy, prompts a need for additional research to be conducted in the United States.

Measuring Religiosity

Two major measures of religiosity are categorized into intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity. Simply stated, extrinsic religiosity views religion as more of a social pursuit rather than a

deeply spiritual endeavor (Donahue 1985). By contrast, intrinsic religiosity is a sincere belief in and attempt to follow the teachings of one's religion. These two major frameworks could determine the difference between Christians who support Muslim immigration and those who do not.

Two major frameworks with which to approach the study of world religions are detailed by Wuthnow (2005). One of them is the ethnoreligious perspective—the idea that each religious group provides worldviews distinct from other religious groups. In other words, the actual categorization of religious group is the most significant indicator of opinion. The other perspective is the religious restructuring perspective, which holds that there exist spectrums of belief from liberal to conservative within each religious group and that religiosity may be a more important indicator of opinion than religious affiliation itself (Wuthnow 2005).

Various scales have been formulated and tested to measure various aspects of religious belief. Altemeyer (2003) mentions three: the Christian Orthodoxy scale, which measures level of belief in various common Christian teachings, the Religious Emphasis scale, which measures the stress put on religion in childhood homes, and the Religious Ethnocentrism scale, which measures the extent to which Christians nurture an “us versus them” mentality in their interactions with people of other faiths. This study uses a new, simplified scale to measure religiosity, which takes cues from each of the previously mentioned scales.

Anti-Muslim Sentiment in the United States

Though Americans' general lack of knowledge regarding foreign policy makes studying

what influences their opinions on it somewhat futile, there is evidence that religion does play some role in political belief, particularly in the Middle East because of religious tensions between Jews, Christians, and Muslims there (Smidt 2005). Though the refugee crisis is a relatively new issue, previous research found significant correlations between religion and belief in the necessity of military intervention in Iraq (Smidt 2005).

Religious salience was also positively correlated with one's tendency to believe Islam is a violent religion, but results varied according to one's particular sect of Christianity (Smidt 2005). Political affiliation had a comparatively higher impact on policy opinions than religious variables, but religious variables had a higher impact on opinions of Islam than did political affiliation (Smidt 2005). Perhaps most relevant to the question posed in this research is that those who "asserted higher levels of biblical authority were less likely to view Islam as violent than those who expressed lower views of biblical authority" (Smidt 2005:259). This lends some support to the hypothesis that Christians with more attachment to the Bible may be more open to welcoming those of other religious backgrounds, as mentioned in the passage from Matthew above.

Anti-Muslim prejudice cannot be categorized into purely racial, religious, or cultural prejudice. Kalkan, Layman, and Uslaner (2009) explore Muslims' unique position as an American out-group that exists in both the racial and behavioral bands. Characteristics of Muslims as a group that may be viewed as positive are counteracted by negative characteristics, and vice versa. They found that religious traditionalism, patriotism, authoritarianism, and party affiliation were all related to tendencies toward intolerance of out-groups, but that these effects only impacted views of Muslims

indirectly. Their research suggests that though Muslims occupy a unique position within the American consciousness, prejudice against them is predicted by the same measures as for other racial and religious prejudices, regardless of perceived threat.

EMPIRICAL QUESTION

How do religiosity and political affiliation affect anti-Muslim sentiment among members of various Christian congregations?

METHODOLOGY

Survey

A 41-question online survey was administered via Qualtrics. Respondents were recruited by postings at local libraries, contacting local congregations, and emailing Christian student organizations at the University of Michigan. Due to sampling techniques, results are not generalizable to a larger population, but rather serve as insight into the various frameworks that surround religiosity and anti-Muslim sentiment.

Interviews

At the end of the survey, respondents were asked if they would be willing to complete a follow-up interview with the primary investigator. Those who agreed gave their contact information, and the researcher attempted to contact them. Four follow-up interviews were conducted in order to contextualize responses and to gauge how respondents thought about the issue. Interview questions surrounded one's personal relationship with religion, as well as one's knowledge and perceptions of Islam. The interview guide was relatively open-ended, with only a few guiding questions. Interviews, which were audio-recorded, took place at local restaurants and cafes of the respondents' choosing.

