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## Where will you find Trump's most ardent supporters? Probably not at church

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New data suggest the left may have a lot more common ground with religious conservatives than either group realizes.

In a Democracy Fund Voter Study Group report, I found that religious conservatives are far more supportive of diversity and immigration than secular conservatives. Religion appears to moderate conservative attitudes, particularly on some of the most polarizing issues of our time: race, immigration and identity.

Churchgoing Trump voters have more favorable feelings toward African-Americans, Hispanics, Asians, Jews, Muslims and immigrants compared with nonreligious Trump voters. This holds up even while accounting for demographic factors like education and race.

Churchgoing Trump voters care far more than nonreligious ones about racial equality (67 percent vs. 49 percent) and reducing poverty (42 percent vs. 23 percent). These differences are reflected in their actions, too. Trump's most religiously observant voters are three times as likely as secular Trump voters to volunteer — and not just with their own churches. Sixty-one percent of the president's most devout base volunteered in the past year, compared with 20 percent of conservatives without religious affiliation.

Religious participation also appears to pull Trump's supporters away from the administration's immigration policy. The more frequently Trump voters attend church, the more they support offering citizenship to unauthorized immigrants and making the immigration process easier, and the more opposed they become to the border wall.

In fact, many conservative Christian churches disapprove of the Trump administration's handling of immigration. The National Association of Evangelicals, representing 45,000 churches, asked Trump to end family separation at the border because it caused "traumatic effects" on young children. It also urged the administration to "resume a robust U.S. refugee resettlement program."

The Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Protestant denomination in the country at over 15 million people, did something similar: It passed a resolution asking the Trump administration to consider a pathway to citizenship for asylum-seekers and keeping families together at the border because of the "biblical mandate to act compassionately toward those who are in need."

The Mormon Church issued a news release voicing its concern over the "aggressive and insensitive treatment" of asylum-seekers that was "harmful to families" and urged officials to "correct this situation" with "rational, compassionate solutions."

Religious institutions provide communities and identities that aren't based upon immutable traits such as race or country of birth. Research suggests that identities that transcend race or nationality may lead people to feel more favorably toward racial and religious minorities.

Social psychology research has also found that conservatives have a stronger desire to belong and be loyal to cohesive groups. Secular conservatives lack church membership to provide that sense of belonging and may succumb to the temptation to find it on the basis of their race or the nation, thereby bolstering white nationalism or the alt-right movement. We found that secular Trump voters are three times as likely as churchgoing Trump voters to say that their white racial identity is "extremely" important to them; a majority of them report feeling like strangers in the country.

These effects aren't confined to just Protestants or Catholics (who make up 63 percent and 26 percent, respectively, of Trump's devout supporters). Frequent participation in religious traditions also appears to bolster more tolerant attitudes and volunteer work among Muslims, Mormons and Buddhists.

But the harmonizing effect of religion may be diminishing. Since the early 1990s, as record numbers of Americans began leaving organized religion, the percentage of white Republicans with no religious affiliation has tripled, according to an analysis of the General Social Survey. Today, only 31 percent of the president's coalition attends church regularly. Forty-eight percent never or rarely attend services.

Because of the LGBT culture wars, some incorrectly assume that if conservative churchgoers are less accepting of sexual minorities, they are also less accepting of racial and religious minorities. This incorrect assumption may help explain why a majority (56 percent) of Democrats today have outright negative views of evangelical Christians, as the Views of the Electorate Research Survey found.

Many progressives imagine that encouraging conservatives to disengage from religion will make them more tolerant. But if the data serve as any guide, doing so may make it even harder for left and right to meet in the middle.

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