

Political Tolerance and God's Wrath in the United States*

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Ever since Stouffer (1955) began to measure political tolerance a half century ago, multiple studies have shown that church attendance and denominational affiliation play a significant role in influencing whether individuals want to extend civil liberties to fringe groups. However, there is little theoretical understanding of why religion should affect an individual's unwillingness to grant free expression to minority opinions. Drawing upon the theoretical innovations of Greeley (1995) we argue that the key to understanding when religion negatively affects political tolerance is the individual's conception of God. Using data from the General Social Survey we find that a wrathful image of God is significantly related to the denial of civil liberties to unpopular groups, even controlling for attendance, affiliation and view of the Bible. These findings indicate that religious faith and civil liberties are in tension mainly when believers think that God actively punishes sinners.

Persecution for the expression of opinions seems to me perfectly logical.
—Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes (1919)

The U.S. Declaration of Independence asserts, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” With this eloquent proclamation, Thomas Jefferson indicates that prioritizing the rights of the individual does not undercut but, in fact, is premised on the idea of an almighty creator. Nonetheless, this famous sentiment appears at odds with the empirical reality that religious individuals in the United States tend to be less likely to approve of extensive civil liberties.

In fact, those who defend the sacredness of religious concepts are often pitted against those who defend the freedom of individuals to express “profane”

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points of view. This recurring tension was most evident in the recent controversy concerning cartoon depictions of the Prophet Muhammad, in which Islamic conservatives argued that their publication should be banned while Western civil libertarians prominently displayed them as expressions of free speech. In contrast to this ongoing tension between faith and freedom, the United States began as an experiment to reconcile the dictates of religious devotion with a commitment to guard individual freedom and, from this experiment, the United States has grown into one of the most democratic *and* religious countries in the modern world. While the United States provides an example of how the tension between faith and freedom can be peacefully reconciled, a clear discord between religion *and* political tolerance persists even within the borders of the United States.

Over the past fifty years, researchers have consistently shown that religious affiliation and/or church attendance tend to decrease an individual's willingness to grant civil liberties to fringe groups (Stouffer 1955; Filsinger 1976; Beatty and Walter 1984; Ellison and Musick 1993; Katnik 2002). While the statistical link between religious affiliation, church attendance, and political intolerance is evident, there has been little attempt to understand this connection beyond the simple assumption that religion makes people closed minded. But what is it about being religious that makes a person less tolerant of divergent viewpoints? The most obvious answer supposes that certain religious beliefs lead individuals to diminish the importance of individual freedom in appeasement of a higher religious authority. This paper seeks to test this basic notion.

To better investigate the hypothesized relationship between faith in a higher authority and political intolerance we draw upon the work of Andrew Greeley (1995). Greeley argues that an individual's image of God provides the narrative link between complex religious systems of belief and attitudes concerning more secular topics such as public policy, law, and civil society. In sum, individuals who posit a wrathful God will tend to defer to religious texts and doctrines when forming opinions about secular topics. Conversely, those who view God as a relatively benign force (interestingly, a Jeffersonian conception of God) will place more importance on individual rationality when forming their opinions about social justice.

Using Greeley's general theoretical framework, we examine the effects of an individual's image of God on political intolerance. We expect that when people conceive of a God who is actively judging and punishing human behavior, they will be less tolerant. The logic of this hypothesis is simple: if God is intolerant of certain behavior, believers should be intolerant, too. To ensure that our measure of a wrathful God is not simply a proxy for other measures of religious beliefs, behaviors, or affiliations, we control for religious affiliation, church attendance, and view of the Bible in our analyses.

SOURCES OF POLITICAL TOLERANCE

Samuel Stouffer (1955) offered the first empirical measure of political tolerance still in wide use today. He defined "political tolerance" in terms of the extension of rights to so-called fringe groups. In other words, a politically tolerant person is one who would extend civil liberties to someone with ideas contrary to her own. The General Social Survey adapted Stouffer's measurement and has regularly asked whether three civil liberties (teaching at a college, speaking in public, and having a book in the library) should be extended to atheists, homosexuals, communists, militarists and racists.

