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Acceptance of Other Religions in the United States: An HLM Analysis of Variability across Congregations

Interactions with people who are different become more common and significant as the world becomes more closely connected, both physically and culturally. One of the ways in which such cultural collisions are most deeply felt is over matters of religion. The author explores the importance of religious traditions in sculpting the attitudes religious people hold toward the validity of alternative faiths. By employing the statistical techniques of hierarchical linear modeling (HLM), the current analysis is able to combine prior explanations of individual-level behavior with the contextual effects of the religious congregation, such as strictness, racial homogeneity, and membership size. This is accomplished with the 2001 United States Congregational Life Survey. Results indicate that all religions have distinct ways of influencing the relationship between socio-demographic characteristics and pluralistic attitudes, but that more particular features of the congregation are only sporadically significant.

Key words: *hierarchical linear modeling · racial homogeneity · religious pluralism · strictness · United States · United States Congregational Life Survey*

Les interactions avec des personnes différentes se multiplient et acquièrent plus d'importance à mesure que le monde s'interconnecte, à la fois physiquement et culturellement. L'un des domaines dans lesquels une telle collision est profondément ressentie se situe dans le religieux. L'auteur explore l'importance des traditions religieuses qui façonnent les attitudes que les personnes appartenant à une religion adoptent vis-à-vis de la validité de fois alternatives. En utilisant des techniques statistiques de régression hiérarchique linéaire, l'analyse permet de combiner des explications antérieures concernant le niveau de comportement individuel avec les effets contextuels de la communauté religieuse, tels que la rigueur, l'homogénéité raciale et l'importance de l'adhésion. Cette analyse a été réalisée à l'aide de l'Enquête de 2001 portant sur la Vie des Assemblées aux États-Unis. Les résultats indiquent que chaque religion génère des façons différentes d'influencer la relation entre caractéristiques socio-économiques et attitudes pluralistes, et que des traits communautaires plus spécifiques sont significatifs dans certains cas seulement.

Mots-clés: *États-Unis · homogénéité raciale · modèle de régression hiérarchique linéaire · pluralisme religieux · rigueur · United States Congregational Life Survey*

In a world that is continuously being brought closer together by technology, trade, and politics, encountering diversity is no longer a possibility, but rather inevitable. Among the most profound and meaningful of these meetings with the “other” are in regards to religion. The world’s populations engage in numerous faiths, each with distinctive beliefs, rituals, and practices. As globalization continues to make immigrants and their new ideas more common, people must find a way to reconcile themselves to the existence of a variety of religions. In a world where both religious conflict and religious collaboration are more common than ever before, it is important to understand how people choose which of these stances to take. In addition, while such spiritual attitudes may be very important to the individual, the attitudes that people hold toward other religions also have important consequences on their religious, social, and political actions (Smith, 2007).

By their very nature, the doctrines of religions make claims about the truth of other faiths, both implicitly and explicitly. The most common stance is to claim that all other faiths are false or at least less true, but there are exceptions of extreme inclusivism wherein all religions are seen as equals. Thus, it is not surprising that the religious tradition one belongs to is an important factor in determining attitudes toward other religions. In addition, certain socio-demographic characteristics, such as education, age, race, and marital status can be significant factors.

By using hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) statistical techniques, this study will attempt to parse out the disparate effects of congregation and individual on attitudes toward religious pluralism. This includes an examination of how affiliation with different religious denominations is associated with variation in interactions between socio-demographic characteristics and attitudes toward religious pluralism. In addition, it allows for an examination of the ways in which general qualities of the congregation to which an individual belongs are associated with such attitudes. The major advantage of HLM over a standard ordinary least squares regression model is that it more accurately determines the relationships present between both individual- and group-level characteristics and dependent variables. This is because HLM recognizes that individuals nested in congregations are not independent entities. By virtue of attending the same place of worship, people have many things in common, such as their pastor, their general area of residence, and the type of worship in which they participate. Thus, through HLM we get a clear view of what part of attitudes toward religious pluralism stems from the individual, and what part is due to the congregation in which he or she worships.