Respondents were given \$10 in cash as an incentive for their participation. Interviews ranged from 15 to 45 minutes in duration.

Variables and Analysis

The primary dependent variable in this study is opinion on Muslim immigration. Because social desirability bias makes measuring this opinion difficult, for the purposes of this study, a score (on a scale of 0 to 8, 8 being the highest level of anti-Muslim bias) was generated through a series of 15 questions. Responses to each question which indicated a negative opinion of Muslims were assigned a value of 1 or 0.5 depending on the intensity of the response, and the total was tallied. Questions factoring into measurement of the dependent variable attempted to capture ideas about Muslims and Islam in general, such as, “would you say you have a generally favorable or unfavorable opinion of Islam?”, “what do you think about the number of Muslims immigrating to the United States?”, and a series of value statement between which respondents were asked to choose.

Respondents were also asked to describe their views about Muslims and Islam in general—whether they believed Muslims contribute more, less, or the same amount as Christians to society and how likely they believed Muslims are to commit crimes.

The explanatory variables were religiosity, political affiliation, and authoritarianism. Religiosity was measured by another composite index (ranging from 0 to 11, with 11 being the most religious), which combined church attendance, self-described religiosity, views on religious texts, prayer, and how often participants engaged in personal religious study. Respondents were asked to identify themselves on a five-point scale from Conservative to Liberal. Four questions attempting to gauge the level of

authoritarianism were included in the political views section, based on questions from MacMillan (2016).

Other variables included the number of Muslims respondents know and their relationships with those Muslims, as well as basic demographic characteristics.

HYPOTHESIS

It was hypothesized that anti-Muslim sentiment would be negatively correlated with religiosity, but that political affiliation would have a stronger effect on anti-Muslim sentiment than religiosity. I predicted that politically liberal Christians would appeal to religious teachings to support Muslim immigration to the United States, while politically conservative Christians would focus on political ideologies more than religious teachings when defending their beliefs. Authoritarianism was predicted to be strongly affiliated with political conservatism and would thus be positively correlated with anti-Muslim sentiment.

RESULTS

Survey

The online survey received 95 responses. Any responses that were incomplete following the demographic questions were excluded from analysis, leaving 88 responses. These were obtained through contacting local churches and religious student organizations at the University of Michigan campus and asking them to distribute the survey link to members of their congregation or organization. The average age of the sample was slightly above 28 years old, with a median age of 24. Respondents were 41% male and 59% female. Of the sample, 10% listed high school as their highest level of education,

36% listed some college, 37% listed a bachelor's degree, and 17% listed a graduate degree. Respondents were 81% percent white, 4% Latino, 1% Black, 9% Asian, 2% American Indian, and 1% Middle Eastern.

Personal Experiences

Though salience of the topic was a concern given the survey was conducted a year after the 2016 presidential election, 73% of respondents said that the issue of Muslim immigration to the United States was at least somewhat important, if not very important, to them at that time. 34% of respondents said that the biggest influence on their opinion was personal experiences, while 17% said it was religious beliefs. Other large influencers were media (16%) and education (12%).

17% of respondents said they did not know anyone who was Muslim, and only 12% said they had a close friend who was Muslim. 57% of respondents who knew any Muslims said that most of the Muslims they knew were acquaintances, and 27% said the nature of their relationships with most of the Muslims they knew were coworkers.

Religiosity

75% of survey respondents were Protestant, 16% of respondents were LDS, and 8% of respondents were Catholic. The large disparities between religious groups made comparative analysis by religious group inadvisable. Perhaps not surprisingly given the method of participant recruitment, 92% of respondents listed religion as "very important" to them, while the other 8% listed religion as "somewhat important." The mean composite score for religiosity was 9.6, with 11 being the highest possible score. Religiosity did not vary significantly according to political affiliation (p -value = 0.75).