Using these measures, researchers have found that a variety of demographic characteristics are significantly related to political tolerance. Stouffer (1955) found rural residence, aging, and lower levels of education predict intolerance of atheists and communists. Stouffer concluded that exposure to a variety of peoples and viewpoints lead to higher tolerance. Thus, he found community leaders to be more politically tolerant, as were people in more urban locations (Stouffer 1955:127). Women have also been shown to be less politically tolerant than men (Golebiowska 1999). However, Sotelo (1999) discovered that adolescent girls may actually be more politically tolerant, thus raising the possibility that gender differences are disappearing. Education is also frequently cited as a predictor of political tolerance (Bobo and Licari 1989; Duch and Gibson 1992; Golebiowska 1995; Karpov 1999a; Stouffer 1955; Nunn, Crockett and Williams 1978; Wilson 1994). However, Weil (1982) found that education had no impact on levels of political tolerance in Western Germany, demonstrating that the effects of education are not universal. Other potential sources of political tolerance include socioeconomic status (Filsinger 1976; Karpov 1999a, 1999b; Katnik 2002), age (Karpov 1999a, 1999b; Sotelo 2000; Wilson 1994), regional differences (Ellison and Musick 1993; Fletcher and Sergeev 2002), and the perceived threat of a minority group (Duch and Gibson 1992; Sullivan and Transue 1999).

Stouffer (1955) was also the first to test for a relationship between religion and political tolerance. As have many researchers since, Stouffer used two broad measures of religiosity—affiliation (Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, other, and none) and church attendance—finding that both religious membership and attendance were related to a higher likelihood of political intolerance. Replicating Stouffer's analysis, numerous studies have shown that religious affiliation predicts political intolerance (Beatty and Walter 1984; Ellison and Musick 1993; Filsinger 1976; Katnik 2002). For example, conservative Protestants are the focus of several studies of political attitudes and tolerance (Finlay and Walther 2003; Hunter 1984; Hoffmann and Miller 1997; Tamney and Johnson 1997). Such studies typically report that conservative Protestants are becoming increasingly tolerant over time (Smith 2000), yet still lag behind other U.S. cit-

izens in their willingness to grant civil liberties to fringe groups (Reimer and Park 2001). In one of the few studies outside of a Judeo-Christian context, Fletcher and Sergeev (2002) found no relationship between religious affiliation and political intolerance in Islamic communities. Such varying findings reveal the problems of relying solely on Christian denominational measures to analyze the relationship between religion and intolerance. Also, scholars often disagree how best to categorize various religious groups and identities. Gay and Ellison (1993) found that changing the manner in which denominations are grouped greatly affects the results of analyses of intolerance.

Although Stouffer (1955:153) labeled church attendance “the most superficial index of devotion,” a number of studies find a consistent relationship between higher levels of attendance and lower levels of tolerance (Beatty and Walter 1984; Filsinger 1976; Katnik 2002). It remains an open question as to *why* attendance predicts intolerance. Karpov (1999b, 2002), for example, argues that attendance is merely a proxy measure of the support one has for the political power of a church, which will more directly influence tolerance.

Although most studies of religion and tolerance have focused on either church attendance or denominations/religious families, a few studies have included measures of religious belief in their models. For example, Ellison and Musick (1993) found theological conservatism to be a significant predictor of intolerance. Tuntiya (2005), on the other hand, finds that the most consistent belief to predict intolerance is biblical literalism. Jelen and Chandler (1996) examine certain religious moral attitudes such as strict conceptions of sexual deviance, resistance to feminist values, and opposition to abortion. They find that one’s exposure to and acceptance of religious doctrines decreases tolerance of these non-traditional behaviors more than the amount of time the individual spends with fellow members of their religion (Jelen and Chandler 1996). And Karpov (2002) found that a measure which combined “born again” experience with biblical literalism was a stronger predictor of intolerance than fundamentalism or evangelicalism.

