

Social scientific research about trust grows and grows (Williams 2001; Alesina and La Ferrara 2002; Glaeser, Laibson, Scheinkman, and Soutter 2000; Welch, Rivera, Conway, Yonkoski, Lupton, Giancola 2005; Simpson 2006). A very-well studied topic in fields like political science, sociology, and economics, we know quite a bit about the correlates of trusting, and have good reason to believe that trust is an essential social and political order (Welch, Sikkink, Sartain, and Bond 2004; Welch et al. 2007; Mencken et al. 2009; Glaeser, Laibson, Scheinkman, and Soutter 2000; Miller and Mitamura 2003; Welch et al. 2005; Simpson 2006; Paxton 2007).

Much of the work, at least in the sociology of religion, advances what we would call a 'pro-religion' frame. That is – religion is mostly understood as a source of pro-social resources and as such as a primary reservoir of social trust. Certainly, research documents the relatively retreatist characteristics of evangelicals and fundamentalists, but religious practice and belief are regularly portrayed as motivators of volunteering, charity, and social participation. The lower levels of trust among evangelicals are regularly explained as a result of high levels of 'bonding-social capital.' It's not so much that evangelicals live fearful lives in institutions that promote fear, but rather that their embattled communities are thriving under their own canopy. Mainline protestant churches, on the other hand, are conceived as great sources of social capital and trust because they encourage 'bridging social capital' that propels them into the social world in myriad ways. In fact, the General Social Survey data I'll report in just a few minutes confirm nearly all of these previous empirical findings about how religious tradition, belief, and practice relate to trust, but attempts to understand their meaning differently.

The paper, very much preliminary, that I will present today adopts a somewhat unique, and somewhat critical, frame. Instead of seeing religion as a primary reservoir of social capital, we instead think about how patterns in American culture and institutions were assembled with the resources and tool-kit of white, mainstream protestant Christianity. Much sociology of religion and civic life, in fact, is done by folks who bring that tool-kit to work every day. It is not so much that these sociologists work to establish or maintain a pro-religion frame, but rather that they are not predisposed to considering how non-religion might do the same the sorts of things, maybe even more so. So, that's a significant part of what we will do. Instead of stopping with measures of religious affiliation, belief, and practice, we will also consider how non-affiliation and nontheism might in fact be pro-social.

Of course, how scholars define and measure trust and religion varies, and a number of theoretically relevant questions continue to be understudied. Mencken, Bader and Embry's (2009) recent work on the issue of trust and religion is an important step toward addressing this lacuna, but room remains for theorizing about how American religion affects the basic social building block of trust (Welch et al. 2004). Recognizing the caveats Alisina and La Ferrara (2002:213) rightly discuss, we adopt their approach to measuring generalized trust – using the GSS question “Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?” Trust, in the findings that follow, is a dummy variable indicating those who said “most people can be trusted”

Alesina and La Ferrara (2002), whose study today's talk draws heavily upon because it touches on themes many studies do, identify several important trends in trust that align with our 'critical' perspective on trust in America. For example, they report that membership in a historically marginalized social group, here referring specifically to people of color and women being 'low-trusters.' Similarly, those who earn less income and receive the least education - at the bottom of our society's entrenched system of inequality - are also less likely to trust others. We understand these as relatively alienated social groups that have good reason not to expect others can be trusted. When society is built on your back while its rewards go disproportionately to wealthy, white men, distrust is rational.

We include measures of belonging to these relatively disadvantaged groups. We use the GSS variable RACE (White, Black, Other), creating a dummy identifying people of color, with white as our reference group. We use the GSS variable CLASS - a subjective measure of class status, creating dummy variables for 'lower class' and 'working class' - middle and upper class are the reference category. Dummy variables are used to identify those who finished less than high school, as well as high school graduates - those with college education or more are the reference category. We expect that those in the disadvantaged status will report, on average, lower levels of trust.

