



Urbanism, Religion, and Race-based Residential Preferences

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Abstract

Using the October 2008 Pew Social Trends Survey, the present study finds that worship attendance more strongly contributes to the unwillingness of non-urban Whites to live within racially diverse settings than it does for their urban counterparts. One way to understand these findings is that the greater exposure to diversity among individuals living within more urban contexts may serve as a challenge to conservative attitudes reinforced within worship settings that are largely racially segregated. Contrary to Whites, however, worship attendance is unrelated to the place-based racial attitudes of Blacks and Hispanics living in more and less urban communities.

Keywords: racial attitudes, urbanicity, worship attendance

Introduction

Religious leaders and adherents play key roles in pushing for racial justice in the U.S. During the 1960s, progressive clergy and laity were politically involved in efforts calling for open housing in northern cities and for civil rights more broadly (Brown 2008; Dillard; Findlay; McGreevy). In the current era, thousands of congregations affiliate with faith-based community organizing firms that pressure elected officials to support public policies aimed at increasing economic opportunities within poor urban minority communities (Wood and Warren). At the same time, religion has often been used by dominant groups to reinforce and legitimate existing racial and other social-political hierarchies. For example, during the civil rights era, lay movements emerged within predominantly White Mainline Protestant and

Catholic Churches aimed at removing clergy that were too active in the civil rights movement (Hadden; McGreevy; Quinley). Along these lines, a plurality of White Protestant laity currently believes that the best way to eliminate racial inequality is to stop talking about race (Emerson and Sikkink). The under-representation of predominantly White congregations in faith-based community organizing firms aimed at reducing racial inequality is, in part, related to uncertainty of how joining such movements are consistent with their core concerns and interests (Warren). The conflicting nature of the association between religion and racial justice is also seen in experimental and survey research that, at times, suggest that worship attendance heightens prejudice among dominant group members while other studies call these relationships into question (Batson, Schoenrade, and Ventis; Gorsuch and Aleshire; Hunsberger and Jackson).

Given that religious congregations are in many ways America's central civil societal institution, it is important to investigate their capacity to inform racial attitudes. More Americans are members of, volunteer for, and donate money to congregations than any other non-profit organization (Independent Sector). Religious institutions are also one of the top three institutions in which Americans hold a high level of confidence (Pew 2002; Saad). The heightened levels of involvement and confidence in religious institutions likely contribute to a belief that religious institutions have a role to play in addressing racial justice issues. Indeed, over 80 percent of Americans believe that religious institutions should do more to increase awareness about racial discrimination (Wuthnow).

Nonetheless, the relationship between worship attendance and racial/ethnic out-group attitudes is not entirely clear, and the extent to which worship attendance associates with the racial attitudes of racial/ethnic minorities is even less clear. For example, a number of studies find frequent worship attending Whites, those who attend once a week, to be less prejudiced than individuals that attend from once or twice a year to once a month, but no different than those that never attend (Batson, Schoenrade, and Ventis; Gorsuch and Aleshire; Hunsberger and Jackson). Other studies suggest that worship attendance is either unrelated or associated with increased prejudice towards and a desire to maintain distance from racial/ethnic out-groups (Batson, Schoenrade, and Ventis; Brown 2011; Chalfant and Peek; Davis and Robinson; Gorsuch and Aleshire; Hunsberger and Jackson).

Furthermore, past studies on religion and out-group attitudes have generally examined the connection between religion and tolerance of out-groups (Batson, Schoenrade, and Ventis; Gorsuch and Aleshire; Hunsberger and Jackson). While tolerance is a prerequisite for members of diverse social groups to view their life chances as inter-dependent, in isolation, it makes no such assumption (Hollenbach). Alternatively, a willingness to live within racially diverse communities moves one closer to viewing race/ethnicity as an artificial construct that holds no bearing on the maintenance of in-group and out-group boundaries. The present study aims to further understanding of the role that religion plays in out-group attitudes by assessing the relationship between worship attendance and the willingness of urban and non-urban Blacks,¹ Whites, and Hispanics to live within racially diverse communities.

