

Where Do Americans Draw the Line Between Church and State?

An Update on American Public Opinion Toward Religious Establishment and Free

Exercise

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Abstract

Using data collected in a 2008 survey we examine Americans' attitudes toward the "separation of church and state," updating an earlier study by Jelen and Wilcox. We find that Americans' attitudes have a clear structure, roughly reflecting the US Constitution's distinction between religious establishment and free exercise. However, of these two dimensions, attitudes on free exercise are more tenuous. When compared to data collected twenty years ago, Americans appear to be both more accommodationist toward religious establishment, and more libertarian toward free exercise. We further find that perceptions of threatened values, whether that threat is direct or indirect, relate to attitudes on both establishment and free exercise. A higher sense of threat leads to greater accommodation of traditional religious expression, and a greater willingness to restrict the free exercise of small, and potentially unpopular, religious groups.

Even though controversy over the proper relationship between church and state arises frequently in the United States, we know relatively little about what the public thinks that relationship should be. Part of the problem is the limited literature on this point, with just one major extant study. And while this one study is very thorough, much of the survey data it employed is now over twenty years old. Given all that has happened regarding religion in American public life since then, a re-examination is in order. How do Americans feel about issues that arise under the establishment or free exercise clauses found in the First Amendment? The courts have drawn legal distinctions based on these clauses, but does the public do the same? Are public attitudes on church and state structured differently, based on diverse values and experiences?

Inquiry into Americans' attitudes toward church and state is of interest for both substantive and theoretical reasons. Substantively, discussion of controversies over the public role of religion would benefit from greater information about the contours of public opinion on the subject. The subject, however, can also inform theory, as church-state issues are potentially *sui generis*. While scholars generally map issues onto the standard uni-dimensional left-right ideological spectrum, many church-state questions do not have an obvious relationship to ideology. For example, ideological positioning on a free exercise question like whether public schools can forbid Muslim girls from wearing head scarves is difficult to predict. Will conservatives see such a policy as an unnecessary removal of religion from the public square, and oppose it? Or will they be willing to endorse such a policy in the spirit of deference to school authority, or out of a concern that Islam runs counter to the Judeo-Christian history of the United States? Will liberals oppose such a policy as an infringement of religious liberty or

free speech? Or will they endorse it because they see head coverings as promoting gender inequality?

There is similar ambiguity when we try to predict the relationship between church-state attitudes and religious commitment. Are highly religious Americans, the overwhelming majority of whom are Christians of one kind or another more or less likely to accept restrictions on the free exercise of non-Judeo Christian faiths, like Muslims? Do they approve or disapprove of religion in school, given that a strict prohibition on religious establishment is often credited with ensuring the vibrancy of America's religious landscape?

This paper uses survey data collected in 2008 to address two objectives. First, it will map the contours of public opinion on church-state attitudes. Do Americans in general distinguish between religious establishment and free exercise claims as the Constitution and courts do? If not, what is the structure of opinion about the relationship between church and state?

Second, we seek to explain why Americans have the opinions they do on religion's appropriate place in the public square. As we have suggested, Americans' attitudes on church-state questions are likely to be more nuanced than simply serving as a proxy for ideology or religiosity, although both are clearly relevant factors. This paper examines another factor drawn from the literature on public opinion and political tolerance that is also likely related to attitudes on church and state: a sense of threat to one's values and/or religion. We hypothesize that Americans who feel threatened in this way will want to expand the presence of Christianity in the public square, and endorse efforts to constrict the presence of non-Christian faiths.

Past Findings and Expectations

The literature on public attitudes toward church-state issues is limited, but it offers some clear expectations for this analysis.¹ The most comprehensive study to date, by Jelen and Wilcox (1995), draws three general conclusions in this regard.² First, there is a clear underlying structure of opinion regarding church-state issues in the American public, with two dimensions: one roughly in line with religious establishment issues (such as public displays of religious symbols), and one roughly in line with free exercise issues (such as regulation of unpopular religious groups). Second, within these two dimensions, patterns are often quite complex, especially when one moves from abstract principles of church-state relations to the numerous concrete policies disputes. Such complexity reflects the many values that can come to bear on particular church-state controversies as well as a lack of opinion constraint that characterizes public opinion. Third, this rough structure of opinion arises from multiple sources, including religion, demography, perceptions of threat, communal context, and general political attitudes. Indeed, this multiplicity of sources may help account for the structure of public opinion on church state relations.

So we expect to find that public opinion is structured in part around establishment issues, ranging from an “accommodationist” position that favors government recognition of religion to a “separationist” position that does not. Jelen and Wilcox (1995, 74) find this establishment dimension to be the strongest of the two, especially in terms of abstract principles. Their analysis also reveals that in concrete terms such a dimension of opinion is

¹ There is, however, a vast historical, legal, comparative, and normative literature on the subject. A sampling includes: Hamburger (2002); Curry (1986); Monsma (1993); Monsma and Soper (1997); Segers and Jelen (1998); Jelen (2000); Neuhaus (1984).