This study also aims to test whether two attributes of congregations (the number of prohibitions and racial diversity as measured according to the Herfindahl index) influence the pluralistic attitudes of members, while controlling for a number of individual-level predictors. First, tension theory as laid out by Stark and Finke (2000: 145) hypothesizes that, “The higher its level of tension with its surroundings, the more exclusive, extensive, and expensive is the level of commitment required by a religious group.” In this case, we are interested in the higher level of exclusivity and dismissal of other religions as a result of more distinction from society at large. Second, a theoretical extension of the contact hypothesis will be made. The contact hypothesis predicts that interacting in an equal manner with others who are different leads to an appreciation of these differences and increased tolerance (Emerson et al., 2002). A test will be made of

whether or not exposure to one form of diversity breeds acceptance of other forms of diversity. Because one of the more pronounced and visible forms of diversity in America is racial diversity, the current study will examine its consequences within a congregation. If contact with fellow churchgoers of another race enhances one's acceptance of diversity in general, then we should expect it to correlate with more religiously pluralistic viewpoints.

1. Data and methods

Because the conceptual framework of this study encompasses both churches and adherents, it is necessary to use HLM techniques. HLM is useful for all multilevel research and has recently been used in a variety of analyses about subjects ranging from the aggressiveness of bar staff (Graham et al., 2005) and success of schools (Reeves and Bylund, 2005) to perceptions of students in single-sex schools (Brutsaert, 2002) and displays of affection by interracial couples (Vaquera and Kao, 2005). The 2001 United States Congregational Life Survey (USCLS) is one of the largest surveys of its kind, providing multilevel information about congregants and their congregation, the subsample used here including 122,404 religious adherents from 424 places of worship. In addition, the survey asks all respondents about their views of other religions, making it ideal for the current study. The data used is a random selection from the total sample of over 300,000 people in over 2,000 congregations (Woolever and Bruce, 2002: 79–80). This data was collected from congregations which had members who took part in the 2000 wave of the General Social Survey conducted by the National Opinion Research Center. The obvious benefit of this data is the large number of observations, but an equally important element for the current analysis is that it includes numerous respondents from the same congregation. Thus, we can control for all the characteristics of the place of worship, such as religious tradition and size, while noticing how the varying socio-demographic characteristics of individuals affect attitudes.

Individual-level variables were selected on the basis of availability and evidence from prior literature that they should be significantly related to religious pluralism attitudes. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of each variable as well as the original question wording¹. As a measure of the respondent's attitude toward religious pluralism, the following question is used: "All the different religions are equally good ways of helping a person find ultimate truth?" There are five possible responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The middle value of 3 matches with a response of "Neutral or Unsure." A low score indicates acceptance of equality among religions, while a high score indicates a more exclusive viewpoint. While it is a far simpler measure, this question seems to gauge a similar variation in attitude to Smith's Pluralism/Relativism Index (Smith, 2007).

This study uses six characteristics of the individual respondent as explanatory variables. Each variable was included because it has been shown to be an important predictor of acceptance of alternative religions. Smith (2007) found that women and people who were not married consistently held more accepting views of other religions. Sex is simply coded as a dummy variable of whether or

TABLE 1
Descriptive statistics of respondents over 16 (n = 82,071) and
congregations (n = 342) from 2001 USCLS

Characteristic	Mean (Std. Dev.)	Min.	Max.
<i>Pluralism Measure</i>			
All the different religions are equally good ways of helping a person find ultimate truth?	2.75 (1.26)	1 (Strongly agree)	5 (Strongly disagree)
<i>Worship Attendance</i>			
How often do you go to worship services at this congregation?	5.69 (1.21)	1 (This is my first time)	7 (More than once a week)
<i>Devotion</i>			
How often do you spend time in private devotional activities?	2.37 (1.55)	1 (Every day)	6 (Never)
<i>Education</i>			
What is the highest educational level you have completed?	5.53 (1.76)	1 (No formal schooling)	8 (Graduate degree)
<i>Age</i>			
Age of respondent	50.29 (17.29)	16	100
<i>Per cent ...</i>			
Currently married	67%		
Male	39%		
<i>Average Attendance at Congregation</i>			
	634 (910)	11	5,400
<i>Logarithmic Transformation of Average Attendance</i>			
	5.66 (1.22)	2.40	8.59
<i>Racial Homogeneity of Congregation</i>			
	0.23 (0.16)	0.00	0.87
<i>Count of Prohibitions at Congregation</i>			
	2.02 (2.03)	0.00	7.00
<i>Religious Tradition of Congregation</i>			
Evangelical Protestant	26%		
Mainline Protestant	39%		
Black Protestant	4%		
Jewish	1%		
Catholic	24%		
Other	5%		