¹ Note: "Black" and "African American" are used inter-changeably throughout the document.

Urbanism and Racial Attitudes

The lack of clarity in the relationship between religion and prejudice may partially stem from the lack of attention given to social-geographic context. That is, urban dwellers tend to maintain greater levels of tolerance of alternative lifestyles, beliefs, and cultures (Carter et al.; Carter; Fischer; Glenn and Hill; Tuch; Wilson 1985, 1991). Such attitudes are, in part, explained by the fact that living in more highly urban settings, often defined by population density, tends to place individuals in contexts in which no one lifestyle and/or ideology lay claim to cultural dominance (Stouffer; Wirth). Such diversity contributes to some individuals re-considering long-held beliefs of out-groups and developing a “live and let live” attitude in which varying beliefs, lifestyles, and social/racial/ethnic groups are tolerated (Stouffer).

Living in dense areas also increases opportunities to become friends and establish professional relationships with equal status others at work, in civic organizations, and within houses of worship (Fisher; Sigelman et al.). Through extended positive inter-racial contact, racial biases erode as people learn about similarities with others, appreciate differences, and, subsequently, begin to think of themselves as members of a more inclusive in-group (Allport). With common in-group identity, the cognitive and motivational processes that initially produced in-group favoritism are redirected to benefit the common in-group, including former out-group members (Pettigrew; Dovidio, Gaertner, and Kawakami). From this perspective, inter-racial/ethnic cooperative interaction enhances positive evaluations of racial out-group members, in part, because friendships and equal status working relationships transform perceptions from “us” versus “them” to a more inclusive “we” (Pettigrew; Dovidio, Gaertner, and Kawakami). Such exposure to diversity and opportunities for positive interactions with out-group members likely contributes to urban dwellers being more willing than others to live in racially integrated neighborhoods and support policies that outlaw housing discrimination and encourage school desegregation (Carter et al.).

Moreover, the extent to which urban congregants attend congregations with other urban dwellers, their more tolerant attitudes are likely reinforced. And, the extent to which urban individuals attend worship settings with persons from smaller towns and less tolerant attitudes, their urban experiences may serve as a buffer against less tolerant attitudes. Conversely, living in smaller towns reduces the chance of exposure to diverse thinking, behaviors, and opportunities for friendships with members of racial/ethnic out-groups; in this context, less tolerant attitudes may be reinforced or go unchallenged within religious congregations.

Religion, Urbanism, and Racial Attitudes

As stated, urban Whites tend to maintain more tolerant attitudes than do their less urban counterparts (Carter; Fischer; Glenn and Hill; Tuch). Such tolerance is partially reflected in urban Whites’ greater attendance of and membership in racially integrated congregations relative to non-urban Whites (Jackson et al.). For Whites, attending integrated congregations contributes to greater support for racial integration in neighborhoods and schools, in part, because they are more likely to have a racially diverse friendship network and social support system (Yancey). Urban Whites are also more likely than non-urban Whites to attend religious congregations that provide them with opportunities to participate

in discussions and educational programs about race and racial inequality (Wuthnow; Jackson et. al).

Urban dwellers' heightened attendance of racial justice oriented congregations is likely linked to their interests in, and proximity to, such congregations. Overall, congregations located in urban areas are more likely than others to be racially/ethnically diverse (Emerson and Woo). Along these lines, predominantly White urban congregations are more likely than their rural counterparts to host worship services with congregations of other racial/ethnic backgrounds (Chaves and Anderson). These congregations are also more likely than others to preach sermons and host programs about race and social justice and to involve themselves in social justice – community organizing efforts aimed at reducing racial inequality and improving inter-racial understanding (HIRR/CCSP). Moreover, it is somewhat sensible that worship attendance may play a different role in informing the racial attitudes of Whites that live in communities of greater and lower levels of urbanism.

