Christian Fundamentalists or Atheists

Who do Progressive Christians Like or Hate More?

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Abstract

This paper examines the propensity of theological, political, and/or denominational progressive Christians to have affinity or disaffinity towards Christian fundamentalist and atheists. Thermometer questions on the American National Election Studies assess how progressive Christians rank Christian fundamentalists and atheists. Theological and political progressive Christians are shown to have disaffinity toward, or dislike of, fundamentalist Christians and are relatively less likely to have affinity towards, or to like, conservative Christians while they are less likely to have disaffinity towards, or to not like, atheists. Political progressive Christians also tend to have affinity with atheists. Belonging to a progressive Christian denomination did not have any effects on the affinity/disaffinity towards either Christian fundamentalists or atheists. These relationships remain after application of social and demographic controls.

Keywords: progressive Christians, Christian Fundamentalists, Atheists, affinity, disaffinity

Introduction

Religion is an important source of social identity (Ysseldyk, Matheson, and Anisman; Seul; Joseph). The highly religious determine answers to questions of meaning, purpose, and social position largely through their religious identity (Petersen and Roy; Dogan; McAdams and Albaugh 2008a). Because these answers are often mutually exclusive to answers offered by other religious groups, religious identity may facilitate intergroup religious conflict. Yet sometimes religious groups perceive other religious groups as quite similar to themselves, and perhaps even as allies. Alliances among groups with similar religious epistemological beliefs and social interests may develop to achieve political (Marsh; Rieger and Pui-Lan), social (

Clark and Mason), or even religious (Clark) goals. Such allies likely have similar answers to questions of purpose and social position, making it easier for members of the different religious groups to identify with each other. A given religious group identifying another religious group as an outgroup can cause religious conflict due to different interpretations of meaning and purpose.

Religious identity by itself may not determine group loyalty. Hawkins and Nosek argue that perceived political allegiance is the major reason why conservative Christians are more supportive of religious charities than liberal Christians. Religious ingroups are often contextualized by political and social conflicts with other religious groups. One of the important religious conflicts in the United States began in the latter half of the nineteenth century within American Protestantism and focused upon whether the goal of Christianity should be salvation of the lost or a social gospel to improve society (Moberg; Wuthnow 1989). This led to a split within Protestant Christianity into those with a mainline, or progressive, theological perspective, and those with a more conservative theology. This conflict eventually spilled out of Protestant Christianity with arguments between those wanting a pure church, and those desiring progressive societal reforms and eventually influenced American Catholicism (Dillon; Gibson and Hare; Appleby).

Given this intragroup conflict among Christians, it may be possible that progressive Christians have more affinity for non-Christian religious groups than for conservative Christians. Previous research on intrareligious Christian conflict has documented the propensity of conservative Christians to reject Christians who are not sufficiently "strict" in their interpretation of Christianity (Kelley; Ammerman; Jelen and Wilcox). However, Christians who do not prioritize theological purity may be alienated from strict Christians while accepting individuals they perceive as more open and welcoming. Previous literature indicates progressive Christians politically distinguish themselves from conservative Christians, especially on culture war issues (Jensen; Hoffmann and Johnson; Burke). Consequently, it is possible for progressive Christians to find more in common with a group like atheists who reject Christianity but share similar social values of tolerance and rationality. The progressive Christian's rational, tolerant, and humanist approach to their faith has been favorably compared to epistemological understandings of secularists (Metzger). Thus, it is not surprising that politically and theologically progressive Christians often ally with atheists and other secularists in organizations such as Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, People for the American Way, and the ACLU.

Do such political alliances indicate that progressive Christians have greater affinity towards secular individuals who share their political and social values than towards more conservative Christians? It is quite possible that progressive Christians are willing to work with those of different religious traditions, or no religious tradition, but still have higher loyalty and affection for other Christians. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the propensity of theological, political, and denominational progressive Christians to have affinity or disaffinity towards Christian fundamentalist and atheists. Such an investigation allows us to see if progressive Christians identify more with the social/political goals of atheists than with Christian fundamentalists. Using different dimensions of progressive Christianity will help shine a light on how different aspects of progressive religiosity influence the construction of a progressive Christian social identity.

Religious Intergroup Conflict

Intergroup conflict is part of a multicultural society. Such conflict can be used to gain important societal resources by justifying the removal of those resources from outgroups. Conflict among groups enables a group to define itself by establishing group/outgroup boundaries (Ting-Toomey; Crocker and Luhtanen; Voci). Outgroups provide examples of what are perceived as dysfunctional behaviors and negative interpretation of such behaviors helps to illustrate the implicit values of the group. Who group members select as outgroups is generally associated with a given social identity (Zou, Morris, and Benet-Martinez; Price and Oshagan; Ledgerwood and Chaiken) and allow group members to define what they are not. To reinforce the difference of the group from an outgroup, the group generally develops disaffinity towards members of the outgroup.

A group's social identity is often strengthened by locating ingroups that help define that identity. Brewer argues that ingroup loyalty can exist separate from any motivations individuals have in order to maintain prejudice towards outgroups. Favoritism towards those recognized as part of the ingroup is more likely to occur when the commonalities one has with the ingroup are highly salient to a particular situation (Mullen, Brown, and Smith). This favoritism is important beyond identity construction as it allows groups to find allies. In a battle to obtain resources, there is value in working with other groups as long as those ingroups share enough common values and concerns to constitute mutual allegiance. Consequently, such loyalty will engender individuals to have an affinity towards those members of a perceived ingroup.