² For other empirical analyses, see Wilcox, Goldberg, and Jelen (2002); Jelen (2005); Jelen and Wilcox (1997).

structured by the types of religious *activities* in question (1995, 108-111). The public often draws distinctions between activities that are general in nature, such as public holiday displays, and more specific regulations, such requirements in public schools. These findings suggest that a strong measure of establishment views could be derived from attitudes on concrete instances of government endorsement of religious symbols favored by a majority of the public.

We also expect to also find that public opinion is structured in part around free exercise issues, ranging from a “communalist” position that favors government regulation of religious groups and a “libertarian” position that does not. Jelen and Wilcox (1995, 139-140) find this dimension to be the weaker of the two, even in terms of abstract principles. They find that in concrete terms this dimension of opinion is structure by the types of religious *groups* in question. The public draws a distinction between religious groups that are perceived to be dangerous (such as religious groups associated with violence) versus those that are perceived to be harmless; an additional distinction is also noted between groups that are perceived as strange (such as immigrant religious groups) versus those that are familiar. These findings suggest that a strong measure of free exercise views could be derived from concrete instances of government regulation of groups disfavored by a majority of the public.

What about the sources of public views on these two dimensions of opinion? One obvious source of such attitudes is religion itself, including religious affiliation and level of religious commitment (Jelen and Wilcox 1995, 64-68, 125). Affiliation, such as membership in a religious tradition, is at root a form of group affiliation, and religious commitment reflects in large part engagement in religious activities. It would be surprising indeed if such membership

and activity had no bearing on individual-level views of establishment and free exercise, given the importance of both groups and activities in structuring such opinions.

For one thing, different religious traditions may hold beliefs that support particular views of church and state on one or both dimensions (Jelen and Wilcox 1995, 65, 128) . For example, there is some evidence that the traditional beliefs of Evangelical Protestants are associated with stronger establishment views (that is, the accomodationist position), while the less traditional views of Mainline Protestants are associated with weaker establishment views (or stronger separatist position). Catholics, Jews, and the unaffiliated also tend to be more accomodationist. These patterns may reflect different understandings of the religious origins and nature of American society (Hecl 2007). However, religious affiliation appears to be much less associated with views on free exercise. This pattern may reflect the fact that most religious groups were—or could be—religious “minorities” of one sort or another.

Religious commitment could also have an independent impact on church-state attitudes. It could be, for instance, that high levels of religious commitment produce greater exposure to the relevant beliefs of their traditions. But it could also be that the religiously committed are more likely to hold more traditional beliefs regardless of the religious tradition to which they belong, and in any event, are more likely to be engaged in the religious activities at the core of many church-state issues. Past research has found that measures of religious commitment, such as frequency of worship attendance and the subjective salience of religion, are associated with accomodationist views on the establishment dimension and negatively associated with libertarian views of free exercise. In fact, the impact of religious commitment

often eliminates the independent effect of religious tradition on these dimensions (Jelen and Wilcox 1995, 67, 128).

Thus we have reason to expect that religious affiliation and/or religious commitment may influence church state views. However, these associations may be the result of other demographic factors that are a source of views on church-state issues—and are often closely linked to religion as well (Jelen and Wilcox 1995, 68-70, 125-129). For example, gender, race and ethnicity, and to a lesser extent, region, have been linked to positive support for accommodationist views; and with the exception of race, these factors have also been linked to negative libertarian views of free exercise. These patterns may reflect stronger communal ties of women, blacks, Latinos, and Southerners compared to men, whites, non-Latinos, and Westerners. Indeed, the greater support of free exercise by blacks may reflect the political involvement of the African American community. Age also has been found to have a similar pattern and it may reflect the era in which the individual came of age. Finally, income and especially education are negatively linked to accommodationist views and positively linked to libertarian views. These patterns may reflect higher levels of information but also greater support for civil liberties among upper status individuals.

In addition to these expectations regarding demography, two related factors may matter as well: perception of threat and religious diversity in communities. On the first count, individuals' views of establishment may be influenced by a perception of a direct threat to their religious values. Certainly, small religious groups can feel that their values are threatened by official favoritism toward larger groups, but by the same token, the favored groups can feel their values threaten by various "disestablishment" efforts. Indeed, one part of the "culture

wars” is about such perceived threats to values, and thus the need to maintain—or the need to end—particular government policies. Such concerns could extend to views of free exercise by the value-threatening groups as well. But the perception of more tangible threats by religious groups, such as violence or other direct harm, may matter as well (Jelen and Wilcox 1995, 126-130).