Anti-Muslim Sentiment

When asked to share their thoughts on the number of Muslims immigrating to the United States, 84% of respondents said they believed religious identity should not affect someone's ability to immigrate to the US. Among respondents who said religious identity should have no effect on ability to immigrate but also marked their opinion of Islam as unfavorable, all were conservative.

The average anti-Muslim sentiment score on the composite scale, where 8 was the highest score, was 1.9. 33% of respondents scored a 0 on the scale. The likelihood that a third of respondents had absolutely no anti-Muslim sentiment seems low, meaning the survey questions may not have detected subconscious bias. Level of anti-Muslim sentiment was not strongly correlated with authoritarianism (correlation coefficient = 0.17), religiosity (correlation coefficient = 0.06), or age (correlation coefficient = -0.17).

The open-ended question at the end of the survey lends insight into the difficulty of capturing opinions on sensitive topics such as immigration policy and Islam. 15 of 30 comments expressed some dissatisfaction with the nature of survey questions that asked respondents to choose between two potentially polarizing statements. One respondent wrote, "When asking about the number of Muslims entering the United States, I do not have an opinion on the number that should be allowed. I do believe that there should be a rigorous vetting process and all laws should be followed. I am perfectly happy with Legal immigration, based on merit." Another wrote, "The last segment comparing two [statements] was ridiculously [biased], one was very mean and inconsiderate, [the] other statement [suggests] Muslims [were] the greatest people [to] ever live."

Some open-ended responses reveal a deep-seated knowledge of the conversation surrounding Muslim immigration in today's political sphere. One respondent wrote, "The Muslim community in general is peaceful but the core of their doctrine is what should be looked at. You may be surprised at what you find in the Quran and Hadiths." Another wrote, "In general, Muslim immigrants are just as worthwhile as other groups. However, the professed 'virtues' of jihad and taqiyya, and the >70% worldwide Muslim support for shariah law, are valid concerns for compatibility with this country's rule of law and professed human rights."

The longest response in the open-ended category, which came from a 63 year-old Catholic woman, said the following:

It's not the number of Muslims, but the attitudes or beliefs they may hold about the Western culture they are requesting admission to join. People who come to the US to improve their situation must also accept the US belief that we live together in peace and cooperation. Because we know that some radicalized persons have come to live in 'cells' to later cause some type of disruption, it's important, no matter what religion people profess, that they do not come with the intention of disrupting the rights of others, or detracting from the common good of the whole. Radicals can be found in any religion, and in any political or cultural movement. I don't believe the Muslim religion has a corner on violence, but there have been too many large scale and violent or gruesome attacks on complete strangers that have been done in the name of Allah that I am forced to consider that not all people view the world as we do, or value harmony and peace between neighbors. Because violent threats have risen precipitously in the last 10 - 20 years. It would be naive to think otherwise. All terrorists, no matter their religious views, should be denied immigration. I have known too many kind people of the Muslim religion who live respectfully with their families and the community to think the problem is with them alone. But I must also consider that there are religious texts in the Islamic faith that permit or even endorse violence against the 'infidel,' which I assume as a white Catholic woman, I am. If those texts are emphasized, they could pose a threat to others. People do not all think like Americans think, nor do they value the same things. The Catholic faith does not endorse violence against those whose beliefs are different than ours, nor does it condemn others as 'lost' but instead is always hopeful, always welcoming, and reaching out to others

to come and see, come and hear who Jesus is, and learn why His message of love is the true radical teaching.