Religion is a valuable source of social identity and group affinity. Some scholars have argued that religion is the primary source of purpose, meaning, and morality (Fry; Park, Edmondson, and Hale-Smith; Preston, Ritter, and Ivan Hernandez; Geertz; McAdams and Albaugh). Religious individuals can see those of other faiths as proponents of competing systems of meaning. Consequently, individuals from different religions have an incentive to envision each other as outgroups. However, if other religious groups share similar, although not identical, ideals about purpose, meaning, and morality, then those groups may be allies – working together with more societal resources at the expense of other social groups. A Christian identity may provide enough similarity between religious subgroups so that it can act as a natural bridge for coalition. For example, recent research (Wilcox, Rozell, and Gunn) suggests that Christian particularism plagued early religious based political movements, but recent incarnations of these movements have resulted in broader Christian coalitions. Wilcox, Jelen and Leege point out that various Christian religious identities create a perception of a common fate which may promote political advocacy.

Progressive Christians

The modernist/fundamentalist schism in the early twentieth century may have created groups so estranged from each other that such partnership is not feasible. Christian fundamentalism developed largely in reaction to innovations of science, such as Darwinism, and new social changes emerging from modernity (Hofstadter). In reaction to the emergence of this wing of Christianity many Christians reaffirmed the modern social changes and new scientific focuses. For example, some of the nation's prestigious universities that were once conservative seminaries began to promote biblical higher criticism, moral relativism, and the

scientific method. Such ideals were also accepted within many mainline denominations as they became the forerunners of a progressive Christianity that in part defines itself as accepting many modernist innovations rejected by conservative Christians.

Many Protestant denominations recognized as progressive today originally promoted a conservative theology (Carpenter; Marty 1970). However, social forces of modernity moved many of these denominations away from positions of theological certainty into more flexible doctrine focusing more on societal improvement than personal sin (Andrain; Wuthnow and Evans; McAdams and Albaugh 2008b). Furthermore, the values of progressive Christians and their denominations moved from claims of absolutism to an emphasis on tolerance, rationality, and acceptance (Roof and McKinney; Edles; Wellman). Some progressive Protestant leaders have been critical of what they perceive as judgmentalism and intergroup bigotry on the part of other Christians (Spong; McLaren). They also argue that conservative Protestants rely too much on a literal definition of the Bible (Borg; Spong; Kania). An overreliance on a holy text can be seen as authoritarian and contrary to a modernist perspective of truth. Such criticisms suggest that a major way progressive Protestants develop their social identity is by rejection of dysfunctions they perceive among conservative Protestants. This possibility is strengthened by previous research (Bolce and De Maio 1999; Yancey and Williamson 2014), indicating that individuals with high educational attainment, a quality more common among theologically and politically progressive Christians (Pew Research Center 2015; Wellman; Marty 2011), are more likely to have antipathy towards conservative Christians.

Catholicism is also influenced by divisions based on conservative and progressive ideology (Starks). While in the past the division centered on birth control and women's ordination (Manning; Weaver), current conflict among Catholics often fits in with cultural war issues in general society (Starks). Conservative, or traditional, Catholics are uncomfortable with the questioning of the Church's authority while progressive Catholics believe that such questions are important in modern society (Manning; Starks), creating a key distinction in how Catholics may find separate sources of meaning. In many ways, progressive Catholicism mirrors progressive Protestantism because both question whether to accept modern interpretations rather than traditional authority in their interpretation of religious traditions.

Atheists stand at the other end of the theological, and often political, spectrum from fundamentalist and conservative Christians. Atheists are highly unlikely to accept sacred writings, religion as authoritative, or the notion of an afterlife. Previous research indicates that atheists are heavily invested in promoting social changes following a progressive political and social philosophy (Schulzke; Abdel Haq; Williamson and Yancey; Cimino and Smith). Furthermore, progressive social movements heavily influenced by atheists tend to prioritize the ideals of religious neutrality (Yancey and Williamson). These social values can contribute to an image of atheists as politically progressive and open-minded. In critical ways, the stated social aims of atheists are similar to progressive Christians, although atheists have distinct theological differences with such Christians. While atheists are generally less accepted than any religious group (Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartmann), understanding the acceptance of atheists should be contextualized by understanding potential theological or social motivating influences. Since individuals with a traditional moral structure are more likely to reject atheists (Whitt and Nelsen; Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartmann), individuals lacking a deep adherence to a

traditional notion of morality, as we would expect among progressive Christians, may be linked to an affinity stronger than any affinity possessed by fundamentalist Christians.

Hypothesis

This research investigates one aspect of how progressive Christians define themselves in the larger American culture by comparing their attitudes towards Christian fundamentalists, and atheists. Specifically, I assess affinity or disaffinity towards fundamentalist Christians and atheists to assess the potential value progressive Christians place on their general Christian identity relative to their progressive social and political attitudes. If progressive Christians tend to create negative appraisals of fundamentalist Christians who they may envision as intolerant and closed minded, then they are likely to have relative disaffinity towards them. Furthermore, if the focus of progressive Christians is on a rational approach that is not dependent on a sacred book or church, then they may envision atheists as potential allies and have relative affinity towards them. On the other hand, if progressive Christians are deeply tied to their core theological Christian beliefs, then they would be significantly more likely to have relative disaffinity towards atheists, who deny the value of those beliefs, and, despite potential differences, perceive an alliance with and affinity towards more conservative Christians. It is possible that subgroups among progressive Christians have affinity towards other Christians or atheists as outgroups while other segments of progressive Christians have disaffinity towards them. If this occurs, then we should see progressive Christians significantly more likely to show both affinity and disaffinity towards fundamentalist Christians and/or towards atheists when compared to progressive Christians' evaluation of other relevant social groups. This would indicate a bifurcated approach towards fundamentalist Christians and atheists.