The perception of threat from religious groups or their activities may be implicit in the unease caused by growing religious diversity in the U.S. Such unease is likely to reflect both the perception that a religious group is becoming larger as well as dislike for the group (Wuthnow 2005). Obvious targets of such concern are new religious groups, especially non-Christians, but also members of the expanding secular population, such as atheists. But the growth of existing religious groups could matter in this regard as well; fundamentalist Christians are one such example. In sum, we would expect that overall the perception of threat to values to be positively associated with accommodationist views and negatively associated with libertarian views of free exercise. However, such libertarian views may vary with the particular religious group in question.

Such subjective measures of threat may be exacerbated or mitigated by the individuals’ objective circumstances, specifically the religious diversity of the community in which the individual lives (Campbell 2006). It could be that individuals who live in religiously diverse communities are the more likely to encounter religious groups that are perceived as threatening. If so, greater religious diversity would be positively associated with accommodationist views and negatively associated with libertarian views. Such a pattern would reflect the need to protect the threatened values. Of course, the opposite might be true as

well: the experience of religious diversity might reduce the level of perceived threats from other groups, and thus be negatively associated with accommodationist views and positively associated with libertarian views. Such a pattern would reflect exposure to and greater appreciation of other religious groups.

Of course, church-state controversies are part of broader political debates (Leege et al. 2002), and thus a final source of individual's views on these matters would be their general political views, including self-identified ideology and party identification. Here we expect suggests that conservatism and Republican identification would be positively associated with accommodationist views and have negative associations with libertarian views—while liberalism and Democratic identification would have the opposite pattern (Jelen and Wilcox 1955, 70-72). Such a pattern arises from the contingencies of contemporary politics. After all, one can certainly make the case for the opposite pattern, with conservatives being separatist and libertarian, and liberals being accommodationist and communal.

Data

The data we employ to test these expectations come from the 2008 Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project (CCAP), a multi-university collaborative survey project conducted on-line by Polimetrix, Inc. The questions we examine were asked on the October 2008 wave of CCAP to approximately 2,000 respondents. Polimetrix assembles a massive panel (>1,000,000) of respondents who have opted-in to a request to participate in on-line surveys. Each sample drawn from the panel is matched to a corresponding sample of the universe in question (in this case, a national voter file) using a wide array of demographic characteristics. The result is that

the sample from the Polimetrix panel very closely resembles the sample that would have been drawn from the full population (Rivers 2006; Vavreck and Rivers 2008). Weighting by demographics further ensures that the Polimetrix sample resembles a random sample of the voting population. We concede that the jury is still out on whether the samples drawn using the Polimetrix methodology are fully representative of the general population. For that reason, consider our analysis as preliminary, laying the groundwork for a full-fledged study of Americans' attitudes toward church and state.

We measure attitudes toward church and state with seven items that cover concrete controversies on establishment and free exercise issues. The survey included three establishment clause claims and three free exercise clause claims, plus an item on school vouchers that had elements of both.³ Respondents were asked to select their response to each from a standard Likert scale (ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." The item wording was as follows:

Religious Establishment Items:

Government officials should be allowed to post the 10 Commandments inside government buildings.

A city government should not be allowed to put up a manger scene on government property at Christmas.

Teachers and other public school officials should be allowed to lead prayers in public school.

Mixed Establishment and Free Exercise

³ The particular voucher item asked has an establishment feature in that the vouchers come from the government, but it also has a free exercise feature in that individual parents can express faith by how they spend the voucher.

Parents should have the option of sending their children to non-public schools, including those with a religious affiliation, using vouchers or credits provided by the federal government that would pay for some or all of the costs.

Free Exercise Items

There should be laws against the practice of Satan worship.

Public schools should be allowed to have a policy against students wearing religious dress at school, like Muslim head scarves.

Churches should be denied their tax exemptions if they prevent women from becoming ministers or priests.

All the establishment clause items address issues that have been the subject of recent controversies, including Supreme Court cases. *Prima facie*, they would appear to be closely related to one another as, for example, it seems logical that someone who supports school prayer would also endorse a crèche on government property. Furthermore, each one touches on the relationship between the state and the practices of long-entrenched religious groups in America. Such is the nature of most establishment clause controversies which, almost by definition, involve government endorsement of large and longstanding religious groups. Thus these three items can reveal whether there is an establishment dimension in public opinion.

These free exercise claims differ from the establishment clause questions, in at least two ways. Since controversy over the exercise of religion typically involves small and sometimes unpopular religious groups, one item asks about legally forbidding Satan worship (since Satan-worshippers are a small and unpopular group). Another asks about whether public schools can forbid the wearing of religious dress, specifically citing the example of head scarves worn by some Muslim girls. Muslims, while obviously a large group worldwide, are a relatively small proportion of the US population and, according to public opinion data, are viewed unfavorably

by many Americans (Pew Research Center 2007; Penning 2009). Head scarves have, to date, been a relatively low-profile matter in the US to date, but the issue has roiled European nations like Britain and, especially, France (Bowen 2007). Our question poses a reasonable hypothetical scenario, that a public school wishes to ban the head scarf (and other forms of religious dress).