Source: 2001 United States Congregational Life Survey, Random Attenders and Random Profiles Datasets

not the respondent is male. Given that women tend to be more religious, it is not surprising that the majority of respondents were female (61%). Marital status is collapsed into a dummy variable of married vs. not married. Married includes all situations wherein the respondent is currently married including "In first marriage," "Remarried after divorce," and "Remarried after death of spouse." The not married category is made up of "Never married," "Living in a committed relationship," "Separated," "Divorced," and "Widowed." The recoding of this variable was based on current cohabitation as well as the religious acceptability of the situation. Using this coding, 67% of the sample qualifies as married, while 33% are not married.

Religiosity of the individual is measured through two variables, since it has been shown to be a significant predictor of pluralistic worldviews (Dreyer et al., 2002). The first is a measure of how frequently respondents attend worship services at the congregation in which they were surveyed. There were seven possible responses ranging from "This is my first time" to "More than once a week". The mean selection of 5.69 falls between "Two or three times a month" and "Usually every week". As we would expect, given that all respondents were surveyed after a religious service, the group in question appears to attend religious services more often than Americans in general. For example, the General Social Survey from 2000 found a mean attendance rate of 3.56 between the categories "Several times a year" and "Once a month." The second measure, devotion, relates to the frequency of private religious activities such as reading the Bible or praying. Unlike the attendance question, there were six possible selections in this case, ranging from "Every day/most days" to "Never." The mean frequency of 2.37 falls between the categories of "A few times a week" and "Once a week." This variable is potentially problematic since it pools a wide range of private religious activities that may have different relationships to religious pluralism. Even so, unstructured religious activities are an important predictor of pluralistic attitudes and need to be included as a control at the very least.

The final two individual-level variables are age and education. Roof and McKinney (1992) suggest that the circumstances the baby-boom generation grew up in make them more accepting of pluralism in all its forms, including religion. Age is simply the number of years since the respondent was born. Only respondents who were at least 16 were included in this analysis but there is still a wide range of responses, with a mean of 50.29 years old and a standard deviation of 17.29 years. Wuthnow (2005: 210) found out that more educated Americans are less likely to have inclusive attitudes. Education is measured based upon the highest degree received, with eight possible categories. The mean educational category of 5.53 falls between "Trade certificate" and "Associate degree."

To ensure that differences in congregations are not simply a measure of the size of the congregation, average attendance is included. This is average attendance in 2001 as estimated by the key informant who provided all the following information about the religious place of worship. Because the distribution of attendance is skewed, a natural logarithmic transformation was performed before its inclusion in the model. Before the transformation the mean attendance was 634 with a standard deviation of 910.

In order to test whether diversity within a congregation causes acceptance of religious diversity, a measure of racial diversity was included. Very few

congregations include members from a variety of religious traditions, but racial diversity is a more common, although not a prevalent, phenomenon. To measure racial diversity a Herfindahl index of racial monopolies was created². The separate possible racial categories were Asian, African American, Hispanic, Native American, White or other. This creates an index, which in this case ranges from 0.00 to 0.87, the lowest score indicating that a congregation is dominated by a single race and a higher score indicating a more multiracial congregation. People in congregations with higher rates of racial heterogeneity would be expected to interact on a more regular basis with people of other races, at least in their worship setting.

Another quality of a congregation that may influence attitudes toward other religious traditions is the level of strictness. In this case, strictness is measured by counting the number of special rules or prohibitions a congregation imposed. The seven possibilities were smoking, drinking alcohol, dancing, gambling, tithing, cohabitation and homosexuality³. This creates a scale ranging from 0 to 7, higher scores indicating more strict congregations. The Cronbach's alpha score of scale is 0.814 and is not improved by the removal of any of the items.

One of the most consistent predictors of all religious behavior is the denomination to which a person belongs. In order to measure this, the Steensland et al. (2000) RELTRAD categorization scheme was employed. This means that each congregation was labeled as Evangelical Protestant, Mainline Protestant, Black Protestant, Jewish, Catholic or other according to the RELTRAD classification system. Because RELTRAD is typically applied to individuals, certain denominations, such as American Baptist and Southern Baptist, can fall into two categories, the determination made being based upon the race of the respondent. Instead for this analysis the determination was made on the basis of whether a majority of the respondents within the congregation were black. The entire congregation was then labeled as Black Protestant or Evangelical, or Black Protestant or Mainline as the case may be. Because prior research has consistently shown that American Evangelicals are the least accepting of religious pluralism, they are used as the reference category.