In sum, previous research has found a consistent relationship between political tolerance and religiosity, as measured by affiliation, attendance, belief, or some combination thereof. Comparatively few have directly examined the role religious beliefs play in producing tolerance or intolerance. We turn our attention to an underlying, yet unexplored, element of religiosity: individual conceptions of God.

THE WRATHFUL HYPOTHESIS

Greeley (1995) argues that religion is the primary “story” which guides the lives of believers. Believers map their understanding of the supernatural and its

desires onto the earthly landscape, making decisions consistent with their religious story. Consequently, the content of a religious narrative, Greeley theorizes, will significantly affect religious and non-religious behaviors and attitudes. Of course, religious narratives consist of a bewildering variety of beliefs, such as ideas about salvation, concepts of sin, pantheons of deities, cautionary tales, claims of miracles, and so on. Thankfully Greeley (1995:124) provides guidance in this regard when he observes, "The central religious symbol is God. One's 'picture' of God is in fact, a metaphorical narrative of God's relationship with the world and the self as part of that world."

Although surveys routinely report that 95 percent of Americans believe in God (Bishop 1999), Americans disagree about God's *character*. Some imagine a personified God, others a cosmic force. God may be above the matters of the world or ever-present and engaged. For some God is easily angered and quick to judge human behavior; to others all-forgiving. Psychologists have long recognized such diversity in understandings of God (Benson and Spilka 1973; Cook and Wimberly, 1983; Mallery, et al. 2000; Maynard, et al. 2001; Pargament and Hann 1986; Schaefer and Gorsuch 1991; Rowatt and Kirkpatrick 2002; Vergote and Tamayo 1981). Several studies have found differences in perceptions of God by gender and other key demographic indicators (Ladd, et al. 1998; Nelsen, et al. 1985; Roof and Roof 1984; Roberts 1989; Schoenfeld 1987).

Greeley helped develop a series of items on images of God which then appeared in the General Social Survey. Using these items, Greeley (1988, 1989, 1991, 1993) found simple bivariate correlations between "maternal" and "gracious" images of God and political affiliation, support for "safe sex" education, support for environmental protection, and opposition to the death penalty. Greeley (1995) maintains that people with more gracious and maternal conceptions of God will be more tolerant of extremists on the left or right. However, he did not perform the analysis to test this assertion and resorted to looking for Catholic/Protestant differences in levels of tolerance.

Greeley (1995:179) offers us an interesting conjecture, stating that "those whose religious imagination has a propensity to a warmer, affectionate, more intimate, more loving representation of ultimate reality will also be, I hypothesize, more gracious and more benign in their response to political and social issues." We invert on this hypothesis to ponder whether individuals with harsher and more wrathful images of God will be less forgiving and tolerant of others. Specifically, we expect that individuals who think God punishes sinners will be less likely to grant socially deviant groups the freedom to express opinions and perspectives, because believers are more likely to view these groups as clashing with God's authority. The following analyses will examine whether more wrathful images of God predict intolerance of fringe social groups when controlling for attendance, denomination, view of the Bible, and other known predictors of intolerance.

MEASURES

Our analyses use data from the 1991 and 1998 waves of the General Social Survey (GSS). In 1991 and 1998 the GSS included detailed batteries of questions of religion, allowing the creation of our various measures of religiosity. The 1991 and 1998 survey years were combined, creating a total sample (before missing data) of 4,349 cases.

Political Tolerance

Although GSS measures of tolerance have been criticized on several grounds, Gibson (1992) found the GSS items to be as effective and robust as alternatives. More recently, Mondak and Sanders (2003) came to similar conclusions about the GSS 15-point scale technique, arguing that it provides a valid measure of whether or not respondents are tolerant, although it has limited usefulness as a measure of *levels* of tolerance. We follow suit and utilize the standard method applied throughout the tolerance literature (see Bobo and Licari 1989; Ellison and Musick 1993; Gay and Ellison 1993; Golebiowska 1995), using a series of questions regarding whether members of particular fringe groups (atheists, communists, militarists, racists, homosexuals) should be permitted civil liberties (having a book in the library, speaking in public, teaching in college). These 15 binary responses (where intolerance = 2 and tolerance = 1) were summed to create a measure of intolerance. Thus, the maximum possible score is 30, representing a person who would not allow any of these activities to occur, and the minimum is 15 meaning all the actions would be permitted. This measure has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.916. Of the 2,316 people who answered all 15 questions in either 1991 or 1998, the mean was 19.8 with a standard deviation of 4.66.¹ Thus, people tend to be more tolerant than intolerant, but there are at least 49 cases for each of the 15 possible tolerance scores.