The second way that the free exercise index differs from the religious establishment questions is that, by design, the free exercise questions cover a wider range of religious activities and groups. Indeed, the third free exercise question departs from the other two, in that it does not ask about a small, possibly exotic, religious group. It instead asks about a policy of some large and longstanding denominations, including the single largest denomination in the United States, the Roman Catholic Church. Should churches which prohibit female clergy be allowed to keep their tax exempt status? This is a free exercise question of a different sort than the other two, since it asks about a practice found within the nation's more conservative religious denominations, including Catholics, Southern Baptists, and Mormons.

These three items can reveal whether there is a free exercise dimension in public opinion, in which respondents support free exercise for all religions. A consistently pro-free exercise position would mean that a respondent does not want a law against Satan worship, would permit Muslim girls to wear head scarves in public schools, and would permit tax exemptions for churches with an all-male clergy. It seems fair to say that the combination of Satan worship, Islam, and conservative denominations comprises a hard test of whether respondents have an expansive view of free exercise.

Table 1 displays the distribution of opinion on these seven items. Consistent with the literature, we can see that a majority of Americans hold opinions that can be classified as

accommodationist views on the first four items. Sixty-four percent strongly agree or agree that the Ten Commandments should be permitted in public buildings, while 69 percent approve of placing a manger on government property. Both topics have been fraught with controversy, but according to the Supreme Court are allowed if other conditions are met. Although teacher-led prayer in public schools has been unequivocally struck down by the courts, but 54 percent still agree or strongly agree that it should be permitted. A similar percentage, 56 percent, endorses school vouchers, which have been deemed constitutional by the Supreme Court under certain circumstances.

<TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE>

Turning to the last three items, we see that a majority of Americans also favor the free exercise of religion, at least as measured by these diverse items. Sixty-four percent disagree or strongly disagree with a law to forbid Satan worship, 66 percent do not think that public schools should forbid religious garb, and 65 percent say that churches with all-male clergy should still receive a tax exemption. These findings are generally consistent with past research, but with some variation.

Overall, responses to these questions indicate that the American public can be described as comfortable with religiosity in the public square: favorable toward actions that either violate or skirt Supreme Court precedents regarding religious establishment, and broadly supportive of free exercise—even for Satanists and Muslims. Nonetheless, there are some notable differences across the specific questions. Note, for example, that a larger majority of Americans support displaying the Ten Commandments and crèches on government property than feel the same about school prayer or vouchers. Significantly, about the same overall

percentage of Americans oppose a ban on religious dress at school (including Muslim head scarves) as do not want to end the tax exemption for denominations with all-male clergy. People feel more strongly about the tax exemption, though, as 30 percent strongly disagree ending it, compared to 21 percent who strongly disagree with a ban on religious dress in public schools.

Three of these items are fairly similar to items asked in the Williamsburg Charter Survey in 1987 (analyzed by Jelen and Wilcox 1995). These limited comparisons provide a sense of how public opinion may have changed over the previous twenty years. In the late 1980s, 86 percent of the public agreed that a crèche could be placed on government property, compared to 69 percent that agreed in 2008. And twenty years before, 67 percent disagreed that churches with all-male clergy should lose their tax-exemption, about the same as the 65 percent that agreed in 2008. However, the biggest change was on banning Satan worship: in 1987 just 40 percent of the public disagreed with such a ban, compared to 64 percent 2008. Although one must be careful not to overstate these changes, it does suggest that the American public may have become less accommodationist on the establishment dimension and more libertarian on free exercise.

Exploratory principal components factor analysis of these seven items reveals the underlying structure of public opinion on these measures of church-state attitudes. The results, displayed in Table 2, show two dimensions of opinion roughly associated with establishment and free exercise. Clearly, the strongest dimension incorporates support for establishment views. The three establishment items load positively and strongly on this factor, as does support for vouchers, suggesting that the public sees this version of school vouchers largely in

establishment terms. Here the two strongest loadings are for the Ten Commandments and school prayer, long running controversies in church-state relations. In addition, opposition to a law forbidding Satan worship loads negatively on this factor, indicating that support for the free exercise of small and unpopular religious groups does not necessarily coincide with accomodationist views toward large and popular groups.

There is also evidence for a weaker second dimension which reflects favorability toward free exercise in all three contexts: Satanists, Muslims, and traditional denominations. With a low eigenvalue and relatively small loadings it is questionable whether these items truly form an index, but given the disparate nature of the three component items it is nonetheless noteworthy that they cohere at all.