Within the model, each of the non-dichotomous variables is centered. Individual-level variables are centered at the congregational group mean while congregational-level variables are centered at the grand mean of all congregations. Nominal variables, including sex, marital status, and religious tradition are left uncentered. This means that all intercepts represent the predicted outcome for the average case with dummy variables at zero (i.e. an unmarried female Evangelical Protestant).

The formula of the individual-level model is:

$$\text{Pluralism Scale} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Attendance}) + \beta_2(\text{Devotion}) + \beta_3(\text{Education}) + \beta_4(\text{Age}) + \beta_5(\text{Married}) + \beta_6(\text{Male})$$

With each of the individual-level variable slopes, and the intercept, modeled by the conditions of the congregation:

$$\beta_0 = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{Log of Average Attendance}) + \gamma_{02}(\text{Racial Homogeneity Index}) + \gamma_{03}(\text{Prohibitions Scale}) + \gamma_{04}(\text{Mainline Protestant}) + \gamma_{05}(\text{Black Protestant}) + \gamma_{06}(\text{Jewish}) + \gamma_{07}(\text{Catholic}) + \gamma_{08}(\text{Other Religion})$$

$$\beta_1 = \gamma_{10} + \gamma_{11}(\text{Log of Average Attendance}) + \gamma_{12}(\text{Racial Homogeneity Index}) + \gamma_{13}(\text{Prohibitions Scale}) + \gamma_{14}(\text{Mainline Protestant}) + \gamma_{15}(\text{Black Protestant}) + \gamma_{16}(\text{Jewish}) + \gamma_{17}(\text{Catholic}) + \gamma_{18}(\text{Other Religion})$$

$$\beta_6 = \gamma_{60} + \gamma_{61}(\text{Log of Average Attendance}) + \gamma_{62}(\text{Racial Homogeneity Index}) + \gamma_{63}(\text{Prohibitions Scale}) + \gamma_{64}(\text{Mainline Protestant}) + \gamma_{65}(\text{Black Protestant}) + \gamma_{66}(\text{Jewish}) + \gamma_{67}(\text{Catholic}) + \gamma_{68}(\text{Other Religion})$$

By using HLM it is possible to control for the effects of the characteristics of the congregation to which a respondent belongs. In total, 342 congregations had all relevant individual- and group-level variables. Not only are the effects controlled, but also all possible interactions across groups are tested between individual-level characteristics and congregation-level variables. For example, the model will test whether the effect of age on pluralistic attitudes differs with the size of a congregation.

2. Results

Table 2 shows the results of the full HLM regression, with attitude toward religious pluralism as the dependent variable and all of the individual and congregational attributes as explanatory variables. The first block of parameter estimates provides the intercepts for each congregational variable assuming that all other variables are controlled for and are at their mean levels. Thus, the overall intercept of 3.67 means that, controlling for everything else, the average respondent in the sample would have an attitude toward the equality of all religions of between “Neutral or Unsure” and “Disagree”. Because neither racial homogeneity nor average congregational attendance is significant, we can expect that changes in these conditions do not affect the base level response of individual congregants. The prohibitions scale is significant, implying that for every additional prohibition of a congregation above the grand mean for all congregations, members will tend to be less accepting of the equality of religions by about 0.05 points. We would predict that respondents from a congregation with no prohibitions would score about 0.40 points lower (0.05*8) on the Likert scale than those from a congregation that possessed all seven prohibitions.

In regards to religious tradition, each group is compared to Evangelical Protestant congregations, and all five other traditions have significantly different intercepts. All five coefficients are negative, implying that Evangelicals disagree the most with the equal truth of religious faiths. Respondents from Catholic churches and Jewish synagogues have the lowest average scores, about 2.37 (3.66–1.29), followed by people from other religions (2.53), Mainline Protestants (2.62) and Black Protestants (2.98). Thus, Evangelicals are the only religious group that falls on the disagreement side of the Likert scale rather than the agreement side, on average.

