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**RESPONSES TO RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY IN NATION AND COMMUNITY:
EXAMINING THE ROLE OF BELIEFS AND INTER-RELIGIOUS CONTACT**

A Thesis in

Sociology

by

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ABSTRACT

Many scholars have argued that religious tolerance in the United States has become the norm and that boundaries between religious traditions have declined in salience. However, several pieces of evidence suggest that the boundary between Christians and non-Christians is still meaningful to many Americans. A majority of Americans believe that the United States is a “Christian nation” and express concerns about non-Christians. Using data from the nationally representative Religion and Diversity Survey, this paper examines how Americans respond to religious diversity at the national and community levels. A four-item scale measuring theological exclusivism is consistently and strongly associated with negative attitudes toward religious diversity and a decreased willingness to include Muslims and Hindus in community life. Contrary to expectations, a three-item scale measuring belief in a “Christian nation” is associated with a positive view of religious diversity in the nation as a whole and is not predictive of respondents’ attitudes toward inclusion of Muslims and Hindus in community life. Prior contact with Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus is associated with more positive views of religious diversity at the national and community levels.

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Introduction

The American religious landscape has been characterized by ever increasing diversity. What was once a Protestant nation became a nation of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews (Herberg 1960). The growth of non-Christian religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam, as well as growing numbers of Americans claiming no religion, has again added diversity to American religion and challenged Americans to decide what role religion should play, if any, in forming a national identity and a moral and cultural core. Americans are challenged to decide how to deal with religious diversity and how non-Christians should be incorporated into social life.

Using data from the nationally representative Religion and Diversity Survey, this paper examines how Americans respond to religious diversity arising from the growth of Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu populations. Theological beliefs about the relationship of Christianity to other faiths, beliefs about the role of religion in society, and prior contact with non-Christians all influence Americans' willingness to include non-Christians in public life.

Religious Diversity in America

Alexis de Tocqueville, a French visitor to America in the early nineteenth century, famously noted the significance of religion in American life. Tocqueville (1835) saw Christianity as the “established and irresistible fact” in American society. In America, the Christianity of Tocqueville’s day was primarily Protestantism. Since that time, many

factors, most notably a tremendous influx of immigrants, have dramatically increased religious diversity in the United States. Soon, if not already, the country will no longer have a Protestant majority (Smith and Kim 2005). The dominant Western Judeo-Christian faiths of Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism claimed around 95 percent of Americans for much of the twentieth century, but by 2000 they claimed 83 percent (Hout and Fischer 2004). Largely because of immigration to the United States, many more Americans are identifying with religions outside of Christianity and Judaism (Smith 2002). The 1990s witnessed a notable increase in the proportion not affiliated with any religion (Hout and Fischer 2002). America has become arguably the most religiously diverse nation in the world.

Is Christianity no longer an “established and irresistible fact” in American life? Indeed, many scholars since the mid-twentieth century have noted growing ecumenism of religious traditions in the United States and increasing tolerance of religious differences. The argument goes that as boundaries between religious traditions weaken and tolerance becomes widespread, religion *in general* has become the basis for solidarity and trust among Americans. Beliefs found in all religious traditions provide individuals with the moral foundation necessary to be trustworthy citizens. In the classic work *Protestant, Catholic, Jew*, Herberg documents how each of these Western Judeo-Christian traditions came to enable its adherents to become good Americans (Herberg 1960). More recently, Diana Eck has portrayed a richly diverse “new multireligious America” and discusses the growth of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam (Eck 2001). She consciously extends Herberg’s theme to include those growing non-Christian faiths as increasingly legitimate ways to be American. Furthermore, a recent study (Edgell et al. 2006) demonstrated that

out of a list of religious, cultural, and ethnic minority groups in the United States, atheists are the least trusted both in terms of private acceptance (willingness to accept a member of the group into family by marriage) and public acceptance (whether the minority group agrees with the respondent's vision of America). The authors argue that their study indicates a weakening of boundaries *between* religious traditions and a strengthening of the symbolic boundary between religion and *non-religion*. Atheists serve as a symbolic "other" – a group that supposedly does not share dominant values and beliefs that form the cultural and moral core of America. Several recent lines of evidence, however, suggest that, for many Americans, the boundary between Christians and non-Christians is still meaningful and helps define cultural membership and social trustworthiness in American society.