It is worth noting that a similar factor structure emerges from an analysis of the Williamsburg Charter data, using the three similar items and three additional items that are worded differently but are conceptually similar (school prayer, vouchers, and student religious clubs at public schools). This comparison suggests that this rough two-dimension structure of public attitudes may have existed for some time even in concrete cases. This pattern certainly fits with Jelen and Wilcox's conclusion on the relative weight of accomodationist and libertarian positions in the public (1995:148-154)

Based on these results, we have created an additive index of the four items that load on the first factor to form an index assessing support for religious establishment ($\alpha=.77$). The three free exercise items will be modeled separately, since they do not form a cohesive index ($\alpha=.17$).

The survey also included items designed to tap the perception of religious threat, drawn from a 2001 survey by the Pew Research Center (Pew Research Center 2001). One question asked directly if the respondents felt that their values were threatened in today's America. A total of 34 percent believed that their values were "very threatened," while only 18 percent believe their values are not threatened at all (19 percent believe they are slightly threatened, and 29 percent believe they are moderately threatened). So a solid majority of Americans believed their values were at least moderately threatened. There was a correlation of 0.37 ($p < 0.000$) between ideology and threatened values, suggesting that while threat has a relationship to ideology, neither are they identical.

Three pairs of questions were asked to measure an implicit threat from key religious groups. Each has the same format, so we use one illustrative example for explanation.

Do you think the number of people in the U.S. who are atheists or who don't believe in God is increasing, decreasing or staying about the same?

Increasing/ Decreasing/ Staying the same

If Increasing:

Does the increase in the number of people in the U.S. who are atheists or who don't believe in God sometimes bother you, or not?

Yes/ No

The same type of question was then asked about "people who practice religions other than Christianity and Judaism," and "fundamentalist Christians."

All told, some 46.2 percent of Americans reported that atheists were increasing in number; a total of 26 percent of all Americans (a) perceive an increase in atheists and (b) reported being bothered by this perceived increase. Meanwhile, more than one-half (55

percent) of the respondents reported that the percentage of non-Judeo Christians is rising, and a total of 25 percent of the population said they were bothered by the rising level of religious diversity. In contrast, only 28 percent of the population believed that fundamentalists are increasing in numbers, and a total of 16 percent of the population said they were bothered by a perceived growth in fundamentalists. So about one-quarter of Americans are potentially threatened by the growth of atheists and non-Christians, and about one-sixth by Christian fundamentalists.

State-level religious diversity was measured with data from the Pew Forums' 2007 Religious Landscape Survey, whose sample size was large enough to generate estimates of religious composition by state. A Herfindahl index measuring religious diversity has been generated for each state, coded so that a higher number means greater diversity.⁴

Sources of Views on Religious Establishment and Free Exercise

What are the sources of these views on establishment and free exercise? A final step is to investigate these relationships using multiple regression analysis, with the results of four equations reported in Table 3. The first column looks at the establishment index and the next three at the free exercise items separately (tax-exemption for clergy, no ban on religious dress

⁴ Religious Diversity Index = $1 - \sum_r h_{rs}^2$

where r represents the eleven religious traditions and s represents each state. The term h_{rs} , therefore, is the proportion of each religious group in each state.

in public school, and no law against Satan worship).⁵ All the equations include the variables we expect to have an impact on church-state opinions. In these analyses, we employ robust standard errors and account for clustering by state.

<TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE>

A good place to begin the discussion is with the measures of religion.⁶ As can be seen in Table 3, religious affiliation has a mixed impact on church-state opinions (Mainline Protestants are the excluded category). Indeed, only membership in minority faiths has a statistically significant impact on establishment views--with Black Protestants tending to hold accommodationist views, while Jews, Liberal Faiths, and the unaffiliated tend toward separationist views. Minority faiths also have some impact on the free exercise items, with the Other Christians (led by Mormons) favoring the tax-exception item, while Jews and Other Non-Christians tend to oppose it. The Liberal Faiths and Jews also support freedom for Satan worshippers, all else taken into account.

But consistent with past findings, membership in the large Christian traditions does not have an independent impact in any of the four equations. It could well be that this reflects the internal diversity of these religious traditions and that other items in the equations are tapping that diversity in a fashion that is most directly related to church-state views. One such variable

⁵ Recall that Traditional Religion is an index, coded so that it ranges from 0 to 15, enough categories to warrant using linear regression. The free exercise items have a narrower range, from 0 to 3, but for consistency's sake are also modeled using OLS, even though ordered logit would also be appropriate. Note that the use of ordered logit does not change the substantive results one whit.

⁶ Religious traditions are coded into eleven categories: mainline Protestants, evangelical Protestants, Hispanic Protestants, Black Protestants, Catholics, Hispanic Catholics, Other Christians (e.g. Mormons), liberal faiths (e.g. Unitarians), Jews, Other non-Christians (e.g. Muslims), and Nones (those with no religious affiliation). See Kellstedt et al. (1996). Religious commitment is measured with an additive index which combines frequency of worship attendance, religious guidance, and importance of religion ($\alpha=.65$).

is religious commitment, which has a statistically significant impact in all the models. As expected, religious commitment is associated with accommodationist views on the establishment index. And interestingly, it also has a positive impact on two of the free exercise items, in favor of the tax-exemption and religious dress items. And on the Satan worship item, religious commitment is small and not statistically significant. These patterns represent a departure from our expectations. One interpretation of these findings is the most committed members of the largest religious traditions can find common cause with members of small and even unpopular religions.