TABLE 2
HLM OLS regression of religious pluralism attitude with
congregants as level-1 and congregations as level-2

	Coefficient	Adjusted Slope
Intercept		
Intercept	3.667***	
Log of Average Attendance	0.000	
Racial Homogeneity Index	0.030	
Prohibitions Scale	0.055***	
Religious Tradition ^a :		
Mainline	-1.048913***	
Black Protestant	-0.683742***	
Jewish	-1.297***	
Catholic	-1.298***	
Other	-1.136***	
Worship Attendance		
Intercept	0.171***	
Log of Average Attendance	-0.003	
Racial Homogeneity Index	0.019	
Prohibitions Scale	0.004	
Religious Tradition ^a :		
Mainline	-0.095***	0.076***
Black Protestant	-0.020	
Jewish	-0.201**	-0.030
Catholic	-0.126***	0.044**
Other	-0.147***	0.023
Devotion		
Intercept	-0.100***	
Log of Average Attendance	-0.011**	
Racial Homogeneity Index	0.026	
Prohibitions Scale	-0.007**	
Religious Tradition ^a :		
Mainline	-0.006	
Black Protestant	0.009	
Jewish	0.102	
Catholic	0.048***	-0.052***
Other	0.100***	-0.000
Education		
Intercept	0.116***	
Log of Average Attendance	-0.001	
Racial Homogeneity Index	-0.020	
Prohibitions Scale	0.006*	

Continued

Table 2 (Continued)

	Coefficient	Adjusted Slope
Religious Tradition^a:		
Mainline	-0.034**	0.082***
Black Protestant	-0.062**	0.054**
Jewish	-0.063	
Catholic	-0.062***	0.055***
Other	-0.064**	0.052**
Age		
Intercept	-0.007***	
Log of Average Attendance	0.000	
Racial Homogeneity Index	0.003	
Prohibitions Scale	0.000	
Religious Tradition^a:		
Mainline	0.003**	-0.004***
Black Protestant	-0.003	
Jewish	0.011*	0.004
Catholic	0.004**	-0.003**
Other	0.007**	0.000
Married		
Intercept	0.166***	
Log of Average Attendance	-0.001	
Racial Homogeneity Index	-0.063	
Prohibitions Scale	-0.008	
Religious Tradition^a:		
Mainline	-0.115**	0.051*
Black Protestant	0.011	
Jewish	-0.213	
Catholic	-0.153***	0.013
Other	-0.142*	0.023
Male		
Intercept	0.087***	
Log of Average Attendance	0.004	
Racial Homogeneity Index	0.044	
Prohibitions Scale	0.002	
Religious Tradition^a:		
Mainline	0.056	
Black Protestant	-0.065	
Jewish	-0.046	
Catholic	0.074*	0.162***
Other	0.166**	0.253***

*p-value≤0.05 **p-value≤0.01 ***p-value≤0.001

^aReference category is Evangelical congregation

Source: 2001 United States Congregational Life Survey, Random Attenders and Random Profiles Datasets

While the differences in intercepts are interesting, the true power of HLM over a standard ordinary least squares regression model is in its ability to simultaneously allow the regression slope between each individual-level variable and attitudes toward religious pluralism to vary across each type of religious congregation. Thus, the second block of numbers in Table 2 provides the predicted relationships between frequency of worship attendance and pluralism score across differences in congregational attributes. The intercept is the average regression slope of worship attendance on pluralism attitude with all other things held constant at the group and grand means. So for a single female Evangelical Protestant who is average in all other ways, we can expect disagreement about religious truth equality to increase by 0.171 points for every category increase in religious attendance above the mean. Since there are seven attendance categories, an increase from the lowest to the highest would be accompanied by an increase in the pluralism scale of about 1.026 (6×0.171), or a full category.

Across congregations average total attendance, racial homogeneity, and prohibitions do not seem to change the relationship between personal attendance and attitudes toward pluralism. In other words, we would expect a slope of 0.171 in a multiracial strict mega church as well as in a uniracial lenient small congregation. However, there is quite a bit of variability in the effect of attendance on attitudes toward religious pluralism between religious traditions.