Religion Variables

Four religion measures are included in the analyses: church attendance, religious tradition, Biblical literalism, and image of God.

The GSS asks respondents to indicate their frequency of church attendance using nine categories ranging from never to more than once a week. Although the question responses are ordinal they are commonly treated as continuous and that method is followed for this analysis.

¹Although this represents over 2,000 missing cases, the vast majority (over 90%) were simply not asked the relevant questions. Furthermore, we compared the descriptive statistics of those who were asked the tolerance questions with those who were not and found no significant differences.

We include the RELTRAD classification scheme developed by Steensland et al. (2000) using the history and theological perspectives of individual denominations. Respondents are placed in one of seven categories based on their reported affiliation—Catholic, Black Protestant, Evangelical Protestant, Mainline Protestant, Jewish, other and none (no religious affiliation). Respondents who indicated that they are nondenominational Christians but go to church at least monthly were coded as Evangelical Protestants, which is the contrast category in these analyses.

We also include Biblical literalism as a control. GSS respondents were asked which of three statements comes closest to their feelings about the Bible: The Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, the Bible is the inspired word of God but not everything should be taken literally, or the Bible is an ancient book of fables recorded by man. We dichotomized this item to compare those with a literal view of the Bible with all others.

Our image of God measure consists of six items that, together, tap the extent to which an individual views God as wrathful. A series of four items in the GSS asks respondents to locate the personality of God between two opposing adjectives, on a scale of 1 to 7. Respondents were asked whether God is more like a king or friend, judge or lover, master or spouse, and father or mother. Each item was dichotomized, contrasting those who select the most severe image of God—as judge, king, master, and father—with others. Operationally, scores of 7 on the seven-point scale were recoded as 1, and scores of 1-6 were recoded as 0.² An additional item asks respondents to use a five-point Likert-scale to indicate the extent of their agreement with the statements: “There is a God who concerns Himself with every human being personally” and “To me, life is only meaningful because God exists.” These later two items tap the extent to which an authoritative God is engaged in the lives of individuals and willing to make His authority known. These six items were converted to z-scores and then summed to create an image of a wrathful God ($\alpha = .75$). Believers with high scores on this scale think of God as a highly engaged and forceful authority—in essence, a God who rules with wrath rather than warmth.

The wrathful God variable gives us insight into the perceived personality of God. In the final tally, 2,095 respondents provided sufficient information about

²We chose to dichotomize the adjective rating items prior to summation based on the distribution of responses in the data. Each of the component variables asks respondents to place their personal image of God between two different descriptors on a scale of 1 to 7. For example, an item asks respondents to place their personal image of God anywhere from mother (1) to father (7). Although the variable ranges from 1 to 7, the vast majority of respondents pick one of three categories—either extreme (1,7), or the middle (4). Very few people claim that God is somewhat of a father (e.g. a 5 or 6) or somewhat of a mother (e.g., a 2 or 3). Based on this non-linear distribution, we chose to compare those with the strongest and clearest images of God as authoritative in nature with all others.

their images of God to create the measure.³ The mean was 0.01 and scores range from -7.40 to 7.89. There were no systematic patterns in missing responses for the items composing the wrathful God variable. Even those who report no belief in God provided opinions on God's characteristics.⁴

Control Variables

Control variables include gender, region of the country, race, age, education, socioeconomic status, size of place and year the interview took place. All of these explanatory variables have either been tested previously or are otherwise suggested by the political tolerance literature. They also have adequate measures within the relevant GSS surveys.⁵

We include a dummy variable for gender, which has been shown to be relevant to levels of tolerance (Gibson 1992; Golebiowska 1999; Stouffer 1955). Region of the country and rural location have been shown to be significant to levels of tolerance (Fletcher and Sergeev 2002). In the United States, this manifests as people from the South generally being less tolerant than other citizens (Ellison and Musick 1993). As such, southerners are separated from all other respondents in the analysis.⁶ As a proxy for rural and urban areas, size of the place where the respondent lives is used. A natural logarithmic transformation is made to account for the decreasing differences between urban areas and very urban areas.