Responses like these provide more explanation for observed anti-Muslim sentiment than any of the categorical variables in the survey. Respondents generally seemed very aware of the social desirability of their responses, like the respondent who wrote:

I don't want anyone to know I said that I think the influx of Muslim immigrants threatens American beliefs and values, even though I firmly believe we should put no religious tests on immigrants or anyone else participating in public life. I am just concerned about the the impact of certain socially conservative, patriarchal attitudes that Muslim immigrants, as a matter of statistical fact, are more likely to hold than native-born Americans (though obviously those generalizations don't hold universally). But this is the sort of thing you're not allowed to say aloud.

A few respondents made an explicit connection between their faith and their opinions on Islam, though whether that is authentic is difficult to determine given the topic of the survey itself. One respondent wrote, “I strongly believe that I have a call as a Christian to accept and care for immigrants, regardless of religious affiliation. I also recognize that Muslims in particular have been discriminated against and, as such, we have a particular imperative to support them, as my faith calls me to pay special attention to the voices and needs of the marginalized. “ Another wrote, “Everyone is a child of God and needs to be treated as such!” Still, one respondent was sure to note that his religious beliefs were completely independent of his views on Muslim immigration.

Political Affiliation

43% of the sample identified as Liberal, 17% as Moderate, and 40% as Conservative.

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between political affiliation and the favorability of one’s opinion toward Islam. The relation between these variables was significant $X^2(4, N = 88) = 18.74, p < .001$. Conservatives

were more likely to hold an unfavorable opinion of Islam. Additionally, political affiliation was associated with the tendency to believe there is commonality between one's own religion and Islam with a p-value of 0.03. Mean levels of anti-Muslim sentiment for liberals (1.74) and conservatives (2.03) indicated a slight difference in anti-Muslim sentiment according to political affiliation, but a Welch Two Sample t-test comparing the means showed no significant difference (p-value = 0.50).

Authoritarianism

Authoritarianism was measured through a four-question sequence asking respondents to select the more important character trait. The two respondents who identified as solidly authoritarian (selected all four authoritarian traits as being more important) identified as moderate. Of the seven respondents who cited all of the non-authoritarian traits as more important, six were liberal and one leaned conservative. The average score on the authoritarianism scale was 1.9. A Welch Two Sample t-test showed the relationship between authoritarianism and political affiliation was not significant (p-value = 0.24), although the first three quartiles among liberals were represented in the first quartile among conservatives. Authoritarianism did not differ significantly according to gender (p-value = 0.91).

Interviews

Four interviews were conducted with survey respondents to add some additional context. These interviews ranged from 15 to 45 minutes, depending on how forthcoming and loquacious respondents were.

Mike is a 65 year-old, white Lutheran man who identifies as moderately liberal.

He believes that religious teachings influence his political beliefs and said:

I've read the Bible several times, and I don't see anything that's, 'you have to reject everybody else, you're supposed to be a closed group' -- quite the opposite. All through, as is pointed out many times in my church, at least, Jesus ate with sinners and with outcasts. I mean, he didn't say, 'oh, are you a baptized Christian? Well, then you can eat with me...' certainly, 'welcome the stranger' is a big part of both church and Christian scripture.

He believes Christian doctrine and welcoming refugees go hand-in-hand, saying,

"Christian doctrine, in my opinion, would be welcoming, particularly to refugees, who are desperate. The poor and the oppressed, you know, those are the people we're supposed to be reaching out to. I understand the fear of terrorism -- obviously we need to be careful with that, but most of these refugees aren't terrorists. In particular, as much as they're already vetted."

Joe is a moderately liberal, 62 year-old white Lutheran man. Though religion is a very significant part of his life, he said: "I'm not very religious. I associate religion with belief, and I'm much more in tune with experiential sort of things, instead of believing, to know, for example. The teachings of a particular church or what I'm supposed to think, or what I'm supposed to know -- I don't keep very good track of that stuff." He has a great interest in religious texts, having read the Quran, the Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads, and others in addition to the Bible. Of different religions, he said:

We're all describing the same thing from different viewpoints, but it's the same thing. What works for somebody doesn't work for another person, and I'm okay with that. In fact, I think it's a good thing! My understanding of God is no understanding at all, other than -- it, he, she, whatever is like a million-faceted diamond, where everybody's interpretation is slightly different, and it's all the same diamond.