Methods

To capture affinity and disaffinity towards Christian fundamentalists, I replicated Yancey and Williamson's technique using the 2012 American National Election Studies (ANES). The ANES asked respondents to describe their affection or disaffection of 27 distinct social groups using a thermometer scale of 0 to 100. However, many of these groups, such as "the Federal Government" or "middle class," are not known for the type of intergroup conflict that creates strong affinities or disaffinities. Previous research indicates that both racial and religious groups are important sources of intergroup contention in the United States (Hartmann et al.) I selected six religious groups (Atheists, Catholics, Christians, Christian fundamentalists, Mormons, and Muslims) and four racial groups (whites, blacks, Hispanics, and Asians) to create an index of relevant reference groups. I averaged the thermometer scores of these ten groups, and compared the thermometer score for Christian Fundamentalist to the average. Respondents who indicated a thermometer score for Christian Fundamentalist a standard deviation below the mean of all thermometer scores were designated as Anti-Fundamentalist and operationalized as having disaffinity towards Christian fundamentalists. Respondents who indicated a thermometer score for Christian Fundamentalist a standard deviation above the mean of all thermometer scores were designated as Pro-Fundamentalist and operationalized as having affinity towards Christian fundamentalists. This technique was repeated to create the variables Anti-Atheist and Pro-Atheist.

The value of using this measure, as opposed to merely documenting the stated thermometer score of respondents, is that I am able to control for the tendency of some respondents to rank all groups relatively high. Since I am interested in respondents' affinity or disaffinity towards fundamentalist Christians/atheists, this is a superior technique to merely noting respondents' objective thermometer score. Despite the score of individual respondents, it is reasonable that those who score fundamentalist Christians/atheists a standard deviation above other religious and racial groups are more likely to perceive them with more relative affinity. The reverse is true for those who score fundamentalist Christians/atheists a standard deviation below other religious and racial groups. Thus, Anti-Fundamentalist, Pro-Fundamentalist, Anti-Atheist, and Pro-Atheist are the basic dependent variables in this research.

The ANES allowed me to assess attitudes towards fundamentalists, but does not provide a way for understanding how respondents define fundamentalists. It is possible that respondents perceive fundamentalists as a mere fringe group, such as Westboro Baptist Church members, or a larger group making up a significant percentage of the United States, such as the 35 percent of Americans who claim to be "born-again" (Hackett and Lindsay). Scholarly attempts to define fundamentalism (Emerson and Hartman ; Almond, Appleby, and Sivan; Antoun) may not correlate to how Americans in general view this concept. Nevertheless, previous attempts tend to define fundamentalism focus upon the notion of a strict religion that removes itself from the impact of modern society. Furthermore, research has connected fundamentalist Christianity to politically conservative efforts (Langer and Cohen; Wilcox and Robinson; Smidt) and makes fundamentalist Christianity a useful group for testing the willingness of progressive Christians to accept Christians with decidedly conservative theological perspectives. Ideally, the affinity and disaffinity of fundamentalist or conservative Christians towards progressive Christians would be tested. However, it is difficult to think of a term that represents individuals with a progressive Christian theology to the degree that Christian fundamentalist represents a strict conservative theology. Consequently, the ANES does not ask about a group that serves as a useful proxy of progressive Christians.

I used the ANES question about religious affiliation and included those who are Catholic or "other" Christians to create a subset of Christians. Only individuals in the subset are eligible to be operationalized as a progressive Christian. However, progressive Christianity can be defined based on theological ideology, political philosophy, or denominational membership. I incorporated three measures to assess all possibilities.

My literature review suggests an important theological dividing line between conservative and progressive Christians in the approach to the authority of the Bible or the Church.[1] The

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[1] There is a conceptual difference between authority of the church and authority of the Bible. This is indicated by the fact that among Christians, non-Catholic Christians are more likely to see the Bible as the literal word of God than Catholic Christians (47.5% v. 22.4%; $p < .001$). Catholics who place a great deal of authority in the Church should be more likely to place a great deal of authority on the Bible. As such, Layman and Green legitimate the use of a Bible as Word of God as a measure across religious traditions due to the strong correlation between the Bible and their Catholic traditionalism index. Since the ANES lacks a question about church authority, the best substitute is using the question on biblical authority to operationalize progressive Catholic Christians.

authority of the Bible is a theological issue that theologically progressive Christian authors (Cobb; Gamwell; Brown; Spong) brought up as an important dividing line between themselves and conservative Christians. Ideally, developing a more comprehensive measure that includes other theological elements such as image/importance of God, belief in miracles, and/or Christian particularism would make for a better assessment of theological differences. However, the 2012 ANES did not ask questions on those subjects and only Bible Word of God can be used as a theological proxy. While, it is questionable to use a single attitudinal variable to enunciate theological distinctions, previous research has used attitudes towards biblical inerrancy as the sole measure to operationalize potential theological fundamentalism (Sherkat; Sherkat and Darnell), evangelicalism (Hunter), and orthodoxy (Roy; Freeman and Houston) within the Christian faith. Kellstedt and Smidt contend that biblical authority has relevance in America. Thus, I am confident in applying the ANES question on biblical inerrancy (reversed coding so that higher numbers indicate more adherence to the Bible as God's word) to Protestant, Catholic, and "other" Christians to capture an important theological division between conservative and non-conservative Christians, with the caveat that this study can only explore certain, but not all, theological distinctions among Christians. This measure created Theologically Progressive Christian.

The ANES also has a political viewpoint variable with a 7-point scale, higher values indicating more political conservatism. To determine if a respondent is a politically progressive Christian, I included those who self-identified as Christian on the religious preference variable and scored under 4 (either slightly liberal, liberal, or extremely liberal) on the political viewpoint variable. Thus, any Protestant, Catholic, or "other" Christian who lands on the progressive side of the political viewpoint scale is operationalized as a Politically Progressive Christian. Finally, respondents who indicated that they were members of a mainline or progressive denomination[2] were seen as having a progressive Christian denominational identity and were operationalized as Denominationally Progressive Christian. The nature of the variable excludes Catholics as being progressives since only Protestant denominations are labeled as religiously progressive.