Non-Christians and Social Inclusion

While the exact proportion of Americans that practice non-Judeo-Christian religions is unknown, it is likely under 3 percent (Smith 2002). Most of those are Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus, who together make up just under 2 percent of Americans (Pew Research Center 2008). However, the growth of non-Christians since immigration laws changed in 1965 has been noticeable. The proportion of Americans claiming a non-Christian faith appears to have grown about 3-4 fold since 1970 (Smith 2002). Data on Americans' attitudes toward the growing number of non-Christian Americans are minimal, but suggest that many Americans have serious reservations about them. As part of the "National Identity" module in 1996 and again in 2004, General

Social Survey respondents were asked how important it is to be Christian in order to be “truly American.” In 1996, 54 percent of respondents agreed that it is either “very important” or “fairly important” and in 2004 this number increased to 66 percent. Edgell and colleagues (2006) found that Muslims are a close second to atheists on a list of groups Americans find problematic, both in terms of private and public acceptance. A recent Pew report showed that 55% of Americans have favorable views of Muslim-Americans, while only 41% have favorable views of Islam as a religion (Pew Center for People and the Press 2006). A survey described in the same report demonstrated that only 38% of Americans would support Muslim mosques or Buddhist temples applying for government funds to provide social services, compared with 62% for Catholic churches, 61% for Protestant churches, 58% for Jewish synagogues, and 52% for evangelical Christian churches. Furthermore, a recent social distance study based on a national survey ranked Muslims and Arabs second-to-last and last respectively out of thirty groups (Parillo and Donoghue 2005). Asian Indians, who are overwhelmingly Hindu or Muslim, ranked twenty-sixth. Clearly, many Americans are uncomfortable with the full inclusion of non-Christians and their faiths into American civil society. For many Americans, non-Christians may be an “other” that does not subscribe to the nation’s moral and cultural core. Indeed, they may even be somewhat of a *symbolic* “other,” since most Americans have had very little meaningful contact with Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and other non-Christian religious minorities and know little about their faiths.

Explaining Social Inclusion

Using data from the nationally representative Religion and Diversity Survey, this study will focus on Americans' responses to religious diversity in the form of growing numbers of Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus. The recent U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, featuring a sample size of over 35,000, found that 1.7% of American adults claim one of these three religious traditions (The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2008). By comparison, Mormons and Jews, both small but influential groups, each make up 1.7% of American adults according to the same survey. Thus, Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus represent a small but significant and growing segment of the religious landscape. This study will assess how Americans respond to religious diversity in the nation and in their communities.

The study will focus particularly on three factors that are hypothesized to shape Americans' attitudes toward non-Christians and their faiths: beliefs about the role of religion in American society, theological beliefs, and prior contact with non-Christians. Together, these three factors represent the role of both personal beliefs and experience. Below I will examine each of these three factors in detail.

Americans' wariness toward non-Christians may stem from their views of religion in public life. The majority of Americans believe that the United States and Christianity share a special relationship, and that Christianity played a significant role in the nation's founding and continues to play a significant role in American society. A recent national survey found that 65 percent of Americans believe that the nation's founders intended it to be a Christian nation, and 55 percent believe that the U.S. Constitution *actually establishes* a Christian nation in spite of the fact that the Constitution nowhere mentions

God or Christianity (First Amendment Center 2007). Based on in-depth interviews with evangelical Protestants, Christian Smith discovered how members of this highly religious group conceive of a “Christian nation” (Smith 2000). Smith’s research found that many nostalgically envisioned an earlier era when there was a majority of “faithful Christians” and when Christian-compatible “principles and values” predominated. Many interviewees asserted that the principles of American government were based upon Christian principles and that these principles were upheld by religious founding fathers. Interestingly, for many, the ideal of religious freedom was strongly associated with the idea of a “Christian nation.” In fact, Smith notes that while evangelicals hold a wide variety of ideas about a “Christian nation,” most say they are accepting of religious and cultural pluralism, or at least see it as a fact of life in America. Smith suggests that for many evangelicals, talk of a “Christian nation” and even disapproval or distrust of non-Christians reflects more an effort to maintain collective identity than intolerance or overt rejection of pluralism. Nonetheless, Smith’s work, along with recent survey data, suggests that many Americans think of the United States as a “Christian nation” in some sense and ground this belief in a set of perceived historical events and traditions.

Some scholars have emphasized that, increasingly, for many Americans, religion *in general* forms a moral and cultural core for American life. Boundaries within religion are becoming less salient than the boundary between religion and non-religion (Edgell et al. 2006). Furthermore, several scholars have suggested that American civil religion has expanded or may expand to include non-Christian faiths (Angrosino 2002; Kao and Copulsky 2007; MacHacek 2003). Civil religion is understood here as an “operative religion” or “cultural system” that “features a belief in a ‘higher law’ and a tradition of

respect for certain fundamental, sacred civil and human rights” and “posits a sacred order of law that exists prior to and transcends government” (MacHacek 2003). By definition, such an expansion of American civil religion would be characterized by less and less religious particularism. MacHacek suggests that “the reality of religious diversity and the reverence that Americans feel for the freedom of religion may well have set in motion a process that leads to... the... further elaboration and expansion of American civil religion.” That Americans appear to draw a boundary particularly around atheists and not minority faiths in defining civil trustworthiness suggests that such an expansion may be occurring (Edgell et al. 2006). Yet, the notion of a Judeo-Christian core to American civil religion and culture persists for many Americans, especially given that a majority of Americans accept some notion of a “Christian nation.” Therefore, I test the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Beliefs that assert Christianity’s role as a moral and cultural core of American society will be associated with negative views of religious diversity and decreased willingness to include non-Christians in social life.