Conversely, it is unlikely that urbanism has the same moderating effect on the relationship between religion and racial attitudes of Blacks and Hispanics as it does for Whites. Given that marginalized groups are often restricted from opportunity structures, they are unlikely to face the same moral dilemma over policies and/or practices that increase opportunities for economically distressed social groups. Because Blacks and Hispanics are socio-economically disadvantaged, racial integration tends to reduce concentrations of these groups in communities with few social economic resources in the form of jobs, quality education, health care facilities, and other qualities of life (Orfield; Massey and Denton; Williams and Collins). The socio-economic benefits of racial integration for racial/ethnic minorities living in areas of reduced and greater levels of urbanism likely contributes to Blacks and Hispanics of disparate levels of worship attendance and urbanism maintaining relatively high levels of support for racial integration. To that end, it is somewhat sensible that Blacks and Hispanics living in urban, suburban, and rural areas are equally likely to attend congregations that provide opportunities to listen to and participate in discussions about race and racism (HIRR/CCSP).

African American and Hispanic American group identification with their respective racial/ethnic groups contributes to their individual interests being connected to policies that benefit their larger group interests (Dawson; Kinder and Sanders). Even if individual urban and/or non-urban Blacks and Hispanics are not directly impacted by a given policy proposal, they are likely to endorse initiatives that are perceived as being the best interests of their racial/ethnic group as a whole (Dawson; Kinder and Sanders). That said, while worship attendance may maintain a differential relationship with the racial attitudes of Whites living in areas of lower and higher levels of urbanism, this is not likely the case for Blacks and Hispanics. This leads to the following hypotheses:

1. The lower the urbanism (e.g. population density) of the communities in which Whites live, the weaker relationship we expect between worship attendance and preference for living in racially diverse communities.
2. We expect no such pattern of relationships among African Americans and Hispanic Americans.

Sample

The current study relies upon the October 2008 Pew Social Trends Survey to assess the above research question. This survey was conducted via landline and cellular telephones on a nationally representative sample of 2,260 adults living in the continental United States. The interviews were conducted October 3-19, 2008. The response rate for the landline and cellular sample were 22 and 20 percent respectively (Pew 2008). These data are also weighted to account for non-respondents within the sampling design (Pew 2008). In this survey, Hispanics, Non-Hispanic Blacks, and Non-Hispanic Whites self identify as such. For the purpose of brevity, Non-Hispanic Blacks are, from this point forward, referred to as Blacks (or African American) and Non-Hispanic Whites are referred to as Whites.

Measures

Dependent Variable: Racially Diverse Communities

The Racially Diverse Community Variable assesses the extent to which respondents prefer living in “A place where there are many different racial and ethnic groups.” Zero indicates a lack of preference for living in such communities and one indicates preference.

Independent Variables: Worship Attendance and Urbanism

The worship attendance variable assesses the frequency of house of worship attendance on a scale ranging from 1 (never attending) to 6 (attending more than once a week). The urbanism variable is a population density measure ranging from 1 (93.1 persons per square mile) to 5 (1967.1 or more persons per square mile).²

Interaction Variable: Worship Attendance/Urbanism

The worship attendance/urbanism interaction variable is the product of the worship attendance and urbanism variables.

Control Variables

The current study controls for the following standard demographic factors: education, family income, gender, children in the household, political ideology, age, religious faith, and region.³ Finally, this study controls for the immigration status of Hispanic Americans.⁴

² Note: The variation inflation factor (VIF) score analyses indicate that urbanism does not maintain a multicollinear relationship with a preference to live in a racially diverse community. At 1.24, the VIF for urbanism is much lower than the threshold of 4 used to determine whether we should investigate for multicollinearity.

³ Missing values for family income, age, and worship attendance were imputed from an imputation procedure that organizes missing cases by patterns of missing data so that the missing-value regressions can be conducted efficiently. The imputations did not significantly or substantively alter the analyses.