I used a variety of independent variables. Age is measured with a 13-point scale. Female, Black, Hispanic, Other Race (WHITE is the reference group), Northcentral, Northeast, and West (SOUTH is the reference group) are dummy variables. Education is measured with a 5-point scale, and Income is measured with a 28-point scale. Higher values indicated higher levels of educational attainment and socioeconomic status. Married is a dummy variable, and Children is a 0-3 scale variable whereby 3 indicates 3 or more children under 18 living in the household of the respondent. I labeled the political viewpoint variable Political Conservatism since higher values indicated more conservatism. I assess religious preference with a series of dummy variables (Non-Catholic Christian, Non-Christian Religion, Spiritual But Not Religious, Not Religious, and Agnostic/Atheists; CATHOLIC is the reference group, and the variable in ANES is mutually exclusive). Attendance indicates religious service attendance with a 6-point scale with higher values indicating more attendance.

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[2] Those denominations included Episcopalian, Anglican, Church of England, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Reformed, Disciples of Christ, Congregationalist, and Quaker Friends.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Thermometer and Progressive Christian Measures

Fundamentalist Thermometer	48.678 (5,105)
Atheist Thermometer	38.590 (5,105)
Percent Theologically Progressive Christians	51.3% (3,621)
Percent Politically Progressive Christian	18.5% (1,856)
Percent Denominationally Progressive Christian	11.9% (5,103)

Means or proportions are entries, N in parenthesis.

The three progressive Christian variables allow for assessment of three different progressive Christianity dimensions.[3] Due to the dichotomous nature of the dependent variables, I utilize logistic regression analysis to determine if different types of progressive Christians (Theological, Political, or Denominational) are more likely to have affinity or disaffinity towards fundamentalist Christians and atheists after controlling for social, demographic, and religious variables. I constructed logistic regression models with Anti-Fundamentalist, Pro-Fundamentalist, Anti-Atheist, or Pro-Atheist as dependent variables. Each type of measure of progressive Christianity is included in separate models of each of the four dependent variables. Means or proportions of these variables, as well as the thermometer measures can be found in Table 1. Only respondents who answered all ten thermometer questions are included in this table or the final models.

Findings

Table 2 compares the percentage of progressive Christians to the general sample as it concerns the dependent variables in this research.[4] Theologically progressive Christians are significantly less likely to have affinity towards Christian fundamentalists and atheists. However, theologically progressive Christians are significantly more likely to have disaffinity towards Christian fundamentalists and significantly less likely to have disaffinity towards atheists. Politically progressive Christians are significantly more likely to have disaffinity and significantly less likely to have affinity towards Christian fundamentalists but significantly less likely to have disaffinity towards atheists. Christians in progressive denominations did not differ from the general population in affinity or disaffinity towards Christian fundamentalists or atheists. An initial assessment suggests that theological and political progressiveness leads to less rejection of atheists but to rejection of, and a lower willingness to have affinity with, fundamental Christians. However, there is no evidence that theological and political

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[3] Correlations between these progressive variables is the highest between Theologically Progressive Christian and Politically Progressive Christian at .19. Thus there is overlap, but these variables are capturing distinctive religious dimensions.

[4] For simplicity of interpretation I only included the respondents used in the regression models found in tables 3 and 4.

progressiveness explicitly leads to affinity with atheists. In fact, theologically Christian progressives are less likely to have affinity with atheists than the general population. Denominational progressiveness appears to have little effect.

Table 2. Percentages of Differing Types of Christian Progressives for Affinity or Disaffinity Towards Christian Fundamentalists and Atheists.

	Theologically Progressive (N = 1,706)	Politically Progressive (N = 583)	Denominationally Progressive (N = 367)	Total Population (N = 3,076)
Anti-Fundamentalist Christian	37.5%*** (639)	48.0%*** (280)	33.8% (124)	30.2% (930)
Pro-Fundamentalist Christian	3.8%*** (64)	4.3%*** (25)	8.4% (31)	8.2% (251)
Anti-Atheist	50.4%* (859)	42.2%*** (246)	49.9% (183)	52.2% (1,607)
Pro-Atheist	1.2%** (21)	2.9% (17)	1.4% (5)	2.0% (61)

Number of respondents in parenthesis; differ from total population: * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Table 3 shows the propensity of the different types of Christian progressives to have affinity and disaffinity towards Christian fundamentalists. After demographic and social controls, theologically and politically progressive Christians still reject fundamentalist Christians. A theologically progressive Christian has almost three and a half times more chance of having disaffinity towards fundamentalist Christians when compared to the rest of the sample (Exp (B) = 3.357). A Christian with progressive political views has more than three times the normal chance of having disaffinity towards fundamentalist Christians when compared to the rest of the sample (Exp (B) = 3.284). Both theologically and politically progressive Christians are also less willing to have affinity towards fundamentalist Christians. Theologically progressive Christians are a little less than a third as likely to have affinity towards fundamentalist Christians as the general population (Exp (B) = .321). Politically progressive Christians are almost half as likely to have affinity towards fundamentalist Christians as the general population (Exp (B) = .557). However, Denominationally Progressive Christians are insignificant in relations to either affinity or disaffinity towards Christian fundamentalists.[5]

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[5] To assess whether missing data would alter the findings, I utilized multiple imputation models with a version of the Estimation Maximization algorithm after analyzing the results from the logistic analysis. I found that with a couple of exceptions, Theological Progressive Christians did not have a significant negative association in the Anti-Atheist model, and Denominational Progressive Christians were significantly positive (p < .05) in the Anti-Fundamentalist model, the results of the progressive Christian variables were the same as what I found in the logistic model. Neither of the discrepancies seriously challenge my basic finding that progressive Christians tend to have more affinity for, or at least less disaffinity against, atheist as opposed to fundamentalist Christians. For ease of presentation I will use the results of the logistic models.