The adjusted slopes column of Table 2 shows the effect of the pertinent variable on the dependent variable for each religious tradition that is significantly different from Evangelical congregations, which is the omitted category. To calculate the regression slope for Evangelicals it is sufficient to examine the intercept of the variable. The same is true of any religious tradition that is not statistically significantly different from Evangelical Protestant congregations (i.e. in which the difference in slopes is significantly different from zero). In the case of worship attendance, the effect for Evangelicals is 0.171, as is the effect for Black Protestants. However, within other religious traditions, attendance has a very different effect on pluralistic views. Rather than an increase of 0.171 points per increase in attendance category, Mainline Protestants increase by only 0.076 ($0.171 - 0.095$), or less than half the effect. Again, a higher score means that respondents think that all religions are not equal. The difference is even more pronounced for Catholics, who have an adjusted slope of 0.044. This means that a change from the lowest frequency of attendance to the highest would increase a Catholic's pluralism score by only 0.264 (6×0.044) as compared to the increase of 1.026 for Evangelical and Black Protestants. Furthermore, the regression slope for Jews and practitioners of other religions is so different from that of Evangelicals that it is not significantly different from zero⁴. For these two religious groups it appears as if increased attendance does not make a person more likely to differentiate between the truth-value of religions.

Besides attendance at religious services, an important measure of religiosity is how often a person engages in private religious practices such as prayer and reading holy texts. Again, the intercept indicates that for the average reference group more frequent religious practice is associated with less agreement that all religions are true. For every one category drop in private religious devotion the average Evangelical's Likert scale score drops by 0.0998. The same is true of Mainline Protestants, Black Protestants and Jews. The effect is much weaker for

Catholics, with an adjusted slope of -0.052, and not statistically significant for other religions. Unlike the relationship with worship service attendance, private devotion's effect on attitudes toward religious pluralism is influenced by the size of the congregation a person attends as well as the level of strictness. Larger than average congregations cause the effect of private devotion to be stronger, while stricter churches also increase the difference between frequent and infrequent private practitioners in regards to pluralistic viewpoints.

For Evangelicals the effect of education is to increase disagreement with the equality of religious truths by 0.116 points per category of education. The same effect exists for Jews, but Mainline Protestants, Black Protestants, Catholics and other religions all have a weaker relationship between education and pluralism attitudes. For example, for Catholics the effect is about half as strong, with an increase of 0.055 points on the pluralism scale per educational degree increase. The effect of education is also influenced by the strictness of the congregation. As congregations become stricter, their members tend to experience stronger increases in disagreement over pluralism as their education increases.

Becoming older has the opposite effect for Evangelicals to becoming more educated. Growing one year older is associated with a decrease in the pluralism scale of 0.0069 points. This is not influenced by racial homogeneity, attendance or strictness of the congregation a person attends, but is affected by the religious tradition. Black Protestants are similar to Evangelical Protestants in this regard, but Catholics and Mainline Protestants each experience about half the effect of aging. For Catholics, growing one year older makes their pluralism score drop by only 0.003 points. The difference is even more pronounced for Jews and adherents of other religions, whose adjusted slope is not significant. Thus, while Catholics and Protestants become more accepting, to varying degrees, the attitudes of Jews and Others do not change as a result of aging.

Because marital status and sex are each treated as dummy variables, their intercepts and coefficients represent the difference between the two possible categories. Thus, the married intercept of 0.1655 implies that married Evangelicals will be slightly less accepting of all religions being true than unmarried Evangelicals. In this regard, Black Protestants and Jews are similar to Evangelicals. Mainline Protestants do not exhibit nearly as much of a difference based on marital status, with an increase of only 0.051 points for the married category. Both Catholics and Others are not distinguishable from zero, implying that becoming married makes no difference for these two groups on their pluralistic outlooks. None of the other congregational attributes is significant.

Again, for Evangelicals sex is significant. For Evangelical, Mainline, Black Protestants and Jews, men tend to have scores about 0.087 points higher than women do. The difference is even stronger among Catholics and Other religious adherents at 0.162 and 0.253 respectively. All religious men tend to be less accepting of all religions being true, but this difference is greatest among Catholics and those of other religious faiths. As with marital status, changes in congregation membership size, racial heterogeneity or strictness do not affect the relationship between sex and attitudes toward religious pluralism.