⁴ Immigration status is not taken into account for Blacks and Whites because 90% of Blacks and 96% of Whites within the current study's sample are native born.

Table 1. Relationship between Worship Attendance, Population Density on Willingness to Live within a Racially Diverse Community: Cross-Tabulation

Church Attendance %	Non-Hispanic Whites	African American	Hispanic American
1. Never Attend	67.41 **	70.00	68.97
2. Seldom Attend	64.21	89.47	65.79
3. Attend a few Times a Year	67.25	78.79	75.56
4. Attend Once / Twice a Month	60.34	82.93	69.70
5. Attend Once a Week	54.61	90.79	71.67
6. Attend More than Once a Week	53.33	81.97	82.76
Urbanism (Population per square mile)			
1. 93.1	51.04 **	75.00	72.09
2. 93.2-305.3	55.56	78.26	69.77
3. 305.4-817.0	65.61	92.31	68.00
4. 817.1-1967	67.35	85.48	75.47
5. 1967.1-+	71.36	88.52	75.56
N	1,669	240	234

*<.05; **<.01

Results

Race, Urbanism, Worship Attendance and Race-based residential preferences

The bivariate analyses presented in Table 1 indicates that, on average, frequently attending worship service and living in areas of reduced urbanism is associated with an unwillingness among Whites to live in racially diverse communities. For example, whereas roughly two-thirds of Whites that never attend worship services are willing to live in a racially diverse community, only about half of Whites that attend more than once a week are willing to do the same. In addition, while about half of Whites living in the least urban areas are willing to live in racially diverse communities, roughly seven in ten living in the densest contexts are willing to do so. As expected, we observe no such pattern of relationships among African and Hispanic Americans. For both groups, worship attendance and urbanism are unrelated to their residential preferences.

Worship Attendance, Urbanism, and Race-based Residential Preferences among Whites

At first glance, the multivariate findings presented in Table 2 suggest that worship attendance is unrelated to White racial diversity attitudes. However, a closer look at these analyses suggests that this relationship is qualified by urbanism. That is, Model I suggests that worship attendance is unrelated to the willingness of Whites to live in racially diverse communities. However, the worship attendance/urbanism interaction variable within Model II, suggests that worship attendance maintains a significantly weaker negative association with the willingness of urban Whites to live within racially diverse communities than it does

for non-urban Whites. In this model, the main-effect coefficient of worship attendance represents the odds of increasing levels of worship attendance associating with residential preferences when urbanism is coded at higher values (e.g. people that live within areas of greater urbanism). The odds ratio for this variable is less than one and significantly different from zero, which suggests that the more often that Whites in less urban areas attend worship services, the less willing they are to live in racially diverse communities. Conversely, worship attendance is unrelated to such attitudes among Whites living in more urban communities. The predicted probability estimates of Figure 1, which are based upon the logit regression analyses of Table 2, illustrate the point that while worship attendance reduces the willingness of non-urban Whites to live in racially diverse communities, we observe no such relationship among Whites living in areas of median and greatest urbanism.

Table 2. Relationship between Worship Attendance and Willingness to Live within a Racially Diverse Community among Non-Hispanic White Americans: Logit Regression: Odds Ratios⁵

	Model I	Model II
Worship Attendance	0.965 (0.892–1.044)	0.829* (0.711–0.967)
Urbanism	1.211** (1.109–1.322)	0.986 (0.809–1.202)
Worship Attendance * Urbanism	—	1.059* (1.007–1.112)
Conservative Protestant ⁶	0.822 (0.553–1.221)	0.829 (0.558–1.231)
Liberal Protestant	0.878 (0.614–1.254)	0.857 (0.600–1.224)
Catholic	0.929 (0.630–1.370)	0.914 (0.620–1.347)
Other Faith	1.102 (0.677–1.794)	1.119 (0.688–1.821)
N	1669	1669