Table 3. Betas and Odds Ratios of Whether a Respondent has Affinity or Disaffinity Towards Fundamentalist Christians

	Theologically Progressive		Politically Progressive		Denominationally Progressive	
	Anti	Pro	Anti	Pro	Anti	Pro
	1.211***	-1.125***	1.189***	-.585**	.193	.089
	(3.357)	(.321)	(3.284)	(.557)	(1.213)	(1.093)
Female	-.0350	-.296*	.082	-.351**	-.028	-.294*
	(.965)	(.744)	(1.086)	(.704)	(.973)	(.745)
Black	-.485**	-.136	-.231	-.478*	-.450*	-.146
	(.616)	(.873)	(.794)	(.620)	(.638)	(.864)
Hispanic	-.253*	-.358	-.014	-.563*	-.238	-.384
	(.776)	(.699)	(.987)	(.570)	(.788)	(.681)
Other Race	-.276	.257	-.154	.116	-.254	.268
	(.759)	(1.293)	(.857)	(1.123)	(.775)	(1.307)
Age	.029*	-.070**	.026*	-.068**	.031*	-.072**
	(1.029)	(.933)	(1.026)	(.934)	(1.031)	(.931)
Education	.399***	-.256***	.373***	-.213**	.390***	-.240**
	(1.490)	(.774)	(1.452)	(.808)	(1.478)	(.787)
Political Conservatism	-.533***	.439***			-.528***	.432***
	(.587)	(1.551)			(.590)	(1.540)
Income	.027***	-.014	.022**	-.012	.026***	-.012
	(1.028)	(.986)	(1.023)	(.988)	(1.027)	(.989)
Married	.127	-.118	.069	-.022	.131	-.110
	(1.136)	(.889)	(1.071)	(.978)	(1.140)	(.896)
Children	-.08	.098	-.083	.074	-.077	.089
	(.923)	(1.103)	(.920)	(1.077)	(.925)	(1.093)
Non-Catholic Christians	-.401***	1.384***	-.404***	1.382***	-.411***	1.403***
	(.670)	(3.990)	(.668)	(3.982)	(.663)	(4.069)
Non-Christian Religion	1.766***	-.393	1.345***	.037	.747**	.517
	(5.845)	(.695)	(3.838)	(1.037)	(2.110)	(1.677)
Spiritual, Not Religious	.712***	-.047	.287	.378	-.312*	.579
	(2.039)	(.955)	(1.332)	(1.460)	(.732)	(1.785)
Not Religious	1.203***	.745	.467	1.542**	.124**	1.660**
	(3.331)	(2.106)	(1.595)	(4.674)	(1.132)	(5.259)
Agnostic/Atheist	1.476***	-.224	.886**	.524	.300	.870
	(4.377)	(.800)	(2.425)	(1.689)	(1.350)	(2.386)
Northcentral	-.071	-.043	-.029	-.048	-.073	-.037
	(.932)	(.958)	(.971)	(.953)	(.930)	(.963)
Northeast	.132	.181	.157	.189	.132	.206
	(1.142)	(1.198)	(1.170)	(1.208)	(1.141)	(1.228)
West	-.091	.281	-.083	.304	-.099	.281
	(.913)	(1.324)	(.920)	(1.355)	(.906)	(1.324)
Bible World of God			-1.324***	1.362***	-1.221***	1.204***
			(.266)	(3.905)	(.295)	(3.333)
Attendance	-.165***	.172***	-.186***	.209***	-.156***	.165***
	(.848)	(1.188)	(.830)	(1.232)	(.856)	(1.179)
N	3,076	3,076	3,076	3,076	3,075	3,075
Nagelkerke R^2	.332	.246	.293	.220	.337	.255
-2 Log Likelihood	2947.544	1393.266	3057.298	1431.917	2933.369	1376.433

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$; Betas are entries, odds ratios in parenthesis.

Previous research has indicated that white, highly educated, wealthy, political progressives are more likely to have animosity towards conservative Christians (Yancey and Williamson;

Bolce and De Maio 2008). Many of these qualities have also been correlated to progressive Christian identity (Pew Research Center 2008). It is not surprising that these same qualities are also significant, in the expected directions, in the model assessing disaffinity towards Christian fundamentalists. Furthermore, while obviously not correlated to being a progressive Christian, being a non-Christian is also related to disaffinity towards fundamentalist Christians, and that finding is replicated in this model (Yancey and Williamson 2014). The results in Table 2 suggest that fundamentalist Christians are less likely to be accepted by theologically and politically progressive Christians. The application of social and demographic controls does not alter these results, shown in Table 2, with theological and political progressive Christians having lower affinity and higher disaffinity with fundamentalist Christians. Given that these effects remain even after social and demographic controls it appears that adherence to either theologically and/or politically progressive Christianity is intrinsically tied to a rejection of fundamentalist Christians.