While Americans’ theological beliefs are rarely examined in depth on major sociological surveys, evidence suggests that they have important implications for attitudes and behavior. Previous research has demonstrated that belief that the Bible is the literal word of God is a meaningful predictor of certain attitudes and behavior. Beliefs about the Bible are important predictors of political variables such as partisanship, vote choice, and attitudes toward abortion (Leege and Kellstedt 1993). Biblical literalism is

related to a willingness to restrict the civil liberties of homosexuals (Burdette et al. 2005), decreased civic activity (Schwadel 2005), and decreased support for the environment (Greeley 1993). Beliefs about God have social significance as well. Gorsuch and Smith (1983) found that feeling close to God colors people's interpretations of life events. One's personal conception or image of God is a powerful predictor of religious belief and commitment, attitudes toward moral and social issues, political affiliation, and political participation (Bader and Froese 2005; Driskell et al. 2008). Atheists topped the list of troublesome minority groups in Edgell and colleagues' study (2006), suggesting that this most basic question of belief in God matters to many Americans when evaluating the social trustworthiness of members of other groups.

However, the social significance of Americans' beliefs about how Christianity relates to other religions is poorly understood. Given that one's theological beliefs provide a moral framework that one uses to interpret events, evaluate others, and define morality, it is likely that Americans' theological beliefs impact how they perceive non-Christians and their faiths. Indeed, Glock and Stark (1966) found evidence that anti-Semitism in the United States has significant religious roots and is driven in part by Christian orthodoxy and theological exclusivism. Furthermore, numerous studies dating back several decades have linked religiosity and prejudice (Batson et al. 1993). Religious fundamentalism, characterized by certainty that one's beliefs are correct and that one has access to absolute truth, is consistently related to prejudice against outgroups, including members of religious outgroups (Hunsberger and Jackson 2005; Jackson and Hunsberger 1999).

A commonly used typology of theological orientations toward religious diversity includes exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism (McCarthy 2007). Exclusivism is the view that one's own religious worldview is the only one that leads to salvation and union with God. Inclusivism holds that religious truth can be found in many faiths, though it is perfected only in one's own. Pluralism is the view that no one religion has unique access to religious truth, and that all religions are potentially equally valid paths. Given that theological beliefs shape individuals' political, social, and moral attitudes, it seems reasonable to expect that they would shape their views of non-Christians. Specifically, I offer the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2: Theologically exclusive beliefs will associated with more negative views of religious diversity and decreased willingness to include non-Christians in social life.

While willingness to include non-Christians into social life is likely affected by personal beliefs, it is likely also influenced by actual experience, including contact with non-Christians. A long tradition of research has examined how intergroup contact can reduce individuals' prejudice toward other groups (Pettigrew 1998; Dovidio et al., 2003; Pettigrew and Tropp 2006). Prior interracial contact in schools and neighborhoods makes individuals more likely as adults to have more racially diverse general social groups and friendship circles (Emerson et al. 2002). Intergroup contact effects are not limited to racial groups. For example, contact with those of different political ideological views leads to greater awareness of rationales for other viewpoints and greater political tolerance (Mutz 2002). Given existing research on intergroup contact effects, it seems

likely that prior exposure to religious diversity would impact how Americans perceive non-Christians. Most Americans have had little to no contact with Buddhists, Muslims, or Hindus. Non-Christians may be a sort of symbolic “other” that remain outside a perceived moral and cultural core of American life. Personal interaction with Muslims, Buddhists, or Hindus may make Americans more accepting of them. Such contact may reduce misunderstanding and foster appreciation or at least tolerance of other theological and cultural perspectives.

Hypothesis 3: Greater contact with non-Christians will be associated with more positive views of religious diversity and increased willingness to include non-Christians into social life.

Americans’ response to religious diversity may be shaped by their racial attitudes and their attitudes toward immigrants and foreigners, rather than by religious beliefs. Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus are not only religious minorities, but cultural and ethnic minorities, as well. This study will assess the impact of respondents’ attitudes toward racial minorities and immigrants on their attitudes toward religious diversity and on their willingness to include non-Christians in social life.

Data and Methods

The Religion and Diversity Survey was designed by Robert Wuthnow at Princeton University in conjunction with the Responding to Diversity Project sponsored

by the Lilly Endowment. The survey was administered to a nationally representative sample of 2,910 adults between September 18, 2002 and February 25, 2003. The design for this survey was intended to produce a representative sample of telephone households in the continental United States. The selected sample is a random-digit sample of telephone numbers selected from telephone exchanges in the continental United States and was drawn by Survey Sampling, Inc. of Fairfield, Connecticut. The response rate was 43.6 percent. Recommended weights are used for descriptive analyses. The data set was downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives website (www.thearda.com).