The positive relationship between strength of religious commitment and an inclusive opinion toward Muslims' dress provides empirical evidence for the hypothesis that, in contrast to Western Europe, Muslim integration in the United States is facilitated by the highly religious character of the American population. This model obviously does not answer that question, but it does suggest that further exploration of the hypothesis with cross-national data is in order.

As expected, other measures of demography also have an independent effect on these measure of church-state opinion. Gender is statistically significant in all the models, with women being more accommodationist on the establishment index. There was, however, a more varied pattern on the free exercise items: women were less libertarian on tax-exemptions for churches with all male clergy and more libertarian on school dress (which specifically mentioned feminine garb). These patterns may reflect special concerns of women as women. However, women were less libertarian on Satan worship. These results may well reveal the many values citizens bring to bear on concrete church-state issues. In contrast to gender, education has the expected pattern: better educated respondents were more

accommodationist on establishment issues and more libertarian on all the free exercise issues. Age showed some modest effects as well, with older respondents tending to hold less libertarian views on school dress and Satan worship.

We turn next to the variables measuring both an explicit and implicit sense of threat. As expected, people who believe that their values are threatened are more accommodationist on establishment issues. Here, too, a more varied pattern appears on the free exercise issues: perceived threat is positively associated with the tax-exemption item, negatively associated with the school dress item, and largely unrelated to the Satan worshipping item. At the same time, the measures of implicit threat have the expected impact. People who are bothered by a perceived increase in atheists and non-Judeo Christians are both more accommodationist on establishment issues, while those that are bothered by a perceived increase in fundamentalist Christians have more separatist views.

At the same time, the implicit threat from these three groups show intuitively satisfying patterns for the free exercise items: people who are bothered by the increase in atheists favor the tax-exempt item; those who are bothered by the increase in non-Judeo Christians oppose the school dress item (which references Muslims); and those who are bothered by the increase in fundamentalist Christians favor freedom for Satan worshippers. These patterns support the view that perceived harmfulness of a religious group motivates limits on the free exercise of religion. Significantly, these effects are not observed for people who say that they perceive a

changing religious complexion, but only for those who are *bothered* by the increases they perceive.⁷

Table 3 shows that state-level religious diversity did not have a statistically significant impact on establishment attitudes, although the coefficient was negative, indicating an association with separatist views. However, state-level religious diversity did have an impact on two of the free exercise items, with mixed results. Greater religious diversity was associated with support for the tax-except items, but negatively associated with the school dress item as well as Satan worshipping, although the latter was not statistically significant. Taken as a whole, these findings support the threat rather than the contact hypothesis, as greater diversity leads to lower approval for free exercise for minority faiths

It is also possible that reactions to religious diversity vary according to religious tradition. As a preliminary test of tradition-specific responses, we tested whether members of two of the largest traditions, evangelicals and Catholics, react distinctively to religious diversity within their state. To detect such a distinctive response requires the religious group in question to be reasonably large and spread across a variety of states; evangelicals and Catholics each meet both criteria. The test entails an interaction between the binary variable indicating each group with the measure of state-level religious heterogeneity. A significant coefficient would mean that, relative to mainline Protestants (the omitted group), either evangelicals or Catholics differ in their response to religious diversity. However, in no case are the interactions

⁷ Perceptions regarding the changing religious complexion of America are divided into three mutually exclusive categories: those who perceive that the group in question (atheists, non-Judeo Christians, Christian fundamentalists) is static or decreasing (in the models, the omitted category); those who perceive an increase but are not bothered by it; those who both perceive and are bothered by an increase. By including both of the latter groups in the model, we can distinguish between perceiving an increase and discomfort with it—a critical distinction.

statistically significant. In results not shown, we also tested whether either group responds to the proportion of unaffiliated in their state, or to the percentage of their co-religionists. Again, we found no significant interactions. In other words, neither evangelicals nor Catholics react uniquely to their religious context with regard to their church-state views.

Finally, self-identified ideology and partisanship are independently related to church-state views, as expected.⁸ Ideology showed the most consistent impact, with conservatism associated with accommodationist views on establishment issues, support for the tax-exempt items, but opposition to the school dress and Satan worship items. And party identification was positively associated with accommodationist views, but also associated with support for the freedom of Satan worshippers. These are strong findings because they survive the impact of a wide variety of other variables. Clearly, general political variables have an important impact on church-state attitudes in the American public.