*<.05; **<.01; Confidence Intervals in parentheses

Treatment Effects: Urbanism and Race-based Residential Preferences among White Americans

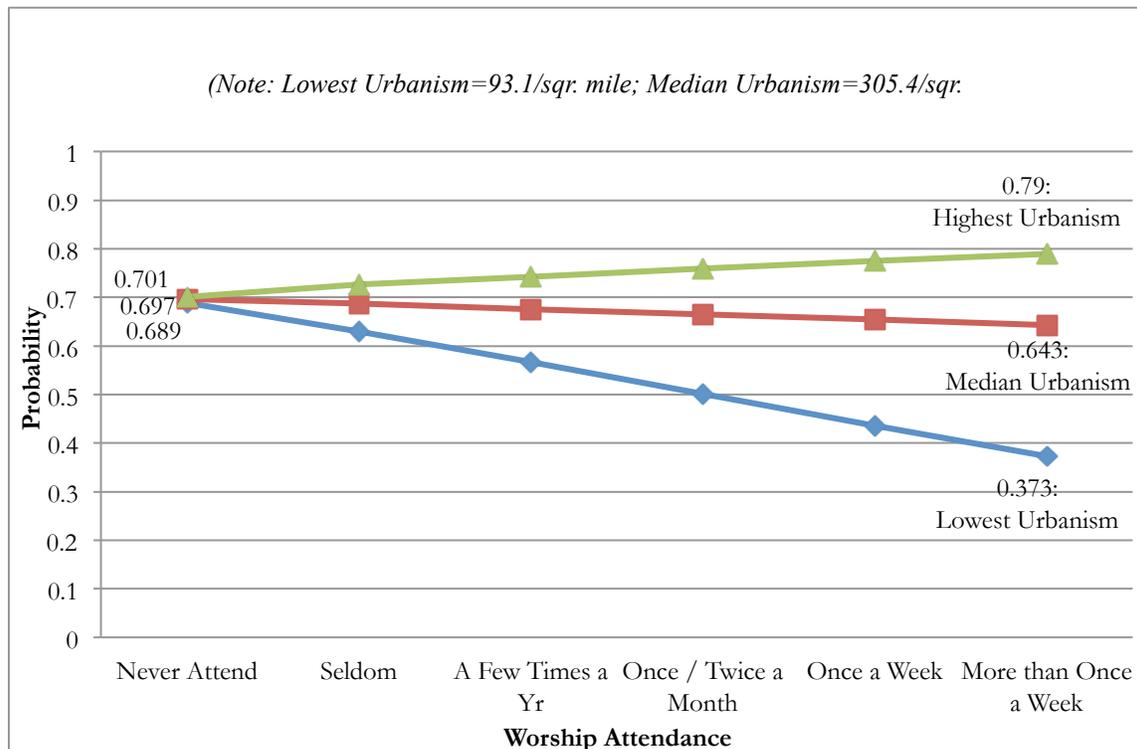
In addition to the standard logit regression analyses reported in Table 2, we employed treatment effect analyses via STATA 13 to estimate the causal effect of our urbanism treatment on our outcome, preference for living in a racially/ethnically diverse neighborhood. Given the statistically significant relationship, we explore the likely outcome

⁵ While not displayed, these and all subsequent analyses also account for education, family income, gender, children in the household, political ideology, age, region.

⁶ Conservative Protestants include Protestants that self identify as being “born again.” Liberal Protestants do not identify as such. Secular persons are the reference category for the religious faith variable (e.g. Liberal Protestant, Conservative Protestant, Catholic, and Other Faith).

of being willing to live in a racially diverse community assuming that all respondents live in an area with the exact same amount of urbanism. This allows us to address the empirical contention that a desire to live in racially/ethnically diverse communities may involve a level