He says that his spirituality "tells me how I should act and how I expect my politicians to

act, and how I would like to see them act. We should love everybody. Love and serve the poor – in mind, body, and spirit.” He says, “It would be really hard for me to listen to somebody that would be quoting scripture and telling me that this clearly says that we should close our walls and keep out the infidels. I don’t see that.” To him, the universality of the human family is one of the most important aspects of his faith, and he believes that is severely lacking in the American political sphere.

Kelly is a 19 year-old Asian undergraduate student who attends a nondenominational church and identifies as moderately conservative. Kelly said, “I feel like, for me at least, religion comes first. That is my worldview. So if I’m looking through the lens of Christianity, that will not -- I don’t want to say ‘taint’ -- but it will influence everything, including political beliefs.” When asked to describe what she knew about Islam, she said, “I’ve heard like different things where like, I’ve heard that they’re actually -- like, it’s a peaceful religion, but then there are always like the extremists, which tend to be the people you hear about more, but then I would like to be on the other side, but then -- I don’t know, yeah. But all in all they’re very nice people!” Though she admits she is not very politically involved, her religion plays an important role in shaping her opinions. She said:

I’ve always been taught that, like to love everyone, and I’m not saying [Muslims are] my enemy but, to like love my enemy and everything, and like to not judge people because like everyone is bad in one way or another. So like, I think it’s wrong to put someone else’s wrongdoing above your own wrongdoing, or to say a certain type of wrongdoing is like necessarily worse than others that we tend to ignore or overlook sometimes. So I do think that [excluding Muslims is] like very discriminative.

Though she does not have any personal relationships with Muslims, she has taken a class

on Islam and has read part of the Quran. Of this experience, she said, “there is parts of it where they say things like, you know, ‘kill people who don’t believe this,’ and stuff like that. And I know that to be true as well -- that exists in there. So then I don’t want to be like, ‘oh, you say you’re peaceful but I’m calling you out because it says in your religious text that you shouldn’t be,’ but then it’s like, I know that they aren’t, so it’s kind of conflicting.”

Jennifer is a 28 year-old white graduate student who attends a different nondenominational church in the area and identifies as Liberal. She was raised Catholic but went through a period of agnosticism in high school, feeling that the Catholic church was too judgmental and conflicting with many of her political views, including those involving gay marriage. She volunteers with a refugee resettlement agency in Ann Arbor and said, “essentially, Jesus was almost like a refugee.” She understands opposition to accepting Muslims immigrants as “rooted in their own worry that they’ll have less power.” She expounded, stating, “A lot of it has to do with -- I feel like it’s a lot of White Christians who are against it, and it’s because they’re used to being in the majority. And now, if we let in a lot of other people who aren’t white and Christian, then they’re not going to be as much of the majority as they were used to, and so they’re scared of having less overall power in what happens in the world.” Though she is a Liberal Christian, she still feels as though she has to suppress her own faith in her classes. She said: “I’m afraid to speak up and say that I’m a Christian in the School of Social Work because I feel like there’s like a stigma about -- and mostly just any religion, really. I think that partly comes from it being a public institution, but it also, I feel like comes from all of the hurt that

Christianity has caused for so many people. It's like a new thing for me to be thinking about Christianity at the same time as immigration.”

DISCUSSION

Survey results and analyses suggest a lack of validity in the measurement of authoritarianism and anti-Muslim sentiment. Much of this can be attributed to social desirability bias, which open-ended responses support. Analyses showing conservatives were more likely to have an unfavorable opinion of Islam are consistent with previous research. The insignificance of difference in mean anti-Muslim sentiment among liberals and conservatives is not consistent with previous research, nor is the lack of significance in the difference in authoritarianism among liberals and conservatives.