Dependent Variables: Responses to Diversity

The dependent variables assess Americans' responses to religious diversity at the national and community levels. The first measure asks respondents whether they "agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly" with the statement "Religious diversity has been good for America." This measure is coded 1 through 4. Two separate measures assess respondents' attitudes toward Muslims or Hindus at a local level. Respondents were asked to "Suppose some Hindus wanted to build a large Hindu temple in your community. Would this bother you a lot, bother you a little, not bother you, or be something you would welcome?" A random half of the sample was asked about Hindus and the other half was asked the same question but about Muslims building a "large mosque" instead. These variables are coded 1 through 4. These measures are 1 through 4. All dependent variables have been recoded such that higher values represent

more positive attitudes toward religious diversity.

Independent variables

Independent variables are shown in Table 1. To assess the social impact of theological beliefs about religious diversity, this study will use a scale constructed from respondents' mean on four survey measures. In the first item, respondents were asked whether they “agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly” with the statement “All major religions, such as Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam contain some truth about God.” Second, respondents were asked whether they respondents were asked whether they “agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly” with the statement “All religions basically teach the same thing.” Third, respondents were asked whether they “agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly” with the statement “Christianity is the only way to have a true personal relationship with God.” Fourth, respondents were asked whether they “agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly” with the statement “Christianity is the best way to understand God.” These measures are coded 1 through 4 and such that higher values indicate greater theological exclusivism. The theological exclusivism scale is internally consistent with Cronbach's alpha score of 0.74.

Three measures will be used to assess the impact of beliefs about the historical and contemporary role of religion in American society on social acceptance of non-Christians. The mean of these variables was used to create a “Christian nation” scale.

First, respondents were asked whether they “agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly” with the statement “The United States was founded on Christian principles.” Second, respondents were asked whether they “agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly” with the statement “In the 21st century, the United States is still basically a Christian society.” Third, respondents were asked whether they “agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly” with the statement “Our democratic form of government is based on Christianity.” Measures were recoded such that higher values indicate greater agreement. The scale is internally consistent with Cronbach’s alpha score of 0.68.

Several measures assess the impact of inter-religious contact on responses to religious diversity. In three separate questions, respondents were asked how much personal contact they have had with Muslims, Buddhists, or Hindus. Possible responses include “a great deal, a fair amount, only a little, or almost none.” These measures are coded 1 through 4 and such that higher values indicate greater contact. In some analyses, a scaled version is used that sums respondents’ values for each of the three into one measure, thus ranging from 3 through 12. This scaled version is referred to as “contact with non-Christians.”

To assess the impact of attitudes toward foreigners and racial minorities generally, two survey measures will be used. Respondents were asked whether they “agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly” with the statement “Foreigners who come to live in America should give up their foreign ways and learn to be like other Americans.” The item was recoded such that higher values indicate greater agreement. A measure of support for a stronger presence for racial and ethnic minorities

was formed by summing three survey items. Respondents were asked “In the next few years, would you welcome or not welcome each of the following groups becoming a stronger presence in the United States.” Respondents were asked the question in reference to African Americans, Asians, and Hispanics. Responses include “welcome,” “not welcome,” or “indifferent” and were recoded such that higher values indicated a more welcoming attitude. Respondents’ values were summed to create a measure ranging from 3 to 9.

Other control variables

Demographic control variables include gender, age, region of residence, rural residence, and educational attainment.

Results

Results from the survey indicate that as Americans envision their contact with religious diversity moving from the abstract to the concrete, they exhibit increasing reluctance to accept non-Christians into social life. Figure 1 illustrates this pattern. While 85 percent of Americans agree that religious diversity has been good for the country, only 63 percent would either welcome or not be bothered by Hindus building a “large Hindu temple” in their community. When instead it is Muslims building a “large Muslim mosque,” this number decreases to 56 percent. This study will examine what factors contribute to acceptance or rejection of religious diversity at each level.

Nation

Table 2 shows results from OLS regression predicting respondents' agreement with the statement "Religious diversity has been good for America." Model 1, which contains only demographic controls, reveals that African Americans and women are less likely to value religious diversity. Those residing in the Northeast or West are more likely to value religious diversity than those living in the South. Educational attainment and, interestingly, age, are positively associated with more positive attitudes toward religious diversity. Model 2 contains both control variables and the addition of the "Christian nation" scale. Women and African Americans remain more likely to see religious diversity less favorably, while educational attainment is still significantly related to a positive view of diversity. Region remains important, with those in the Northeast and West having more positive views of religious diversity. Belief in America as a "Christian nation" is significantly related to a positive view of religious diversity in the nation, contrary to expectations. Model 3 adds the theological exclusivity scale. Education and age remain the only significant control variables, both associated with greater support for religious diversity. Belief in a "Christian nation" remains significantly related to a positive view of diversity, and is actually greater in magnitude, suggesting a suppression effect of theological exclusivity. As hypothesized, theological exclusivity is strongly related to a more negative appraisal of religious diversity in the nation as a whole. Model 4 adds the measure of contact with Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus. Education and age remain as significant predictors of a more positive view of religious diversity. Belief in a "Christian nation" remains related to a positive view of diversity, while theological exclusivity remains strongly related to a negative view of diversity. Prior contact with

Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus is significantly related to a more positive view of religious diversity, as hypothesized. Finally, Model 5 adds measures of attitudes toward “foreigners” and racial minorities. Significant positive effects of age and education remain, as do for belief in a “Christian nation” and prior contact with non-Christians. Theological exclusivity remains a strong predictor, though less in magnitude. The belief that foreigners should assimilate to the American way of life is related to a negative view of religious diversity, while support for a greater presence for racial and ethnic minorities is related to a positive view.