To highlight the importance of congregational differences on an individual's attitude toward the truth of other religions, Table 3 shows the variance components for the preceding model. This shows the percentage of variance

TABLE 3
**Variance components of HLM regression for attitude toward
equality of truth of all religions**

Random Effects	Variance Component (% of total)	df	P-value
Congregation mean	0.094 (7.4%)	330	<0.001
Worship Attendance slope	0.004 (0.3%)	330	<0.001
Devotion slope	0.001 (0.1%)	330	<0.001
Education slope	0.001 (0.1%)	330	<0.001
Age slope	0.000 (0.0%)	330	<0.001
Married slope	0.008 (0.6%)	330	0.001
Male slope	0.004 (0.3%)	330	0.088
Level-1 effect	1.159 (91.2%)		
Total Variance	1.271		

Source: 2001 United States Congregational Life Survey, Random Attenders and Random Profiles Datasets

that exists across the congregations, relative to the variance across individuals independent of congregational affiliation. The vast majority of variation exists within the individual respondents: about 91.2%. However, this leaves 8.8% of the variation being accounted for by group-level effects, particularly religious tradition, size, strictness, and racial homogeneity. Furthermore, the explanatory power of congregations is significant for all variables except sex, implying that there is substantial variation in how pluralism attitudes and individual adherent characteristics interact due to congregational characteristics.

3. Discussion

The hierarchical model of attitudes toward religious pluralism indicates several intriguing trends. First, each of the individual-level characteristics is significant and has the same directional effect, for Evangelical Protestants, as those found by Smith (2007) using the 2000 Religion and Politics Survey. Men are less accepting of pluralism than women, and married respondents are less accepting than single people. In addition, being older, less educated, attending services less often, and practicing fewer private religious activities all tend to correlate with greater acceptance of the idea that all religions contain truth. This is important both because it replicates previous results and because it does so while controlling for the characteristics of the congregation. Furthermore, this analysis shows that the variables that influence people's pluralistic views are mediated by the religious tradition from which they come.

While Evangelicals tend to have the highest disagreement score about the existence of truth in all religions, they also exhibit the most differentiation as a result of individual characteristics. Figure 1 shows these interaction effects across all six religious traditions. The combination of differences in intercepts

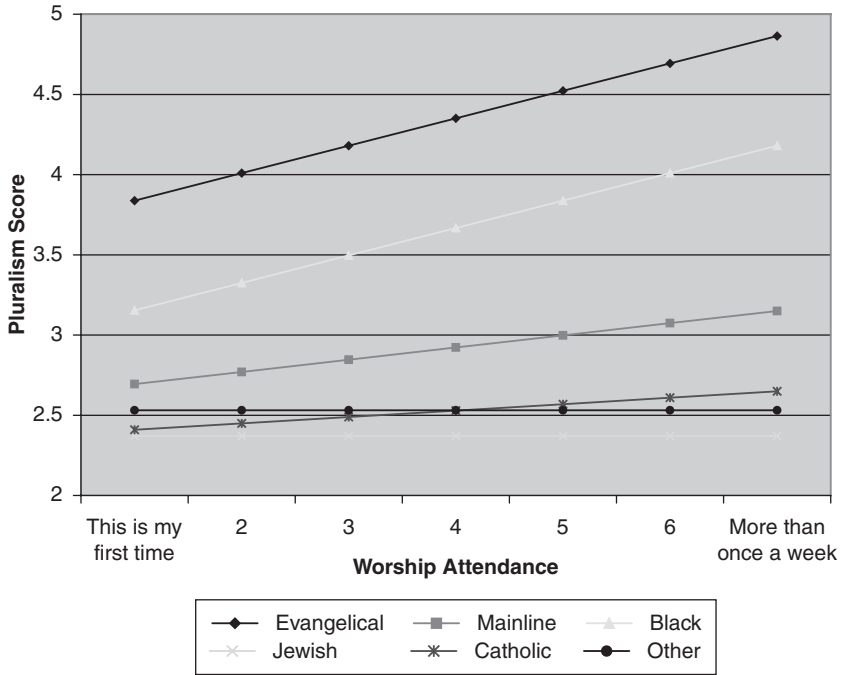


FIGURE 1
Effects of worship attendance on pluralism scale by religious tradition

and slopes means that important differences exist in the way that attendance relates to understanding of other religious faiths. For example, increases in worship attendance have almost two-and-a-half times the effect for Evangelicals as for Mainline Protestants and nearly four times the effect as that on Catholics. Meanwhile for Jews and people of other religions there is no change in their views due to increased attendance.