Table 4 shows the propensity of the different types of Christian progressives to have affinity and disaffinity towards atheists. After social and demographic controls, atheists are not rejected by progressive Christians. For example, theologically progressive Christians are significantly less likely to have disaffinity towards atheists and about a third less likely to rank atheists a standard deviation below other religious/racial groups than the rest of the sample (Exp (B) = .645). Theologically progressive Christians do not differ from the rest of the sample in pro-atheist affinity after controls indicating that results in Table 2 are clearly tied to the confounding effects of some social and demographic variables. In other words, it is not the case that that theological progressiveness leads to a lack of affinity towards atheists but that some other characteristic of theological progressives accounts for the bivariate relationship in Table 2.[6]

Politically progressive Christians are also significantly less likely to have disaffinity towards atheists and are only a little more than half as likely as the general population to have anti-atheist disaffinity (Exp(B) = .489). This difference is not merely due to higher educational attainment or political progressive attitudes of progressive Christians since these and other demographic factors are controlled. Furthermore, unlike Christians who are only theologically progressive, politically progressive Christians do have pro-atheist affinity. Indeed, they are more than six times (Exp (B) = 6.63) as likely to have that affinity than all other respondents, and their standardized coefficient (b = 1.892) indicates a relatively high level of explanatory power of theological progressives and pro-atheist affinity. Finally, Denominationally progressive Christians are insignificant in relation to either affinity or disaffinity towards atheists. In sum, there is less support for the idea that theologically progressive Christians support atheists than for the notion that they do not reject atheists. But a politically progressive Christian not only does not reject atheists but has some affinity towards them. A Christian who is theologically progressive, but not politically progressive may not be an ally with atheists

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[6] It appears that atheism is the confounding variable as theologically progressives are clearly not atheist and atheists would be highly likely to be Pro-Atheist. Having atheists in the control group, but not the theological progressive group (Table 2) may have resulted in the comparatively low percent of theologically progressive Christians with affinity towards atheists. In a regression model with just Theologically Progressive Christian and Agnostic/Atheist the relationship between theological progressiveness and Pro-Atheist disappears (t = -.0004).

but neither does that individual seem to be their enemy.

Table 4. Betas and Odds Ratios of Whether a Respondent has Affinity or Disaffinity Towards Atheists

	Theologically Progressive		Politically Progressive		Denominationally Progressive	
	Anti	Pro	Anti	Pro	Anti	Pro
	-.438*** (.645)	.349 (1.418)	-.716*** (.489)	1.892*** (6.630)	-.108 (.897)	-.071 (.931)
Female	.047 (1.048)	-.137 (.872)	-.005 (.995)	-.000 (1.000)	.047 (1.048)	-.13 (.878)
Black	.638*** (1.892)	-1.141* (.319)	.488*** (1.629)	-1.038 (.354)	.615*** (1.849)	-1.094* (.335)
Hispanic	.367** (1.443)	-.854* (.426)	.240* (1.271)	-.533 (.587)	.351** (1.421)	-.824* (.439)
Other Race	.249 (1.283)	.797* (2.219)	.185 (1.203)	.900* (2.460)	.246 (1.278)	.834* (2.303)
Age	.057*** (1.059)	-.031 (.969)	.057*** (1.059)	-.017 (.983)	.056*** (1.058)	-.029 (.971)
Education	-.112** (.894)	.139 (1.149)	-.094** (.910)	.079 (1.083)	-.099** (.905)	.122 (1.129)
Political Conservatism	.289*** (1.335)	-.593*** (.552)			.283*** (1.327)	-.585*** (.557)
Income	.001 (1.001)	-.014 (.986)	.003 (1.003)	-.012 (.988)	.002 (1.002)	-.014 (.986)
Married	-.015 (.985)	-.255 (.775)	.013 (1.013)	-.342 (.710)	-.015 (.985)	-.255 (.775)
Children	.099 (1.104)	.017 (1.017)	.094* (1.098)	-.021 (.979)	.095* (1.100)	.021 (1.021)
Non-Catholic Christians	.031 (1.031)	-.297 (.743)	.026 (1.027)	-.252 (.777)	.020 (1.020)	-.262 (.769)
Non-Christian Religion	-1.663*** (.190)	.499 (1.646)	-1.674*** (.187)	1.615* (5.028)	-1.315*** (.269)	.214 (1.239)
Spiritual, Not Religious	-.875*** (.417)	.352 (1.422)	-.826*** (.438)	1.331* (3.785)	-.569*** (.566)	.055 (1.057)
Not Religious	-1.489*** (.226)	1.194 (3.299)	-1.261*** (.283)	1.871* (6.496)	-1.139** (.320)	.857 (2.356)
Agnostic/Atheist	-3.018*** (.049)	3.500*** (33.119)	-2.876*** (.056)	4.327*** (75.753)	-2.603*** (.074)	3.152*** (23.386)
Northcentral	.143 (1.154)	-.219 (.804)	.138 (1.148)	-.021 (.979)	.150 (1.162)	-.234 (.791)
Northeast	-.313** (.731)	.301 (1.352)	-.317** (.729)	.317 (1.373)	-.303** (.739)	.286 (1.331)
West	-.330** (.719)	-.075 (.928)	-.313** (.731)	-.006 (.994)	.325** (.723)	-.091 (.913)
Bible is Word of God			.614*** (1.848)	-.747 (.494)	.532*** (1.702)	-.625 (.535)
Attendance	.188*** (1.207)	.056 (1.058)	.200*** (1.221)	.067 (1.069)	.179*** (1.196)	.071 (1.073)
N	3,076	3,076	3,076	3,076	3,075	3,075
Nagelkerke R^2	.228	.294	.218	.278	.233	.295
-2 Log Likelihood	3681.914	435.016	3709.930	443.720	3667.533	433.832

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$; Betas are entries, odds ratios in parenthesis.

The results suggest an indirect way by which progressive Christians may favor atheists over fundamentalist Christians. With the possible exception of politically progressive Christians, Christian progressives do not necessarily have greater affinity towards atheists than towards other social groups. However, they do, with the exception of denominationally progressive Christians, have less affinity towards fundamentalist Christians than towards other social groups. Thus, it is not so much that progressive Christians like atheists than it is that they have distain for fundamentalist Christians.[7] In such a manner atheists are preferred over fundamentalist Christians by progressive Christians since atheists spark less outgroup animosity.