Community: Hindu Temple

Table 3 shows results from OLS regression predicting respondents’ attitudes toward Hindus building a “large temple” in their community. Model 1 reveals that place of residence matters. Those residing in rural settings are less welcoming of a Hindu temple than others, while those residing in the Northeast and West are significantly more likely than Southerners to be welcoming of a Hindu temple in their community. Education is a strong predictor of a more welcoming attitude, while age is associated with a less welcoming attitude. Model 2 adds the “Christian nation” scale. Rural residence and age remain significant predictors of a less welcoming attitude, while residence in the Northeast or West, along with educational attainment, remain predictors of a more welcoming attitude. Belief in a “Christian nation” is associated with a less welcoming attitude toward a Hindu temple in one’s community. Model 3 adds the theological exclusivity scale. Educational attainment remains the only significant control variable.

Belief in a “Christian nation” is no longer significantly related to the dependent variable, while theological exclusivity is very strongly associated with a less welcoming attitude toward a Hindu temple. Model 4 adds a measure of prior contact with Hindus. Again, educational attainment remains a significant predictor, as does theological exclusivity. Prior contact with Hindus is significantly related to a more welcoming attitude toward a Hindu temple in one’s community, supporting my hypothesis about the effects of inter-religious contact. Finally, Model 5 adds measures of attitudes toward “foreigners” and racial minorities. Theological exclusivity remains a strong predictor, though less in magnitude. Prior contact is significantly associated with a more welcoming attitude. Belief that foreigners should assimilate is associated with a less welcoming attitude, while support for a greater presence for minorities is related to a more welcoming attitude.

Community: Muslim Mosque

Table 4 shows results from OLS regression predicting respondents’ attitudes toward Muslims building a “large mosque” in their community. Results are fairly similar to those reported in Table 3 for attitudes toward a Hindu temple in one’s community. Model 1 reveals that place of residence matters. Those residing in rural settings are less welcoming of a mosque than others ($p = 0.054$), while those residing in the Northeast and West are significantly more likely than Southerners to be welcoming of a mosque in their community. Education is a strong predictor of a more welcoming attitude, while age is associated with a less welcoming attitude. African Americans are more welcoming than

those of other racial and ethnic backgrounds, while women are less welcoming than men. Model 2 adds the “Christian nation” scale. Age remains a significant predictor of a less welcoming attitude, while residence in Northeast or West and educational attainment remain predictors of a more welcoming attitude. Race and gender remain significant predictors. Belief in a “Christian nation” is associated with a less welcoming attitude toward a Hindu temple in one’s community. Model 3 adds the theological exclusivity scale. Educational attainment and race remain as significant predictors. Region matters, as those in the West are more likely than those in the South to be welcoming toward a mosque in their community. Race and gender remain as significant predictors, as well. Belief in a “Christian nation” is no longer significantly related to the dependent variable, while theological exclusivity is very strongly associated with a less welcoming attitude toward a Muslim mosque. Model 4 adds a measure of prior contact with Muslims. Again, educational attainment and race remain as significant predictors, as do age, gender, and theological exclusivity. Those residing in the West are still more likely than Southerners to be welcoming toward Muslims. Prior contact with Muslims is nearly significantly related to a more welcoming attitude toward a mosque in one’s community ($p = 0.09$), lending some support to my hypothesis about the effects of inter-religious contact. Finally, Model 5 adds measures of attitudes toward “foreigners” and racial minorities. Theological exclusivity remains a strong predictor, though less in magnitude. Belief that foreigners should assimilate is associated with a less welcoming attitude, while support for a greater presence for minorities is related to a more welcoming attitude. Women remain less likely than men to be welcoming toward Muslims, while African Americans are more welcoming than others.

Discussion

This study demonstrates that while the vast majority of Americans say that religious diversity is good for the country, support for the inclusion of Muslims and Hindus in community life is mixed. As hypothesized, theological beliefs, beliefs about the role of religion in society, and prior contact with non-Christians all predict to some extent Americans' views of religious diversity and their willingness to include non-Christians in social life.