Black Protestants are quite similar to Evangelicals in the ways that individual-level characteristics relate to opinions on religious pluralism. Overall, they are more likely to see all religions as true, but other than for education their individual interactions are the same. Education has a much weaker effect for Black Protestants, implying that there is more diversity in attitudes between educated and uneducated Evangelicals than there is for Black Protestants.

Many differences exist between Mainline and Evangelical Protestants, one of which appears to be the ways that they condition attitudes toward religious pluralism. On the whole, Mainliners are more accepting of truth in all religions and exhibit different effects as a result of education, age, religious attendance, and marriage. All of these variables have weaker effects in regards to shifting the opinions of Mainline Protestants than they do for Evangelical Protestants. Mainline Protestants appear more stable in their general acceptance of truth in all religions while Evangelicals have the potential to fluctuate more drastically.

Catholics and Evangelicals appear to be the most different in their opinions of pluralism and the ways in which they shape their attitudes. For every individual-level variable, the effect for these two groups is different. For every variable except sex, Catholics exhibit less variability. In the case of sex, it appears that being male has almost twice the effect in regards to making a Catholic less accepting than it does for Evangelicals.

An even more noticeable difference is the lack of any significant relationship between the pluralism scale and attendance for Jews and those of other religions. While the relationship is difficult to disentangle for the various other religions, Judaism appears to not reinforce religious truth exclusivity. This may be due to the fact that Jews regard their religion as an ethnic identity, so that other religions can safely be called true without being appropriate for them. For Protestants and Catholics, in contrast, there is more of a need to explain the superiority of a particular faith, in which truth is a common criterion. Similarly, age is not significantly related to pluralistic attitudes for Jews, while it is for Catholics and Protestants.

One of the most surprising lacks of relationships in this study is between pluralistic attitudes and congregational attributes other than religious tradition. Racial homogeneity has no effect on the overall attitude toward religious pluralism or the interactions with the characteristics of individuals. Instead of racial diversity creating more acceptance of truth existing in diverse religious beliefs, it appears to make no difference. Similarly overall membership size, as measured by attendance, is only significant for the interaction with private religious practice. It may be that in larger congregations, private religiosity compensates for the lack of personal interaction within the congregation. Thus, in larger churches people who do engage in private practice experience a stronger shift in their pluralistic attitudes.

Religious strictness is not significant for most of the interactions, but there are several exceptions. Overall, congregations that are more lenient tend to have more members who think all religions are true. This fits with the model of strictness as a measure of the strength of boundaries between the congregation and outgroups. Strict groups are intentionally different from society as a whole and as a result believe they possess truths that other religious groups do not. In addition to the overall effect, more prohibitions lead to a stronger effect for private devotion and education. Even so, the differences are fairly minor given the overall changes in the mean intercept caused by being in a strict or lenient congregation. Thus, while it would be important to control for strictness in future studies, it may not be as powerful an element as previously thought.

This analysis has demonstrated that people belonging to different religious traditions in America tend to have different attitudes toward the truth claims of other religious groups. Religious tradition was also the strongest congregational influence, the characteristics of strictness, size, and racial diversity only occasionally being important. Furthermore, each religious group has a distinct mediating effect on how the socio-demographic attributes of adherents influence these viewpoints. For example, being more educated or attending services more frequently does not have the same effect for Evangelical Protestants as for Catholics when it comes to shaping opinions on religious pluralism. This indicates that future research would do well to investigate not only the effects on attitudes of affiliation to a particular religious group, but also how the characteristics of individuals within a group, and of the group itself, affect the forming of attitudes.

NOTES

¹ More detailed question descriptions, as well as information about the USCLS, can be found at www.thearda.com.

² A Herfindahl index sums the squares of the proportion of market share that each group holds and subtracts it from one—in this case the proportion of each race present within the congregation. These proportions were determined by taking categories reported by individual respondents within a congregation. A value of zero indicates all the members of the congregation are the same race, while values closer to one indicate more heterogeneity.

³ Informants were also asked whether their congregation had special rules about what people ate, but factor analysis showed that this prohibition did not co-vary with the other seven.

⁴ The significance of each adjusted slope was determined by rerunning each model with the particular religious tradition as the reference group, rather than Evangelical Protestants. Then the p-value of the intercept for the relevant individual-level variable was reported.

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