As we've made clear, many studies show religiosity to be related to levels of social trust in the United States (Schoenfeld 1978; Smidt 1999; Putnam 2000; Welch et al. 2004, 2007; Mencken et al. 2009). Most of these studies of religion and social trust emphasize differences across religious traditions in terms of the theological and network aspects of

religiosity (for example, see Welch et al. 2007) using an explanatory framework grounded in the concept of social capital (Putnam 2000; Beyerlein and Hipp 2006), itself a composite of network ties and trust. Others have shown that religious practice is related to levels of social trust. Smidt (1999), for example, found church attendance to be curvilinearly related to social trust such that those who attend the least and those who attend the most are less trusting than moderate attendees. A few recent studies have demonstrated a relationship between religious belief and trust (Mencken et al. 2009), and there are important similarities in the literatures about trust and tolerance (Froese and Bader 2007).

Religious Tradition and Trust

A 2007 study by Welch et al. serves as an example of the current understanding of the relationship between religious affiliation and trust. Welch et al. (2007) first deconstruct religious affiliation into congregations and theological traditions, and then propose a theory which explains trust as a product of the congregational social network structure, social capital, and the tradition's specific theological culture. Congregations "promote in-group bonding and instill a sense of social connection that can extend beyond group boundaries" suggesting that this may be the mechanism that connects religion and social trust (Welch et al. 2007:318). However, network structure and congregational social capital themselves are not enough to explain trust, and so most explanations turn to the cultural and theological differences that are used to categorize religious traditions as conservative or liberal (Daniels and von der Ruhr 2010) or Evangelical and Mainline (Beyerlein and Hipp 2006).

It is often argued that conservative religion generates high levels of bonding social capital because of the aforementioned structural characteristics of congregations are combined with a theology emphasizing the fallen nature of the outside world. This combination, common among Evangelical and fundamentalist Protestants, tends to foster strong in-group ties and brings into doubt the development of trust for strangers, in fact promoting “prejudice and mistrust” and strong symbolic boundaries (Welch et al. 2004:319). Mainline Protestants, however, draw upon a theology that emphasizes the basic goodness of humanity and are involved at congregations characterized by ties to outside organizations. This bridging social capital is combined with a more open theology and is therefore more conducive to the development of permeable symbolic boundaries and greater social trust (Welch et al. 2004:320). The intersection of these basic concepts, social capital and theological outlook, provides a straightforward explanation for the two groups mentioned above, Evangelical and Mainline Protestants.

However, this theoretical approach makes assumptions about religion, in general, which are more appropriately understood as characteristics of white Protestantism. First, this approach assumes that religious affiliation is a matter of choice. Choice is central to Protestant theology, but is not as relevant for other traditions, for example Catholicism and Black Protestantism, in which membership is more strongly connected to ethnic, community, or family ties which limit religious mobility to the degree that membership in these traditions has been termed semi-voluntary (Sandomirsky and Wilson 1990). Second, arguments about the relationship between religiously maintained social boundaries and public life are often supported by reference to a theological debate about privileging soul saving or the Social Gospel. Of course, this debate is of most relevance to the Mainline and

Evangelical movements of American white-Protestantism in the 20th century (Regnerus and Smith 1998).

Given these assumptions that resonate best with white Protestantism, the use of this theory often leads to ad hoc explanations of how other religious traditions promote or constrain social trust. We argue that the lack of clarity about how these concepts should predict the behavior of members of non-white Protestant traditions calls for a broader theory that explains variation across religious affiliations and a wider range of beliefs, including the non-affiliated, according to the place of religion and religiosity in American culture. Critically, these standard explanations ignore the basic sociological observation that America is a religiously stratified nation.

Williams (2007), for example, outlines how the U.S. civic sphere owes its logic of individualism and self organization to the Protestant worldview. More specifically, American public life is grounded in the institutional forms and cultural products of white Protestantism (Loveland, Jones, and Park 2008), and most Americans assume that others are religious to some degree (Tamney, Powell, and Johnson 1989). Social, political, and economic elites have, historically, been disproportionately drawn from the Episcopalian, Presbyterian, and Congregationalists denominations (Davidson, Pyle, and Reyes 1995; Pyle and Davidson 2003). These Mainline denominations dominated American life from the country's founding and continue to hold sway in important ways; members of these Mainline denominations continue to be over-represented in powerful professional positions from banking to education (Davidson et. al 1995). Of course, the major U.S. religious traditions have unique histories and cultures relative to mainstream American