Debates about the religious roots of the United States and the role of religion in public life are seemingly endless. A majority of Americans believe that the United States is a Christian nation and that Christianity played a crucial role in its founding. Yet this study suggests that that belief in the United States as a Christian nation may not be antithetical to positive views of religious diversity. A three-item scale measuring support for the belief that America is a Christian nation is significantly positively associated with the belief that religious diversity "has been good for America." Adding theological exclusivity to the model increases the magnitude of its effect, indicating a suppression effect. While the "Christian nation" scale is related to a less welcoming attitude toward a Hindu temple or Muslim mosque in one's community, controlling for theological exclusivity renders its effect insignificant. Together, these results suggest that while many theologically exclusive Christians support the idea of America as a Christian nation and have negative attitudes toward non-Christians, other Christians have less problem reconciling their beliefs with religious diversity. Christian Smith (2000) argued that for many evangelical Protestants, belief in a Christian nation entails support and appreciation for religious freedom and an acceptance of the reality of religious diversity. That most

Americans see value in religious diversity at a national and local level suggests that an expansion of American civil religion may be underway, but that this development is predictably drawing resistance (Angrosino 2002; Kao and Copulsky 2007; MacHacek 2003). This study appears to capture some of the internal tension within American Christianity, revealing both an impulse to exclusivity and an impulse toward inclusivity and religious pluralism.

Individuals' theological beliefs, particularly about the relationship of Christianity to other faiths, are significantly related to their stance toward religious diversity and their willingness to include non-Christians in public life. Theological exclusivism is strongly associated with more negative views of religious diversity at the national and community levels. Yet how theological beliefs about religious diversity affect behavior toward non-Christians or attitudes toward public policy is unclear. Trinitapoli (2007) found that adolescents with exclusive theological beliefs generally express those beliefs in a tentative manner and add important qualifications about the "limitations of their knowledge or the legitimacy of others who hold opposing views," suggesting that today's religious youth have internalized messages about religious tolerance and pluralism. Furthermore, as Smith (1998) suggests, rejection of religious pluralism may reflect important boundary construction work rather than intolerance of religious others. Such boundary construction helps to maintain a strong sense of collective identity, one way by which more strict religious groups maintain high levels of commitment. Thus, while exclusive theological beliefs are associated with reluctance to accept non-Christians into social life, it is less clear how these attitudes would be translated into behavior. Nonetheless, the results of this study support other research that has demonstrated that

beliefs about God strongly shape people's social attitudes (Bader and Froese 2005) and their evaluations of other groups (Edgell et al. 2006).

Contact with non-Christians appears to support more positive views of religious diversity and greater willingness to include non-Christians into public life. Obviously, these data give us no indication of the nature of respondents' contact with non-Christians. While Allport (1954) offered conditions that he suggested must be met for intergroup contact to ameliorate intergroup prejudice, it appears that these conditions need not necessarily be met in order for contact to affect attitudes (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006). In addition, research on intergroup contact suggests that contact effects generalize broadly, not only to the entire outgroup in question, but to other outgroups not involved in the contact, as well (Pettigrew 1997; Pettigrew and Tropp 2006). For example, effects due to contact with Buddhists could generalize to other non-Christians such as Muslims or Hindus, particularly when Americans know little about these groups and have had little contact with them.

Measures of respondents' attitudes toward foreigners and racial and ethnic minorities more generally were included as predictors in order to test whether attitudes toward religious diversity are driven by non-religious factors. Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus are not only religious minorities but racial and cultural minorities as well. The belief that foreigners should shed their customs and assimilate is, predictably, associated with more negative views of diversity and non-Christians. Likewise, support for a stronger presence of racial minorities in society is associated with more positive views of religious diversity. Significantly, however, the relationship between theological exclusivism and views of diversity remained strong, suggesting that the effect of

theological beliefs is not attributable merely to antipathy toward racial and ethnic minorities. Americans' beliefs about God have social significance, in this case by influencing their willingness to include Muslims and Hindus in community life.