Discussion

This research suggests that Christians who are progressive in their theological or political outlook have a disaffinity towards fundamentalist Christians, but not towards atheists. Furthermore, politically progressive Christians have a distinct affinity for atheists which is missing among other dimensions of Christian progressivism. However, merely identifying with a progressive Christian denomination is not significantly related to affinity or disaffinity for either Christian fundamentalists or atheists. Since, the manner by which the affinity and disaffinity dependent variables are constructed controls for possibilities that progressive Christians have a unique propensity to reject or accept outgroups,[8] the affinity and disaffinity

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[7] It is possible that these findings are artifacts of the way the dependent variables are constructed. To assess this possibility, I ran OLS models using the actual thermometer numerical score of the respondent, and logistic regression models with an affinity/disaffinity scores based upon scoring a standard deviation above and below the averaging of all twenty-seven thermometer scores in the ANES, instead of just the religion and racial group scores. In the OLS model Theologically Progressive Christian ($t = -12.106$), and Politically Progressive Christian ($t = -10.289$) are negatively related to the fundamentalist thermometer score. However, Theologically Progressive Christian ($t = 6.086$), and Politically Progressive Christian ($t = 6.778$) are positively related to the atheist thermometer score. Denominationally Progressive Christian is neither significantly related to either the fundamentalist ($t = -1.536$) or atheist ($t = .534$) thermometers. Separate logistic models constructed with all 27 groups still indicate that Theologically Progressive Christian ($p < .001$, Exp(b) = 2.355), and Politically Progressive Christian ($p < .001$, Exp(b) = 3.181) are significantly and positively related to Anti-Fundamentalist. Pro-Fundamentalist is significantly negatively related to Theologically Progressive Christian ($p < .001$, Exp(b) = .367), and Politically Progressive Christian ($p < .01$, Exp(b) = .540). Logistic models indicate that Theologically Progressive Christian is not significantly tied to Pro-Atheist (ns, Exp(b) = 1.425) but significantly negatively related to Anti-Atheist ($p < .001$, Exp(b) = .611). Politically Progressive Christian is significantly positively related to Pro-Atheist ($p < .01$, Exp(b) = 5.667) but negatively to Anti-Atheist ($p < .001$, Exp(b) = .563). However, Denominationally Progressive Christian is not significantly related to Pro-Fundamentalist (ns, Exp(b) = 1.001), Anti-Fundamentalist (ns, Exp(b) = 1.321), Pro-Atheist (ns, Exp(b) = .426), and Anti-Atheist (ns, Exp(b) = .951). Even with alternate mechanisms for assessing the dependent variable, theologically and politically based Christian progressiveness have relative disaffinity towards Christian fundamentalists and politically based Christian progressives have relative affinity towards atheists. There were not similar effects for Christians who identify with a progressive denomination. The basic findings of this paper are not tied to the way the dependent variables are constructed.

[8] Comparison of the mean measures of the rankings of the ten religious and racial groups given by progressive Christians to other respondents in the ANES indicated that Theologically Progressive Christians (60.450 v. 59.643; $p < .05$), Politically Progressive Christians (59.558 v. 60.927; $p < .01$) and Denominationally Progressive Christians (58.669 v. 58.785; $p < .05$) do significantly differ from the rest of the sample, but the difference is very small. This indicates even more evidence that the results of this work is not tied a distinct difference of progressive Christians to support or reject outgroups.

findings indicate powerful evidence of acceptance or rejection of the groups assessed. It is probably too strong to argue that Christian progressives actively favor atheists over Christian fundamentalists. However, with the exception of those who identify their religious progressiveness through denominational identity, Christian progressives do have more animosity towards Christian fundamentalists relative to atheists. Their comparatively higher likelihood to reject conservative Christians indicates more tolerance of atheists. Thus, it is not completely clear whether progressive Christians "like" atheists more than conservative Christians but they certainly are less likely to "dislike" atheists.

Research (Yancey and Williamson 2014; Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartmann; Gervais, Shariff, and Norenzayan) documents that atheists are rejected more than any religious group. But, this rejection is less among those exposed to a diversity of worldviews; progressive Christians may have an openness to different perspectives that allow them to possess a higher acceptance of atheists. Among theologically progressive Christians, openness to alternate ideas may be a valuable tool to differentiate themselves from conservative Christians. This research suggests that atheists, who often feel the sting of societal rejection (Williamson and Yancey; Anspach, Coe, and Thurlow; Cimino and Smith) are wise to look for allies among politically progressive Christians.

While it is beyond the scope of this research effort to determine why theologically and politically progressive Christians reject their more conservative peers, some speculation may be useful. It is quite possible that Christian progressives have a gross caricature of Christian fundamentalists that motivates their dislike. Even the use of the term fundamentalist can evoke the worst images of religious extremists; even Muslim terrorist are sometimes called fundamentalists. Previous work (Yancey and Williamson 2012) on cultural progressive activists indicates that such activists tend to characterize conservative Christians as racist, sexist, homophobic, bigoted, intolerant, stupid, rude, anti-science, or hypocritical among other negative qualities. If progressive Christians share a similar image of conservative Christians, then it is clear why they hold to such negative attitudes towards them. Indeed, negative stereotyping would likely produce disaffinity from most groups not directly allied with Christian fundamentalists.

However, even without specific stereotypes both theological and political Christian progressives have a rationale for rejecting Christian fundamentalist. For theological progressives, religious disagreements might motivate disaffinity. The theological differences that progressive Christians perceive in Christian fundamentalism may produce an anger they do not have towards atheists because they perceive Christian fundamentalists as distorting their own Christian faith. Indeed, some progressive Christians (Spong 1992; Borg 2009) have argued for the need to take back their religion from Christian conservatives. Theologically progressive Christians do not necessarily feel strong affinity towards atheists, but simply do not have powerful disaffinity towards them. Atheists may not threaten the nature of Christianity in the way that fundamentalists do; atheists are not mistaken for Christians. Rejecting atheists may conceptually violate the progressive Christian's notion of inclusiveness, but their disagreements on otherworldly matters may inhibit the development of affinity towards them.