Although previous research suggests that it is not directly predictive of tolerance, we include a dummy variable for race (white = 1; nonwhite = 0). In the final sample, 19 percent of respondents were not white.

Age is usually a strong predictor of levels of tolerance (Karpov 1999a, 1999b). And Wilson (1994) shows that the age effect remains even when a

³The GSS codebook codes the majority of responses to these image of God questions as "not applicable," meaning that the respondent was never asked the question. These questions appear to have been intentionally skipped independent of the response to any other question. To ensure that the missing data was not biased, we compared the demographic characteristics for respondents who were asked the image of God questions and those who were not. No differences were significant except for age; those who were asked the question were 1.8 years older on average. Furthermore, in the following regression models, no substantive differences occurred by only including individuals who were asked all relevant questions.

⁴As would be expected, those who believe in God without doubt and those who don't tend to have different images of God. The mean image of God score for those who do not believe in God was significantly lower (-2.675) than the image of God score for those who believe in God without doubt (1.416), indicating that non-believers tend to see God as more benign.

⁵Since political identity may be related to tolerance, we ran models including political party affiliation as a control variable. None of the results were significantly altered, but including party affiliation did result in the loss of a large number of cases. Therefore, in order to maximize the sample size, we excluded party in our final analyses.

⁶The following categories in GSS variable REGION were collapsed to create this variable: East South Central, West South Central, South Atlantic.

cohort effect is taken into account. To control for the impact of having two cohorts in the sample, a variable for the year in which the interview was completed is included.

Education is measured with years the person has completed in school. Generally, education has a significant effect on tolerance, leading to more tolerant views of others (Bobo and Licari 1989; Duch and Gibson 1992; Golebiowska 1995; Karpov 1999a; Nunn, et al. 1978; Wilson 1994).

Socioeconomic status is another relevant factor in determining tolerance (Filsinger 1976; Karpov 1999a, 1999b; Katnik 2002). Including income created an exorbitant number of missing cases, so occupational prestige is used as the sole measure of SES. Although it is correlated with education ($r = 0.52$), neither VIF (variance inflation factor) scores, which test for excessive correlations between the independent variables in a model, nor directions of signs imply any significant multicollinearity issues.

FINDINGS

Table 1 presents OLS regressions on our measure of political intolerance. We begin with demographic factors (Model 1), add church attendance and religious tradition (Model 2), and finally include our measures of religious belief (Biblical literalism) and image of God (wrathful God) (Model 3). In all three models, a positive parameter estimate indicates that a person is likely to be less politically tolerant and a negative parameter estimate means he or she is likely to be more politically tolerant. In the first model, every variable is statistically significant at least at the 0.05 level. Males, whites, those with higher levels of education, those with more prestigious occupations, and people in larger cities tend to be more tolerant. Southerners and older people tend to be less tolerant. The strongest predictor in this baseline model is education.

Model 2 adds measures of church attendance and religious tradition. As found in numerous other studies (Beatty and Walter 1984; Filsinger 1976; Katnik 2002; Stouffer 1955), increased attendance leads to less tolerance. This relationship holds even when controlling for religious tradition. Catholics, mainline Protestants, Jews, those of other religions, and those of no religion tend to be more tolerant than Evangelicals. Black Protestants, however, are not significantly different from Evangelicals in levels of political intolerance. In other words, people from what is currently the largest religious tradition in the United States (Evangelicals) are most likely to approve of denying civil liberties to fringe groups. This finding fits with theoretical arguments that members of more powerful religious groups are the ones most likely to display political intolerance (see Baker 2005). Further, Smith (1998) notes that Evangelicals tend to perceive themselves as embattled by secular society even as they grow in numbers and political influence. Through in-depth interviews, Smith (1998:140) found that