Conclusions and Discussion

This analysis has largely confirmed the basic findings of the limited literature on the structure and sources of church-state attitudes in American public. Despite the well-known cognitive limitations of the public, such opinions appear to have a clear structure, roughly linked to the establishment and free exercise clauses in the First Amendment. The strongest of these dimensions is on establishment issues, where on a range of concrete cases, Americans favor government accommodating common activities by popular religious groups. Indeed, the

⁸ Partisanship is measured using the standard seven-point scale, from Strong Democrat (=1) to Strong Republican (=7). Ideology is measured by asking respondents to place themselves on a 5-point scale: Very Liberal (=1), Liberal, Moderate, Conservative, Very Conservative (=5).

clarity and strength of this dimension appears to reflect the impact of the large Christian traditions in the American public. The weaker of the two dimensions is on free exercise issues, where on a range of concrete cases, Americans also do not favor government limits on religious liberty. However, the lack of clarity and strength of this dimension appears to reflect the very diversity of religious groups the United States, ranging from large and popular groups (such as those that have all-male clergy) to those that are small and unpopular (Satan worshippers and non-Judeo Christians). A limited comparison with the Williamsburg Charter data from 1987 suggests that this structure of opinion is not new, although the concrete controversies and opinion on those controversies may have changed. Indeed, it may well be that the American public has become both more accommodationist and liberatarian over the last two decades.

One reason for this structure may be the multiple sources of church-state attitudes in public. Here, too, most of our expectations were met. In terms of establishment attitudes, traditional religious commitment was an important factor on the accommodationist side. Religious affiliation mattered less, with minority traditions found on both the accommodationist and especially the separatist positions. Other demography also mattered, with women being more accommodationist and the better educated more separationist. Value threats were also important, with those perceiving a direct threat to their values being more accommodationist, along with those bothered by the increased number of atheists. In an analogous fashion, respondents bothered by the increased number of fundamentalists were more separationist. Finally, conservatism was linked to accommodationist views and so was Republican party identification.

The pattern for free exercise was more complicated, given the varied controversies under consideration. Indeed, the issue of tax-exemption for churches with all-male clergy most closely resembled the pattern for the establishment index, while the issue of school dress and Satan worshippers were less similar. Traditional religious commitment and membership in minority faiths mattered on one or another of these issues, correlating with more libertarian positions. Meanwhile, the well-educated were uniformly more libertarian, older people often less libertarian, and women showed a variegated pattern, potentially reflecting gendered concerns.

Values threats, direct and indirect, also showed this mixed pattern on free exercise, with concern with the increase in atheists, non-Judeo-Christians and fundamentalists mattering when most relevant to the particular free exercise issues—sometimes on the libertarian side and sometimes on the communitarian side. State-level religious diversity also mattered on both sides of some of these issues. And finally political conservatism was important to views on free exercise, enhancing libertarian views on tax-exemption and communitarian views on the other two items.

Substantively, these findings indicate that Americans' opinions on where to draw the line between church and state are complex, as they blend both accommodationist and libertarian views. Opinions on the free exercise of religion, which usually involve small and/or unpopular faiths, are more tenuously held than opinions on religious establishment, which typically involve larger and more "mainstream" religions. In theoretical terms, we are reminded that public opinion on this or any other issue is not created *de novo*, but is instead structured by

political, judicial, and even religious elites, and informed by multiple sources of both information and values.

Looking forward, we draw particular attention to how perceptions of threat correlate with church-state attitudes. Americans who feel that their values are threatened—a common mantra among social conservatives—favor both an accommodationist opinion on religious establishment, and a communalist position on free exercise (at least as applied to religious dress in school). Furthermore, those who are bothered by two major trends in the American religious landscape, the rise in both secularists and non-Judeo Christian faiths, are also more likely to favor the expression of “traditional” religions in the public square and restrictions on “exotic” religions. Given that secularists and members of non-Judeo-Christian faiths are both increasing (Hout and Fischer 2002; Eck 2001) this potentially portends continued conflict over the two sides of church and state attitudes: religious establishment and free exercise.

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Table 1. Attitudes on Church-State

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Establishment				
Ten Commandments in public buildings	35.07	29.03	15.19	20.71
Manger scene on government property (polarity reversed)	38.85	30.42	17.24	13.49
Prayer in public schools	22.31	31.48	25.03	21.18
Vouchers for religious schools	23.31	32.79	24.17	19.73
Free Exercise				
Laws against Satan worship	15.21	21.20	43.64	19.95
Public schools should be able to ban religious dress	10.37	23.98	44.37	21.29
No tax exemption for all-male clergy	11.43	23.69	35.20	29.68

For the question about a manger scene on government property, the polarity of the responses has been reversed. As worded in the survey, the statement says “A city government should *not* be allowed to put up a manger scene on government property at Christmas.” Thus, agreeing with that statement is an anti-establishment statement, whereas agreeing with the other establishment clause items reflects pro-establishment opinion. Reversing the polarity of the manger question simplifies the presentation.