society (Steensland, Park, Regnerus, Robinson, Wilcox, and Woodberry 2000; Dougherty, Johnson, and Polson 2007), even as over time Catholics, Evangelical and Black Protestants, and Jews have become more connected to mainstream social life (Wuthnow 1988) and divisions between major religious traditions have reduced in salience (Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartmann 2006). Nonetheless, following the logic of historical disadvantage applied to race and gender above, one can also point to significant instances in American history when Black Protestants, Evangelicals, Catholics, and Jews were very much suspect outsiders. Each of these groups, as such, spent significant parts of their history in the United States establishing relatively autonomous institutional and social lives. It is not unreasonable, then, to hypothesize that affiliates of these relatively marginalized groups to be less trusting than mainline, white protestants. We will test this hypothesis by including dummy indicators mainline protestants, using the Steensland et al. coding scheme, and setting all other traditions as the reference category. Mainline protestants will likely, on average, be more willing to trust.

Finally we consider the role of religious practice, belief, and lack of belief. As noted above, attendance has been found to increase trust, and this is usually explained as a social rather than a religious effect. Attendance at religious services provides opportunities to interact with others, building relationships that may increase trust. We use the GSS measure ATTEND to account for attendance at religious services. Ranging from 'never' to 'more than once a week,' we add the 8 category variable as a continuous independent variable.

Next, research has previously shown that biblical literalism is negatively associated with generalized trust. Typically, this is explained in terms of a rejection of the secular and an unwillingness to place trust in those who do not share the same world view.

Compromise with a fallen world is dangerous, and as such one's radius of trust should include only those who have proven themselves trustworthy. This is a separate dynamic than the institutional argument above dealing with the history of evangelical Christianity in the United States. Rather than entering a world of established networks maintained by small fellowship groups at church and regular religious gatherings, this argument is social psychological. It is, in fact, an easier hypothesis to test with personal report data like that from the GSS. Those who believe the Bible is God's literal word, we believe, will be less likely to say they trust the average person who very well may not be a believer. We use the GSS variable BIBLE and create a dummy for those who choose 'Word of God.'

Our most original contribution to research about social trust comes in our exploration of secular attitudes. Because sociologists of religion tend to frame their questions in terms of how religion promotes trust, it is simply not typically considered that lack of religious faith may be correlated with prosocial attitudes. However, the basic critical frame doesn't provide a straightforward hypothesis. Few groups are more despised in America than non-believers, so the marginalization approach would suggest that nontheists would be less willing to trust than believers. However, nontheists, to the extent that they are unattached to religious institutions, may also be freer to form relationships with a wide range of people. Certainly, nontheists don't have the type of ideological commitment that prevents biblical literalists from extending their radius of trust. Might they be more willing to trust people because they lack supernatural boundaries? We test a

number of measures from the GSS including dummies for those who believe the Bible is a book of fables, those who reject the notion of a deity (a dummy combining those who say there is no god, they can't know if there is a god, and who believe some higher power but not a god). We also include the Steensland et al. measure of nonaffiliation with a religious tradition.

Data and Method

We use General Social Survey data, pooled and analyzed with mixed effects logistic regression, grouped by year. We use data from the years in which the question "Tell me which statement comes closest to expressing what you believe about God" was asked. These years are 1988, 1991,93,94, 98, 2000, 06,08,10 and 2012. Listwise deletion, increased by the fact that some of the questions are regularly asked to a subset of respondents, reduces our estimation sample to 8270 cases across 10 years. In addition to the variables addressed above, we include AGE, real income in constant dollars (REALINC, divided by 10,000) MARITAL status as a dummy for 'married' as controls.

What did we find?

The odds that mainline Protestants say the average person can be trusted are 1.4 times greater than those affiliated with other traditions, or without an affiliation.

The odds that a woman says 'most people can be trusted' are 81% that of a man, on average.

The odds that a person of color says 'most people can be trusted' are 52% that of the average white person.

Our education and subjective class identification measures perform as expected. Those with high school education or less are less willing to trust than those who have completed junior college or more. Those who identify as lower or working class have odds 38% and 20% lower, respectively, than others.

Confirming what others have found, the odds that biblical literalists say most people can be trusted are 40% less than non-literalists.

Those who believe the Bible is a book of fables are more trusting than others, with odds of saying most people can be trusted 17% greater.