TABLE 1
Standardized Coefficients (Betas) from OLS Regression Models
Predicting Political Intolerance

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Male	-.038*	-.006	.013
Southern	.128**	.075**	.109**
White	-.104**	-.072**	-.058
Age	.205**	.168**	.124**
Years of Education	-.288**	-.284**	-.271**
Occupational Prestige	-.050*	-.053*	-.032
Size of Place (log)	-.083**	-.066**	-.053
Year of Survey (1991)	.044*	.028	.084**
Church Attendance		.139**	.088**
Religious Tradition ^a			
Catholic		-.161**	-.104**
Black Protestant		-.040	-.024
Mainline Protestant		-.138**	-.087**
Jewish		-.052*	-.027
Other		-.077**	-.068*
No Religion		-.170**	-.089**
Biblical Literalism			.176**
Wrathful God			.093**
Adjusted R ²	.220	.279	.323
Valid N	2,094	1,980	1,023

^aEvangelical Protestant is the reference category.

*p<.05; ** p<.01 (Two-tailed test)

“evangelicals observe that every racial, ethnic, religious, political, and ideological perspective is given fair time and a fair hearing, *except* the Christian perspective. Instead, Christians’ views are seen as routinely slighted, whether subtly or blatantly.” As a consequence, it appears that Evangelicals are less likely to view fringe groups as in need of basic freedoms.

Model 3 adds our measure of Biblical literalism and our wrathful God measure. With all of the religion variables included in the analysis, occupational prestige, size of place, and race lose significance. Indeed, Biblical literalism is a powerful predictor of political intolerance. Those who believe that the Bible should be taken literally are significantly less likely to grant rights to fringe groups than people with different views of the Bible. However, wrathful God remains a sig-

nificant predictor of political intolerance, even when controlling for view of the Bible, attendance, and religious tradition.⁷

In the end, our findings demonstrate that religious individuals are politically intolerant to the extent that they have a certain view of God and the Bible, or belong to a powerful yet embattled religious group. In order to better explore this complex relationship, we look more closely at the individual measures of political tolerance (see Table 2). We find that patterns of significance change depending on whether the fringe group in question is militarists, communists, atheists, racists, or homosexuals. Questions about allowing each group to speak, have a

TABLE 2
Standardized Coefficients (Betas) from OLS Regression Models
Predicting Political Intolerance, By Group

	Militarists	Communists	Atheists	Racists	Homosexuals
Male	.010	-.034	-.003	-.024	.065*
Southern	.051	.117**	.097**	.044	.104**
White	-.098**	-.067*	-.070*	-.078*	-.023
Age	.130**	.095**	.127**	.003	.127**
Years of Education	-.210**	-.232**	-.257**	-.168**	-.220**
Occupational Prestige	-.051	-.068*	-.022	-.010	-.008
Size of Place (log)	-.023	-.047	-.025	-.042	-.068*
Year of Survey (1991)	.086**	.026	.078**	.021	.121**
Church Attendance	.043	.027	.120**	.081*	.130**
Religious Tradition ^a					
Catholic	-.059	-.081*	-.084**	-.094**	-.135**
Black Protestant	-.060	-.075*	-.004	-.018	-.056
Mainline Protestant	-.068*	-.070*	-.045	-.071*	-.122**
Jewish	-.029	-.042	-.006	-.000	-.040
Other Religion	-.055	-.064*	-.069*	-.044	-.074**
No Religion	-.077*	-.074*	-.068*	-.100**	-.030
Biblical Literalism	.149**	.163**	.166**	.101**	.119**
Wrathful God	.095**	.088**	.081**	.066*	.083**
Adjusted R ²	.219	.256	.291	.132	.252
Valid N	1,153	1,117	1,139	1,134	1,146

^aEvangelical Protestant is the reference category.