Table 2. Factor Analysis of Church-State Attitudes
 (results from principal components analysis)

	Factor 1 Religious Establishment	Factor 2 Free Exercise	Uniqueness
Ten commandments	0.88	-0.03	0.23
School prayer	0.84	-0.10	0.28
Manger scene	0.58	0.17	0.51
School vouchers	0.64	0.28	0.63
Satan worship	-0.60	0.50	0.39
All-male clergy	0.46	0.59	0.44
Muslim headscarves	-0.22	0.63	0.56
Eigenvalue	2.84339	1.10626	

Table 3. Predictors of Church – State Attitudes (results from linear regression)

	Establishment Index	Tax exemption for all-male clergy	No ban on religious dress in public	No law against Satan worship
Female	0.395*** (0.144)	-0.117** (0.0469)	0.163*** (0.0363)	-0.260*** (0.0433)
Education	-0.315*** (0.0512)	0.0651*** (0.0153)	0.0436** (0.0187)	0.153*** (0.0143)
Age	-0.00342 (0.00570)	0.000146 (0.00178)	-0.0107*** (0.00232)	-0.00516*** (0.00137)
White	0.0548 (0.405)	-0.0680 (0.166)	0.0829 (0.159)	0.167** (0.0809)
Hispanic	-0.591 (1.257)	-0.349 (0.247)	0.323 (0.384)	0.0666 (0.391)
Ideology	0.679*** (0.0790)	0.191*** (0.0362)	-0.124*** (0.0364)	-0.114*** (0.0304)
Party ID	0.170*** (0.0455)	0.0301 (0.0194)	-0.0108 (0.0152)	0.0454*** (0.0135)
Values threatened	0.316*** (0.109)	0.0531* (0.0297)	-0.0395* (0.0231)	0.00591 (0.0198)
Atheists increasing	-0.542*** (0.191)	-0.274*** (0.0705)	-0.0635 (0.111)	0.230*** (0.0740)
Bothered by atheists	1.307*** (0.203)	0.227** (0.0856)	0.0539 (0.113)	-0.574*** (0.0963)
Non Judeo-Christians increasing	-0.316 (0.200)	0.101 (0.0698)	0.139* (0.0754)	0.154** (0.0587)
Bothered by non-Judeo Christian faiths	0.649*** (0.169)	0.0306 (0.0847)	-0.505*** (0.0621)	-0.0589 (0.0605)

Christian fundamentalists increasing	0.628*** (0.174)	-0.0703 (0.0603)	-0.0754 (0.0644)	-0.254** (0.109)
Bothered by fundamentalists	-1.199*** (0.228)	0.0442 (0.0865)	0.0534 (0.0823)	0.252** (0.102)
Evangelical Protestant	-1.561 (2.784)	1.566 (1.493)	-0.256 (0.867)	-0.0961 (1.061)
Hispanic Protestant	0.404 (1.363)	0.0887 (0.367)	-0.116 (0.452)	-0.355 (0.449)
Black Protestant	1.244* (0.696)	-0.105 (0.296)	-0.0106 (0.247)	-0.0676 (0.164)
Catholic	0.0332 (3.469)	2.324 (2.040)	-1.442 (1.120)	-0.910 (1.359)
Hispanic Catholic	0.481 (1.016)	0.177 (0.237)	-0.0809 (0.342)	-0.507 (0.434)
Other Christian	-0.516 (0.424)	0.357** (0.138)	0.180 (0.165)	0.198 (0.139)
Liberal faiths	-2.230*** (0.533)	-0.250 (0.233)	0.339 (0.231)	0.586*** (0.149)
Jew	-2.483*** (0.272)	-0.297* (0.158)	0.179 (0.113)	0.233** (0.112)
Other non-Christian	-0.201 (0.848)	-0.432* (0.238)	0.0256 (0.243)	-0.112 (0.204)
No religion	-1.506*** (0.286)	-0.00409 (0.0786)	0.0450 (0.0773)	0.309*** (0.0790)
Religious commitment	0.101*** (0.0233)	0.0500*** (0.0106)	0.0431*** (0.00685)	-0.0108 (0.00661)

Religious diversity, state	-0.873 (2.581)	2.753*** (0.913)	-1.893** (0.896)	-0.0965 (0.810)
Evangelical X Religious diversity	2.197 (3.363)	-1.850 (1.830)	0.261 (1.076)	0.0363 (1.327)
Catholic X Religious diversity	-0.152 (4.224)	-2.608 (2.545)	1.740 (1.379)	1.059 (1.693)
Constant	4.553** (2.047)	-0.765 (0.828)	4.882*** (0.694)	2.637*** (0.704)
Observations	1895	1904	1909	1906
R-squared	0.560	0.288	0.196	0.309

For religious tradition, Mainline Protestant is the omitted category.
Robust standard errors in parentheses, with clustering by state. Weighted data.

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1