Because of the high level of religiosity among respondents, comparing respondents according to religiosity was difficult. Whether or not the composite scale used to measure religiosity in this study was valid is difficult to gauge; the sampling technique biased the sample toward a much more religious sample. Respondents had to be those who attended church, were members of religious student organizations, or were involved enough to read and engage with church newsletters or postings advertising the survey. A more general sampling technique of students or citizens of Ann Arbor that excluded respondents after they identified their religion may have lent more representative survey results.

Still, the fact that so few respondents had close relationships with Muslims is indicative a larger phenomenon, especially in an area with one of the highest Muslim populations in the country. Most respondents had some anti-Muslim bias. If social

contact theory holds true in this situation, anti-Muslim sentiment could decrease given more exposure to Muslims. However, for the most part, this contact will not come through religious communities, unless they are, like some interview respondents noted, actively involved in community service involving refugees who might be Muslim.

Though statistical results regarding religiosity were, for the most part, insignificant, this realistically indicates methodological error rather than the absence of any relationship between religiosity and other variables. Previous research as well as open-ended questions and interview responses suggest that religion remains a significant influence on political beliefs, whether conscious or not. Religion plays an enormous role in the daily lives of these people, even those one may not think of when thinking of religion's influence on politics. This area of research leaves much to be explored.

If anything is to be gained from this particular study, may it be that there is a subset of politically active Christians who are not members of the religious right whose beliefs may be influenced by religion just as significantly as members of the religious right. Increased consciousness of this duality could improve the image of Christianity and perhaps religion as a whole as viewed from the Left. Christianity lends itself to a spectrum of political beliefs which do not necessarily correspond to one's devoutness. Just as a politically conservative person need not be religious at all, it is possible to be both religiously devout and politically liberal. If this research were to be continued, it is possible that religion could come to be viewed as driver of social change and allyship rather than (or, at least, in addition to) a rationale for discrimination.

Research such as this is vital to gaining a deeper understanding of how religion

impacts political decision-making among voters, but it is also relevant to determining how to banish bias and improve attitudes toward Muslims in the United States. Though the measures implemented in this study were somewhat rudimentary, the skeleton of the research design leaves a sturdy foundation on which to build upon. In particular, refugee advocacy groups and those seeking to promote religious tolerance would benefit from an understanding of the mechanisms that cause voters and volunteers to direct their efforts for or against causes related to Muslims in the United States.

CONCLUSION

Composite scores for anti-Muslim sentiment were not found to be significantly related to religiosity, political affiliation, or authoritarianism. Conservatives were found to be more likely to have an unfavorable opinion of Islam when comparing individual factors used to compile the composite score. Adjustments to sampling techniques and methods of analyses are necessary to obtain more valid results. Interview and open-ended survey responses indicate that religion is an important factor influencing political belief regardless of political affiliation, though its impact may not be consciously acknowledged. Further study is necessary to explore the relationship between religion and political belief, especially among those whose political beliefs are not traditionally defended with religious rationales.

REFERENCES

- Allport, Gordon. 1954. *The Nature of Prejudice*. Cambridge, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Altmeyer, Bob. 2003. "Why Do Religious Fundamentalists Tend to be Prejudiced?" *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 13(1):17-28.