*p<.05; ** p<.01 (Two-tailed test)

⁷We also ran our final model with an interaction term between wrathful God and Biblical literalism. The interaction term was not significant and did not change the results.

book in the library, and teach were summed, with possible results ranging from zero to three. Again a higher score indicates a more intolerant view of the group, while a lower score indicates more tolerance. These regressions test whether attitudes toward certain fringe groups, in particular atheists, were driving the finding in Table 1.

Immediately, it becomes clear that church attendance has a tenuous relationship with political tolerance. As one of the most consistently cited predictors of political intolerance, we find that church attendance only affects the likelihood of intolerance towards atheists, racists and homosexuals. Individuals who attend church often are not significantly different from others in terms of their political intolerance of militarists and communists. This leads us to question the theoretical mechanism underlying the relationship between church attendance and tolerance. If heightened church attendance simply limited one's exposure to diverse attitudes and opinions we would expect that it would increase intolerance for all fringe groups. Instead, churchgoers specify atheists, racists, and homosexuals as groups which do not deserve comparable civil liberties. Perhaps these groups offend churchgoers for explicitly religious reasons. For example, atheists may be seen as disrespectful to sacred ideas and objects while homosexuals engage in sexual activities which many American churchgoers perceive as sinful.

The models reveal a variety of differences between religious affiliations for specific fringe groups. For example, Catholics are more tolerant of communists, atheists, racists and homosexuals than Evangelicals, but no different from Evangelicals in their willingness to grant rights to militarists. Mainline Protestants, on the other hand, are more tolerant of militarists, communists, racists, and homosexuals than Evangelicals, but hold similar views of atheists. Those with no religion are more tolerant than Evangelicals of every group except homosexuals. In sum, the findings for religious affiliation are mixed and depend upon the type of group in question.

Only three variables were consistently significant predictors across all models. Those who have higher levels of education are more tolerant of fringe groups. People who believe the Bible is the word of God are significantly less tolerant. And images of a wrathful God are also significantly predictive of intolerance for every fringe group. This finding reveals much about how religious believers view civil liberties. Froese and Bader (2004) argue that individuals who believe in a personally engaged and authoritative God will be less likely to consider how social conditions determine individual behavior because they think that God is always an available resource to help guide decision-making (also Bader and Froese 2005). Consequently, believers who hold such an image of God are more likely to condemn certain behaviors regardless of the circumstances surrounding that behavior. Similarly, we find that individuals with wrathful images of God are the most likely to express willingness to deny free expression to groups which they believe are unreceptive of God's guidance.

CONCLUSION

Our findings uncover a basic tension between religious faith and the value of freedom—both of which are generally considered core American values. We find that Americans' opinions concerning individual rights and political expression are noticeably affected by their religious practices, traditions, beliefs, and imaginations. Significantly, Americans who view God as more wrathful and Americans who interpret the Bible as the word of God are more likely to express willingness to curb free expression. These findings indicate that the substance of individuals' religious views determine how religion will affect levels of political tolerance.

Previous research on how religion affects political intolerance underemphasizes the substance of individuals' religious worldviews by focusing on religious affiliation or church attendance. Our findings demonstrate that church attendance does have a significant effect on the overall measure of political tolerance and, more specifically, on intolerance towards atheists, racists and homosexuals. However, attending church does not affect attitudes towards militarists and communists. Similarly, identification with particular religious traditions also has a variety of significant, but inconsistent, effects on tolerance towards certain groups. But our measures of a specific religious belief (Biblical literalism) and image of God (wrathful) are both significant predictors of intolerance toward *all* groups. Much has been written about the influence of Biblical literalism on American's attitudes and behaviors, but other than Andrew Greeley, few have probed the influence of God image. This article provides crucial evidence of the importance of the way people conceptualize God in understanding levels of political tolerance and suggests the importance of including this variable in other analyses of social and political beliefs and behaviors.

For some religious Americans and for many religious groups outside of the United States, the tension between religion and civil liberties remains an important political and social issue. And we expect that current and future battles between religious devotees and civil libertarians will be shaped by differing visions of God. In our attempts to understand the perpetuation of political intolerance, we must keep in mind that it is not religion in general but specific religious beliefs, practices, and images of God which create tension with expansive civil liberties.

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