If politically progressive Christians tie their political activism to their Christian beliefs, then they may reject fundamentalist Christians. However, unlike theologically progressive Christians, there is an affinity for atheists among politically progressive Christians. Speculation about this potential difference can produce future research questions. For example, a Christian strongly tied to political progressiveness may share similar political goals with atheists, especially since atheists tend to be politically progressive (Williamson and Yancey; Cimino and Smith; Vargas). If religious groups tend to find allies with others who share, to some degree, similar perspectives on issues of meaning and purpose, then politically progressive Christians may have real affinity for atheists who share their political values. Given that conservative Christianity can be seen by some progressives as synonymous to political conservatism (Yancey and Williamson 2014), politically progressive Christians may have an additional reason for rejecting Christian fundamentalists. Fundamentalists not only may corrupt their expression of Christian faith but they may also be an active road block to political goals. Future research that assesses the importance of political values relative to theological values for politically progressive Christians can provide answers about this possible explanation of the affinity progressive Christians have for atheists. Future work may further clarify differences between theologically and politically progressive Christians by focusing on the source of their disaffinity towards Christian fundamentalists, and the politically progressive Christian's affinity towards atheists.

There is a distinct disaffinity that theologically and politically progressive Christians have towards fundamentalist Christians.[9] One way to understand this disaffinity is to look at the concept of heresy. A traditional definition of heresy in the Christian context is that it "consisted of misreading Scripture of one's own free will, and publicly teaching, professing, and stubbornly adhering to this misrepresentation after correction" (Michael: 54-55). This definition generally fits the fundamentalist's emphasis of inerrancy and absolutes; however, it may also be a viable concept for progressive Christians. Theologically progressive Christians are not as tied to obedience of the Bible (as in the case of some Protestant denominations) or the Church (as in the case of Catholicism) as their more conservative counterparts, so definitions of heresy that rely upon obedience to a sacred book or church are not accurate for them. For theologically progressive Christians, literal reading of the Bible and excusive interpretations of Christianity may be rationale for heresy.

For politically progressive Christians, heresy may occur due to the politically conservative aims and goals of Christian fundamentalists. They may interpret their faith in ways that support progressive political policy which help them conceptualize the political aims of Christians as "misreading Scripture." For example, Spong explored the work of the prophets in the Old

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[9] Another measure indicating just how much progressive Christians reject fundamentalist Christians is a variable I constructed which indicates if a respondent ranked Christian fundamentalist lower than any of the other nine religious or racial groups. I found that 20 percent of theologically progressive Christians rank fundamentalist Christians below any of the other groups compared to only 11.1 percent of the rest of the sample, and that 31.6 percent of politically progressive Christians rank fundamentalist Christians below any of the other groups compared to only 14.1 percent of the rest of the sample. The relationship remains in logistic models that include the independent variables used in the models in Table 2. Progressive Christians are especially likely to single out fundamentalist Christians for a notable high level of disaffinity, higher than their disaffinity towards any other group.

Testament and concluded that they were "intensely human people and spoke to remedy intensely human problems of injustice and the loss of meaning." He then lamented the move of religion away from building a just society to a focus on individualism, and considers secular forms of social justice such as ". . . the New Deal, the Fair Deal, the Great Society, socialism, Christian socialism, Marxism and communism" (61-62). He goes on to argue that it may be time to return the religious roots, based in Old Testament prophetical work, to these political movements. This illustrates a Christian faith that demands some allegiance to certain political movements. Individuals who perceive Christian fundamentalists as those who do not support social political priorities, or actively reject them, may be seen as heretics to a true expression of Christianity.[10]

When Christian progressiveness is embedded in the denominational identity of a respondent, I found neither significant disaffinity towards Christian fundamentalists or affinity towards atheists. This may not be surprising given the changing role of Christian denominations. The importance of denominational identity to explain political and theological divides has dramatically diminished over time (Wuthnow 1996; Kohut; Van Geest). Indeed, respondents in mainstream or liberal Christian denominations are more likely to accept the beliefs connected to Christian fundamentalists that are generally rejected by theologically and politically progressive Christians.[11] This current research project reinforces the argument that Christians are becoming less willing to tie their religious identity to their denominational membership.

The thermometer questions used in the ANES do not allow for an assessment of disaffinity towards progressive Christians. It is impossible to use this data to compare the level of animosity that progressive Christians have towards fundamentalist Christians with the level of animosity conservative Christians have towards progressive Christians. However, the type of animosity possessed by conservative Christians towards other outgroup members is well documented in other academic literature (Laythe, Finkel, and Kirkpatrick; Whitehead; Olson, Cadge, and Harrison; Martin et al.; Roof and McKinney). Future research that compares the relative disaffinities of progressive and conservative Christians would be an important addition to this current research endeavor. While fundamentalist Christians are known as conservative Christians, there are Evangelicals and Pentecostal Christians who tend to be seen as conservative, but not fundamentalists. Whether these findings apply to attitudes towards fundamentalist Christians or conservative Christians in general is worth exploring. The ANES, or another future survey, incorporating a thermometer measure of a conservative Christian group with an image that is less extreme than fundamentalist Christians (e.g., Evangelicals) would allow for such exploration.

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[10] This point is strengthened by the name of the Spong's book – *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism: A Bishop Rethinks the Meaning of Scripture*. The central claim of the book is that Christian fundamentalists are mistaken in their interpretation of the faith while Spong's theological, political progressive version is a more accurate form of Christianity.

[11] ANES Christian respondents in mainline or liberal denominations were only slightly less likely to state that the Bible is the literal word of God than other Christians (34% v. 39.1%; $p < .1$).

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