- Barth, Fredrik. 1998. "Introduction." Pp. 9-38 in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, edited by Fredrik Barth. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.
- Blumer, Herbert. 1958. "Race Prejudice as a Sense of Group Position." *Pacific Sociological Review* 1(1):3-7.
- Bohman, Andrea, and Mikael Hjerm. 2013. "How the Religious Context Affects the Relationship Between Religiosity and Attitudes Towards Immigration." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 37(6):937-957.
- Davidson, Theresa, and Carlos Garcia. 2014. "Welcoming the Stranger: Religion and Attitudes Toward Social Justice for Immigrants in the U.S." *Journal of Religion & Society* 16:1-21.
- Doebler, Stefanie. 2014. "Relationships Between Religion and Intolerance Towards Muslims and Immigrants in Europe: A Multilevel Analysis." *Review of Religious Research* 56(1):61-86.
- Donahue, Michael J. 1985. "Intrinsic and Extrinsic Religiosity: The Empirical Research." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 24(4):418-423.
- Durkheim, Emile. 1915. *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Hall, Deborah L., David C. Matz, and Wendy Wood. 2010. "Why Don't We Practice What We Preach? A Meta-Analytic Review of Religious Racism." *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 14(1):126-139.
- Heizmann, Boris. 2016. "Symbolic Boundaries, Incorporation Policies, and Anti-

- immigrant Attitudes: What Drives Exclusionary Policy Preferences?" *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 39(10):1791-1811.
- Kalkan, Kerem Ozan, Geoffrey C. Layman, and Eric M. Uslaner. 2009. "Bands of Others'? Attitudes Toward Muslims in Contemporary Society" *The Journal of Politics* 17(3):847-862.
- Lichtblau, Eric. 2015. "Crimes Against Muslim Americans and Mosques Rise Sharply." *New York Times*.
- Lipka, Michael. 2014. "Catholics, Other Christians Support Immigration Reform, but Say Faith Plays Small Role." *Pew Research Center*.
- MacWilliams, Matthew. 2016. "Who Decides When the Party Doesn't? Authoritarian Voters and the Rise of Donald Trump." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 49(4):716-721.
- Moore, Kathleen M. 2002. "'United We Stand': American Attitudes Toward (Muslim) Immigration Post-September 11th." *The Muslim World* 92(1-2):39-57.
- Prather, Paul. 2016. "The Mystery of Christians' Support for Donald Trump is Solved." *Lexington Herald Leader*.
- Simmel, Georg. 1950. "The Stranger." Pp. 402-408 in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, edited by Kurt H. Wolff. Glencoe, IL: The Free Press.
- Smidt, Corwin E. 2005. "Religion and American Attitudes toward Islam and an Invasion of Iraq." *Sociology of Religion* 66(3):243-261.
- Smith, Gregory A. 2006. "Attitudes Toward Immigration: In the Pulpit and the Pew." *Pew Research Center*.

- Tajfel, Henri, and John Turner. 1979. "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict." Pp. 33-47 in *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, edited by William G. Austin and Stephen Worchel. Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Taras, Raymond. 2011. "'Islamophobia Never Stands Still': Race, Religion, and Culture." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36(3):417-433.
- Wuthnow, Robert. 2005. *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

APPENDIX

Survey Questions

What is your age in years?

[open-ended]

What is your sex?

[male, female, other (please specify)]

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

[did not complete high school, high school, some college, Bachelor's degree, graduate degree]

Which categories describe you? (Please select all that apply)

[White; Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin; Black or African American; Asian; American Indian or Alaska Native; Middle Eastern or North African; Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; some other race, ethnicity, or national origin]

About how much collective time have you spent living or traveling abroad?

[none, a few days, a few weeks, a few months, a year or more]

What is your religious affiliation? (name of sect you belong to or church you attend)

[open-ended]

How long have you been affiliated with the church you attend now?

[open-ended]

Were you raised in the faith you now hold?

[yes, no]

Have you ever identified with or been a member of another faith or denomination?

[yes, no]

Which faith(s) and/or denomination(s) were you previously affiliated with?

[open-ended]

Within your faith community, how many are immigrants born outside of the United States?

[nearly all, many, just some, very few, don't know]

How important is religion in your life?

[very important, somewhat important, not too important, not at all important]

How often do you attend church?

[more than once a week, once a week, a few times per month, once a month, a few times per year, only on holidays, less than once a year]

How often do you pray?