Figure 1. Predicted Probability Estimates of the Relationship between Worship Attendance and Desire to Live in Racially Integrated Community by Population Density among Non-Hispanic Whites



of bias as some individuals that value racial diversity self-select more highly urban contexts in which to live. That said, we are interested in providing empirical verification that living in more highly urban contexts does have some impact on race-based residential preferences. By having a simulated treatment of the same level of urbanism, we attempt to address this problem (StataCorp). The treatment effect of urbanism on the willingness of Whites to live in racial/ethnically diverse contexts, presented within Table A of the Appendix, provides an estimation of the proportion of White Americans that would prefer living in a racially diverse community had the entire population lived in an area with the lowest amount of urbanism, which is 54.5%. It also provides us with separate estimates of each of the likelihoods that Whites would prefer living in racially diverse communities had they all lived in communities with the second, third, fourth, and highest level of urbanism. For example, had all Whites lived in communities with the third highest levels of urbanism, roughly 60 percent would express a willingness to live in a racially ethnically diverse community, which at 10 percent greater than those living in the least urbanized areas, represents a statistically significant difference. We observe a very similar pattern of relationships when comparing the racial

diversity-based residential preference estimates of Whites living at the fourth and highest levels of urbanism with those living in the least urbanized areas. In short, these analyses suggest that living in urbanized areas does play a role in shaping race-based residential preferences. Our treatment affect analyses complement the logit regression analyses of Table 2 by providing a greater degree certainty that urbanism associates with and likely informs race-based residential preferences. We now turn to examining the relationship between worship attendance and race-based residential preferences by level of urbanism among African Americans and Hispanic Americans.

Worship Attendance, Urbanism, and Racial Segregation Attitudes among Blacks and Hispanics

Unlike Whites, Models I of the African American and Hispanic American analyses of Table 3 indicates that worship attendance and urbanism are unrelated to race-based residential preferences. In addition, Models II of the African American and Hispanic American analyses also suggests that the relationship between worship attendance and racial attitudes are not significantly different among those living in communities of lower and higher levels of urbanism.

Table 3. Relationship between Worship Attendance and Willingness to Live within a Racially Diverse Community among African Americans and Hispanic Americans: Logit Regression: Odds Ratios⁷

	African American I	African American II	Hispanic American I	Hispanic American II
Worship Attendance	1.167 (0.874–1.558)	1.033 (0.521–2.049)	1.098 (0.894–1.349)	0.862 (0.521–1.425)
Urbanism	1.392 (0.982–1.974)	1.186 (0.489–2.877)	1.184 (0.928–1.511)	0.891 (0.493–1.610)
Worship Attendance * Urbanism	—	1.038 (0.858–1.255)	—	1.082 (0.932–1.257)
Protestant ⁸	0.732 (0.253–2.119)	0.738 (0.254–2.145)	—	—
Catholic	—	—	0.755 (0.391–1.459)	0.744 (0.384–1.443)
N	240	240	234	234

*<.05; **<.01; Confidence Intervals in parentheses

Discussion

The present study builds upon past research on religion and prejudice by suggesting that geographic contexts matter when it comes to understanding the connection between

⁷ The Hispanic analyses control for immigration status.

⁸ Due to their limited sample size, Non-Protestants is the reference category for Blacks and Non-Catholics is the reference category for Hispanics.

worship attendance and race-based residential preferences. That worship attendance contributes to a reduced willingness to live within racially diverse communities among Whites living in smaller towns than those living in larger towns is somewhat understandable. For starters, religious congregations largely attract individuals that are fairly homogenous in their racial/ethnic backgrounds (Christerson, Emerson, and Edwards). Congregants from smaller towns are particularly limited in their opportunities to establish professional and/or personal relationships with individuals of racial/ethnic out-groups that may serve to challenge their prejudices (Fisher; Sigelman et al.). Individuals from smaller towns also have limited exposure to social contexts in which alternative lifestyles and attitudes are viewed as equally valid, thus further reducing tolerance of differences (Carter et al; Carter; Fischer; Glenn and Hill; Tuch; Wilson 1991). Moreover, while all religions proclaim a commitment to loving one's neighbor, it is likely more difficult for White worship-goers from smaller towns to conceptualize neighbors as members of racial/ethnic out-groups, particularly those associated with negative stereotypes. On the other hand, among Whites living in more highly urbanized settings, worship attendance is unrelated to place-based racial attitudes, perhaps suggesting that more highly urbanized contexts serve as a buffer against racial prejudices reinforced within some worship settings.