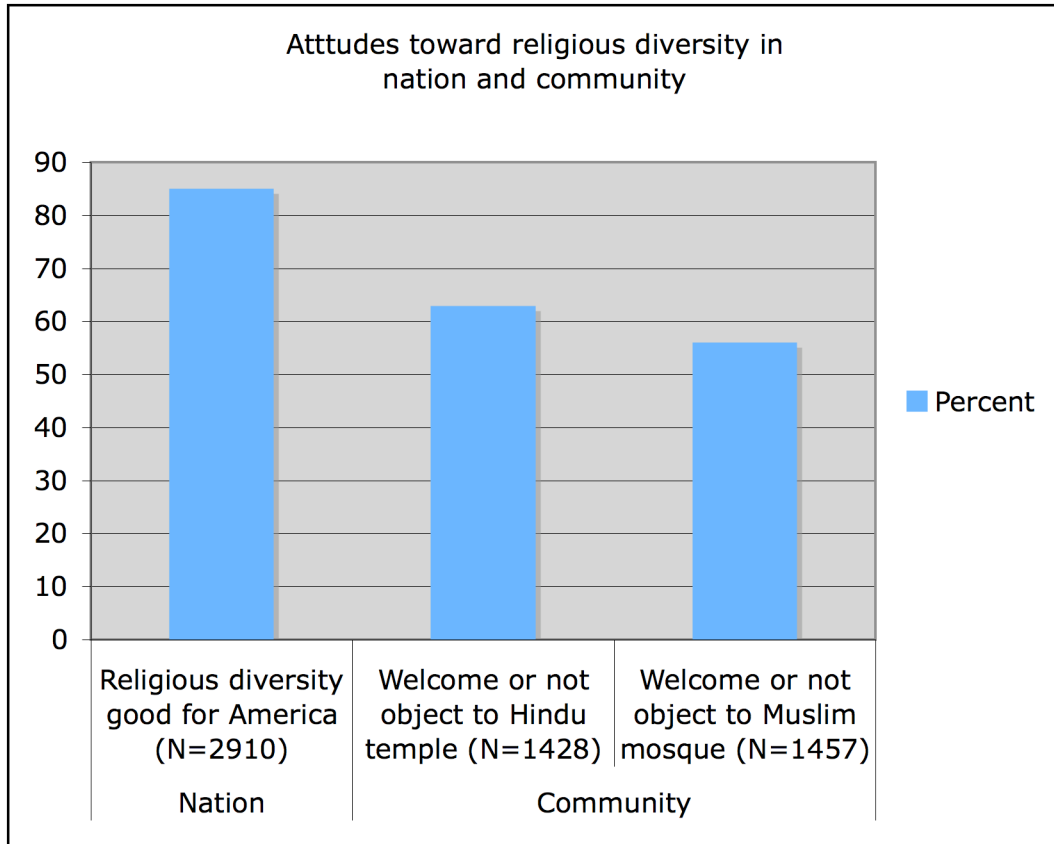
How do Americans deal with religious diversity? Berger (1967) argued that religious pluralism ultimately erodes religious belief by bringing into contact people with opposing religious beliefs and claims. This contact undermines religious "plausibility structures" by revealing the socially constructed nature of religion. Only when a religion envelops society in a monopolistic "sacred canopy" can it conceal its socially constructed nature and enjoy a taken-for-granted quality. However, there are several reasons to question Berger's hypothesis. Some scholars assert that religious diversity actually drives religious mobilization and increases vitality in a religious economy (Stark and Finke 2000). Furthermore, meaningful inter-religious contact appears to be very minimal, particularly among those with exclusivist beliefs. Religious groups with higher levels of strictness and theological exclusivity tend to make non-group activities and contact with non-group members costly (Iannaccone 1994). Adolescents with exclusivist beliefs tend to have dense religious peer networks that limit outside contact and provide "a more all-encompassing social environment" (Trinitapoli 2007). When contact does occur, religious "plausibility structures" may largely be unaffected since what little inter-religious contact there is generally involves little theological dialogue or debate. Churches themselves, across the spectrum, generally do very little to promote inter-religious contact or understanding (Wuthnow 2005). Local interfaith organizations are not very representative of local religious diversity and generally foster little theological debate or discussion (McCarthy 2007). At the level of family, the situation is very

similar. Inter-marriage rates for Mormons and evangelical Protestants, two groups likely to hold exclusivist beliefs, are significantly lower than for other groups (Sherkat 2004). Research on religious intermarriage suggests that religious inter-marriage has increased, but primarily only among moderate and liberal Protestants and more recent birth cohorts (Sherkat 2004). Significantly, the least likely religious inter-marriage is between a conservative Protestant and a member of a non-Judeo-Christian group (Sherkat 1999). Smith (1998), in challenging Berger's "sacred canopy," suggests rather that "sacred umbrellas" allow individuals to maintain exclusivist beliefs in a pluralistic society by providing "small, portable, accessible relational worlds – religious reference groups – 'under' which their beliefs can make sense."

This study reveals a nation somewhat conflicted over how to deal with religious diversity and how to incorporate non-Christians into public and private life. While belief that America is a "Christian nation" is prevalent, it does not appear to drive negative attitudes toward religious diversity and the inclusion of non-Christians in public life. On the other hand, theological exclusivity is strongly related to more negative views of religious diversity and decreased willingness to include non-Christians in public life. Additionally, this study provides evidence that prior contact with Muslims or Hindus increases Americans' willingness to include them into public life. The suggestion that American civil religion is expanding to include non-Christian faiths may be a useful way to understand how Americans deal with religious diversity by expanding the range of what is acceptable and valuable to society. Smith's "sacred umbrella" metaphor (1998) sheds light on how those with exclusive religious beliefs may deal with religious diversity. However, this study makes it clear that there is no consensus about the value of

non-Christian perspectives in American society, and that Americans are divided on this issue.

Figure 1. Attitudes toward religious diversity in nation and community



SOURCE: Religion and Diversity Survey, 2002-2003.