[daily, weekly, less than weekly, only at religious events]

How often do you engage in personal religious study (e.g., reading studying, or listening to religious texts, sermons, or something similar)?

[daily, weekly, monthly, only at religious events, never]

Which of these statements comes closest to describing your feelings about your religious texts?

[my religious texts are the word of God and are to be taken literally, word for word; my religious texts are the word of God, but not everything in them should be taken literally, word for word; my religious texts are written by humans and are not the word of God; other (please specify)]

Do you know anyone who is Muslim?

[yes, no, don't know]

About how many Muslims do you know?

[1, 2-4, 5 or more]

What is your relationship with most of the Muslims you know?

[professional, including coworkers; commercial interactions, acquaintances, close friends, family members]

How much would you say you know about the Muslim religion and its practices?

[a great deal, some, not very much, none at all]

From what you know, do you think that Islam and your own religion have a lot in common, or are they very different?

[a lot in common, very different, don't know]

Would you say you have a generally favorable or unfavorable opinion of Islam?

[favorable, unfavorable, no opinion]

Please write what one word best describes your impression of Islam, religion of Muslims.

Write just the best word that comes to mind.

[open-ended]

Of the two below, please choose the character trait you think is more important:

[respectful, independent]

Of the two below, please choose the character trait you think is more important:

[obedient, self-reliant]

Of the two below, please choose the character trait you think is more important:

[well-behaved, considerate]

Of the two below, please choose the character trait you think is more important:

[well-mannered, curious]

How do you identify politically?

[liberal; moderate, lean liberal; moderate; moderate, lean conservative;
conservative]

Do you feel that the Democratic Party is generally friendly, neutral, or unfriendly toward Muslim Americans?

[friendly, neutral, unfriendly]

Do you feel that the Republican Party is generally friendly, neutral, or unfriendly toward Muslim Americans?

[friendly, neutral, unfriendly]

How important were policies about Muslims immigrating to the United States to you during 2016?

[very important, somewhat important, somewhat unimportant, not at all]

important]

Which one of the following has had the biggest influence on your thinking about Muslim immigration to the U.S.?

[religious beliefs, personal experience, education, media (including news sources, books, articles, etc.), opinions of political leaders, opinions of friends and/or family, something else (please specify), don't know/no opinion]

Please select the statement that comes closest to your own views – even if neither is exactly right.

[the growing number of Muslim immigrants threatens American customs and values, the growing number of Muslim immigrants strengthens American society]

Which of these statements comes closest to your own views – even if neither is exactly right?

[Muslim immigrants strengthen our country because of their hard work and talents, Muslim immigrants today are a burden on our country because they take our jobs/housing/healthcare]

Which of these statements comes closest to your own views – even if neither is exactly right?

[Muslim immigrants threaten American society because of their beliefs, Muslim immigrants strengthen American society because of their beliefs]

Compared to the general population, how likely do you think Muslim immigrants are to commit crimes?

[much less likely, slightly less likely, just as likely, slightly more likely, much

more likely]

Compared to the general population, how likely do you think Muslim immigrants are to positively contribute to American society?

[much less, slightly less, the same amount, slightly more, much more]

Compared to the general population, how likely do you think Muslim immigrants are to receive a graduate or professional degree?

[much less likely, slightly less likely, just as likely, slightly more likely, much more likely]

Compared to the general population, how likely do you think Muslim immigrants are to own a small business?

[much less likely, slightly less likely, just as likely, slightly more likely, much more likely]

What do you think about the number of Muslims immigrating the United States?

[all Muslims should be permitted to immigrate to the US, the number of Muslims permitted to immigrate to the US should be increased, the number of Muslims permitted to immigrate to the US should remain the same, the number of Muslims permitted to immigrate to the US should be decreased, no Muslims should be permitted to immigrate to the US, religious identity should not affect someone's ability to immigrate to the US]

Please leave any comments or additional insights you may have about the topics addressed in the survey in the box below.

[open-ended]