Finally, our model also shows that non-theists are more trusting than those who report belief in god. The odds that nontheists say most people can be trusted are 1.23 times greater than those for believers.

Implications

This is a preliminary analysis, but we find it compelling and worthy of further exploration. Many of our findings confirm what many others have found – that moderately religious people are more trusting than strongly religious folks, and that religious practice can foster trust. However, we are not aware of studies showing those who reject the Bible as a sacred text to be more trusting than Bible believers, nor are we aware of research showing that nontheists are more trusting than believers. This finding does, perhaps, contradict our other findings about marginalized people being less trusting. Non-theists are a growing but still small part of the U.S. population. Research has demonstrated that Americans are uncomfortable with the idea of atheists (Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartman 2006).

However, research has also shown that most Americans are willing to befriend non-believers (Vargas and Loveland 2011). In short, the literature about the social lives of non-believers is very limited.

Taken together, we suggest that secularism can be understood as a positive development for social integration and public life. It is not just that conservative religion, in the case of this study conservative Christianity, promotes an embattled worldview, but that the absence of religion appears to be correlated with a more trusting approach to social life.

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Mixed-effects logistic regression      Number of obs      =      8270
Group variable: year                  Number of groups   =      10

                                      Obs per group: min =      299
                                      avg =      827.0
                                      max =      2027

Integration points = 7                 Wald chi2(14)      =      958.20
Log likelihood = -4742.6797           Prob > chi2        =      0.0000

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      cantrust | Odds Ratio   Std. Err.      z    P>|z|    [95% Conf. Interval]
-----+-----
      mlprot  |  1.398456   .0911307     5.15  0.000    1.230779    1.588977
      attend  |  1.053104   .0113562     4.80  0.000    1.03108    1.075599
      biblit  |  .603352   .0380684    -8.01  0.000    .5331684    .6827743
      fables  |  1.174475   .0885268     2.13  0.033    1.013174    1.361456
nontheist  |  1.23449   .0950354     2.74  0.006    1.061595    1.435542
      POC     |  .5187933   .0367746    -9.26  0.000    .4514993    .5961172
      female  |  .8212829   .0418391    -3.86  0.000    .7432408    .9075195
      lthigh  |  .3217564   .0308639   -11.82  0.000    .2666104    .3883088
highschool |  .5745507   .0329691    -9.66  0.000    .5134336    .6429429
lowerclass |  .623385   .0745734    -3.95  0.000    .4930943    .7881025
workingclass | .7982653   .0447746    -4.02  0.000    .7151604    .8910274
      age     |  1.016293   .0015918    10.32  0.000    1.013178    1.019418
      coninc10 | 1.037855   .0075062     5.14  0.000    1.023247    1.052672
      married | 1.113713   .0606414     1.98  0.048    1.000981    1.239142
      _cons   | .3621525   .0453691    -8.11  0.000    .2833062    .4629422
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Random-effects Parameters	Estimate	Std. Err.	[95% Conf. Interval]	
year: Identity				
var(_cons)	.016914	.0104767	.0050235	.0569493

LR test vs. logistic regression: chibar2(01) = 13.80 Prob>=chibar2 = 0.0001

Number of strata = 1 Number of obs = 8270

Number of PSUs = 8270 Population size = 8174.91

DESCRIPTIVE STATS

	Mean	Std. Err.	[95% Conf. Interval]	
cantrust	.3430766	.0058713	.3315675	.3545858
mlprot	.1632618	.0044438	.1545509	.1719727
attend	3.6951	.0340184	3.628416	3.761785
biblit	.3252901	.0058107	.3138997	.3366805
fables	.1877846	.0048931	.1781928	.1973764
nontheist	.1752374	.004741	.1659439	.1845308
POC	.2231965	.0052913	.2128242	.2335688
female	.5371493	.0062197	.5249571	.5493415
lthigh	.1553813	.0045468	.1464683	.1642942
highschool	.5092021	.0062191	.4970111	.5213932
lowerclass	.0675008	.0029676	.0616836	.073318
workingclass	.4628004	.0062076	.450632	.4749689
age	44.93402	.2028513	44.53638	45.33166
coninc10	5.212127	.0555664	5.103203	5.321051
married	.5685167	.0061184	.556523	.5805103
year	2002.897	.0971797	2002.706	2003.087