Table 1. Description of independent variables

Variable	Description	N	Mean	SD
Female	Female index variable (1 = female, 0 = male)	2909	0.576	
African American	African American index (1 = African American, 0 = other race)			
Age	Age in years (18 to 96)	2887	44.99	17.595
Northeast residence	Northeast residence index (1 = Northeast residence, 0 = non-Northeast residence)	2910	0.196	
Midwest residence	Midwest residence index (1 = Midwest residence, 0 = non-Midwest residence)	2910	0.241	
West residence	West residence index (1 = West residence, 0 = non-West residence)	2910	0.189	
Rural residence	Rural residence index (1 = rural residence, non-rural residence)	2877	0.423	
Education	Level completed (1 = some HS or less to 6 = post-graduate)	2904	3.53	1.554
Belief in Christian nation	Mean of three items (see Methods section for description; 1 = SD to 4 = SA)	2685	2.96	0.757
Theological exclusivity	Mean of four variables (see Methods section for description; 1 = SD to 4 = SA)	2807	2.45	0.879
Prior contact with Hindus	Personal contact with Hindus (1 = none to 4 = a great deal)	2890	2.19	1.174
Prior contact with Muslims	Personal contact with Muslims (1 = none to 5 = a great deal)	2890	2.53	1.271
Prior contact with non-Christians	Personal contact with Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists (3 = none to 12 = a great deal)	2869	6.87	3.064
Foreigners should give up foreign ways	"Foreigners who come to live in America should give up their foreign ways and learn to be like other Americans" (1 = SD to 4 = SA)	2853	2.40	1.12
Stronger presence for minorities	"In the next few years, would you welcome or not welcome each of the following groups becoming a stronger presence in the United States" (sum of respondents' answers for Asians, Hispanics, and African Americans, 3 = not welcome any group to 9 = welcome all three groups)	2767	7.83	1.94

Note: N = number; SD = standard deviation; HS = high school; DS = disagree strongly; AS = agree strongly

SOURCE: Religion and Diversity Survey, 2002-2003.

Table 2. Standardized regression coefficients for OLS regression predicting attitudes toward value of religious diversity in America

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Female	-0.053*	-0.054**	-0.038	-0.032	-0.038
African American	-0.044*	-0.041*	-0.010	-0.014	-0.020
Age	0.051*	0.037	0.061**	0.071**	0.106**
Education	0.133**	0.138**	0.094**	0.075**	0.052*
Rural residence	-0.034	-0.037	-0.004	0.002	0.012
<i>Region</i> ^a					
Northeast	0.050*	-0.057*	0.005	0.005	0.002
Midwest	0.041	0.042	0.018	0.023	0.024
West	0.053*	0.058*	0.023	0.021	0.020
Belief in a Christian nation		0.066**	0.139**	0.141**	0.153**
Theological exclusivity			-0.289**	-0.276**	-0.234**
Prior contact with non-Christians				0.072**	0.058**
Foreigners should give up foreign ways					-0.074**
Stronger presence for minorities					0.135**
R-squared	0.036	0.040	0.108	0.112	0.136
<i>N</i>	2351	2351	2351	2351	2351

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

^a South is the reference category

SOURCE: Religion and Diversity Survey, 2002-2003.

Table 3. Standardized regression coefficients for OLS regression predicting attitudes toward Hindus building a temple in respondent's community

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Female	-0.040	-0.041	-0.015	-0.010	-0.026
African American	-0.020	-0.025	0.003	0.004	-0.005
Age	-0.104**	-0.073*	-0.030	-0.023	0.025
Education	0.172**	0.162**	0.090**	0.073**	0.043
Rural residence	-0.071*	-0.066*	-0.030	-0.027	-0.017
<i>Region</i> ^a					
Northeast	0.075*	-0.063*	0.000	0.000	-0.009
Midwest	0.013	0.008	-0.028	-0.025	-0.020
West	0.100**	0.095**	0.047	0.046	0.043
Belief in a Christian nation		-0.143**	-0.040	-0.040	-0.023
Theological exclusivity			-0.402**	-0.391**	-0.347**
Prior contact with Hindus				0.070*	0.068*
Foreigners should give up foreign ways					-0.131**
Stronger presence for minorities					0.147**
R-squared	0.070	0.089	0.219	0.223	0.264
<i>N</i>	1216	1216	1216	1216	1216

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

^a South is the reference category

SOURCE: Religion and Diversity Survey, 2002-2003.

Table 4. Standardized regression coefficients for OLS regression predicting attitudes toward Muslims building a mosque in respondent's community

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Female	-0.084**	-0.081**	-0.059*	-0.056*	-0.066**
African American	0.078**	0.068*	0.121**	0.115*	0.103**
Age	-0.122**	-0.091**	-0.068*	-0.061*	0.014
Education	0.139**	0.126**	0.069*	0.058*	0.018
Rural residence	-0.055†	-0.051†	-0.003	0.001	0.028
<i>Region</i> ^a					
Northeast	0.083*	-0.068*	-0.010	-0.010	-0.010
Midwest	0.059†	0.059†	0.032	0.034	0.035
West	0.140**	0.124**	0.075*	0.076*	0.076**
Belief in a Christian nation		-0.131**	-0.040	-0.040	-0.014
Theological exclusivity			-0.392**	-0.386**	-0.334**
Prior contact with Muslims				0.047†	0.030
Foreigners should give up foreign ways					-0.171**
Stronger presence for minorities					0.191**
R-squared	0.076	0.092	0.215	0.217	0.277
<i>N</i>	1213	1213	1213	1213	1213

† $p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

^a South is the reference category

SOURCE: Religion and Diversity Survey, 2002-2003.

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