Unlike Whites, worship attendance is unrelated to the race-based residential preferences of African and Hispanic Americans living in both more and less highly urbanized communities. These findings are somewhat understandable given that African and Hispanic Americans living in urban and non-urban areas, as well as those attending worship services less or more often, are under-represented among the middle class and over-represented among the poor. That said, regardless of their religiosity and community contexts, these groups have a compelling interest to support racial/ethnic integration as a means to improve their individual and group life chances.

To be clear, maintaining a willingness to live in racially diverse communities is not synonymous with actually doing so. That is, while White support for living in racially diverse communities has dramatically increased over the past forty years, levels of residential racial integration have not kept pace (Pew 2008; Schuman et al.). The disparity between residential preferences and living may indicate their intensity of support for such communities. That is, although support for racially integrated communities has increased over the decades, a large-scale social movement aimed at pressuring elected officials and housing developers to develop strategies aimed at creating more mixed race communities has not emerged. Increased White support for such neighborhoods may suggest that Whites prefer neighborhoods that are racially diverse and are also safe, with high quality services, good schools, and other amenities. Again, however, so few of these neighborhoods exist. The fact that predominantly Black neighborhoods tend to concentrate Blacks' relatively lower income, wealth, and greater poverty contributes to these neighborhoods being relatively undesirable places to live and raise a family (Massey and Denton). Moreover, if racially diverse communities are not an option, and living in predominantly Black neighborhoods increases the likelihood of living in a community of lesser means, then even well intentioned Whites may opt out of living in such neighborhoods.

Nonetheless, it is still important to recognize that urbanism plays a potentially important role in determining how Whites may interpret the race-based messages to which they are

exposed in their houses of worship. This study suggests that the relatively greater openness to diversity among individuals living in more urban context may challenge conservative racial attitudes reinforced within worship settings that are largely racially segregated themselves. Although attitude change is not synonymous with behavior change, it is an important initial step. Alternatively, the fact that racial integration extends social-economic opportunities to racial/ethnic minorities living in areas of greater and reduced levels of urbanism likely contributes to worship attendance being unrelated to the race-based residential attitudes of African Americans and Hispanics.

Appendix

Table A. Treatment Effects of the Relationship between Urbanism and Willingness to Live within a Racially Diverse Community among Non-Hispanic Whites⁹

Urbanism (Population per square mile)	Average Treatment Effect
2) 93.2-305.3 VS. 1) 93.1	.023 (-.049-.095)
3) 305.4-817 VS. 1) 93.1	.109** (.037-.181)
4) 817.1-1967 VS. 1) 93.1	.128** (.050-.206)
5) 1967.1-+ VS. 1) 93.1	.109* (.006-.211)
Base Urbanism Comparison ¹⁰	Population Mean
1) .93.1	.545** (.492-.598)
N	1669

*<.05; **<.01; Confidence Intervals in parentheses

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⁹These analyses implement the same controls listed within the Logit Regression Analyses of Table 2.

¹⁰ The lowest level of Urbanism (population density) is 1). This represents the base comparison group to which all other levels of urbanism are compared. As stated in the Results section, the base comparison level of urbanism is .545, suggesting that if everyone lived at the lowest level of urbanism, 54.5% of Whites would prefer living in a racially diverse community. The level 3) urbanism score of .109, suggests that, compared to Whites living at the lowest level of urbanism, 10.9% more Whites living at level 3) (e.g. median) of urbanism would prefer living in a racially diverse community. This represents a statistically significant difference from those living at the lowest level of urbanism.

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