

# **Faith and Friendship: Religiously Homogeneous Friendships and Religious Tolerance in Muslim-Majority Countries**

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## **Abstract**

Studies have documented a democracy gap, in which Muslim countries are less democratic than non-Muslim countries, and a tolerance gap, in which Muslim countries have lower levels of tolerance than non-Muslim countries. In part reflecting the greater interest in democracy, less has been written on the tolerance than the democracy gap. Focusing on Muslims' tolerance and attitudes toward non-Muslims and diverging from the mainstream approaches that focus on cultural, institutional, and socio-economic explanations, I argue that Muslim countries' lower tolerance is driven by religiously homogeneous friendships or high levels of religious bonding in the countries. Analyzing a global survey of more than 17,000 Muslims, I show that religious bonding is negatively related to attitudes toward non-Muslims and that religious bonding is indeed higher among Muslims in Muslim countries than Catholics in Catholic-majority Latin American countries. I discuss the implications of this argument and highlight avenues for future research.

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## **Faith and Friendship: Religiously Homogeneous Friendships and Religious Tolerance in Muslim-Majority Countries**

Works on the Muslim world have documented two empirical findings. The first concerns a democracy gap in which Muslim countries are generally less democratic than non-Muslim countries (e.g., Huntington 1997; Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Maseland and van Hoorn 2011). The second concerns a tolerance gap. Although elections and mass support for democracy are important, they are not enough for a truly democratic system to prevail. Democracy requires certain democratic virtues to sustain and make it work. Among various democratic attitudes, tolerance is arguably one of the most fundamental. Studies that look into tolerance in Muslim-majority countries have found that Muslims in the countries tend to have relatively low levels of tolerance<sup>1</sup>.

Reflecting scholars' and general public's great interest in democracy, less has been written on the tolerance than the democracy gap. I intend to fill this gap by focusing on religious tolerance, specifically tolerance toward Christians, and by proposing a new explanation that is based on social relationships. Diverging from the mainstream approaches that focus on cultural-theological, socio-economic, and institutional variables, I argue that high levels of religious bonding or religiously homogeneous friendships are responsible for the lower levels of tolerance in Muslim countries.

I support this argument by presenting two evidence. First, I show that levels of religious bonding or Muslims' ties with fellow Muslims significantly predict indicators of religious tolerance in 17 Muslim-majority countries. Specifically, religious bonding is related to a higher

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the tolerance gap does not imply that non-Muslim countries in general are already tolerant. The term must be understood in the context of a comparison.

perception that Christians are hostile to Muslims, a lower acceptance of interfaith marriage between Muslims and Christians, a lower perception that Islam and Christianity share similarities, and a lower awareness that non-Muslim minorities in Muslim countries face restrictions on their religious practice. Second, comparing Muslims' levels of religious bonding to that of Catholics in Catholic-majority Latin American countries, I show that Muslims in the Muslim-majority countries indeed have more religiously homogeneous friendship networks. This difference persists even after potentially confounding factors are controlled.

### **Religious (In)Tolerance in the Muslim World**

The concept of tolerance can be defined in two ways. Social tolerance relates to “a positive general orientation toward groups outside of one’s own” (Dunn and Singh 2014, 7), whereas political tolerance refers to one’s willingness to respect political and social rights of groups one disagrees with. High social tolerance in a society maintains social cohesion and facilitates cooperation. Political tolerance, on the other hand, guarantees the idea of democracy as a free marketplace where ideas are exchanged and political competition takes place. In a society that is unwilling to tolerate unpopular views, citizens who hold such views will be forced to keep those views to themselves, creating a “spiral of silence” (Noelle-Neumann, Elizabeth 1993) where the dissenters feel they are alone and the majority feel everyone agrees with them.

Notwithstanding the importance of political tolerance, data availability forces the present study to focus on social tolerance. That the study of the Muslim world has overlooked the effects of social relationships on tolerance means that data scarcity is a formidable challenge. The only available surveys on Muslim countries that asked about social relationships included only social

tolerance questions and left out political tolerance. Others that fielded political tolerance questions did not have questions on social relationships.

This limitation should not jeopardize the significance or the generalizability of the study. Social tolerance and political tolerance are known to share some antecedents (Gibson 2006, 163–65). Social tolerance also shapes political tolerance and is more conservative in the sense that more people are socially intolerant than politically intolerant (e.g., Weldon 2006, 338). This suggests that social tolerance may be seen as a “baseline” of a society’s tolerance level—an indicator of how people would think of and treat the different others absent the constraints of the legal and political system (Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus 1982, 241). In my country-level analysis, I show nonetheless that religious bonding predicts lower political tolerance.

A look into the literature would reveal that studies on Muslim countries have focused less on tolerance, let alone religious tolerance, than on understanding support for democracy. There are two reasons for this trend. First, one of the early impetuses of studying the Muslim world stemmed from the notion that Islam is incompatible with democracy (Huntington 1997). This perceived incompatibility continued to be the default null hypothesis that scores of studies aim to disconfirm (e.g., Esposito and Mogahed 2007). The second reason why the study of religious tolerance has lagged behind the study of democracy is because religion itself has been hardly a mainstream topic in the study of politics (Grzymala-Busse 2012). While now the notions that religion is here to stay (Norris and Inglehart 2012) and that it affects political behavior (McKenzie and Rouse 2013) are relatively accepted, a long standing view in the social sciences had been that religion would disappear as societies become more rational.

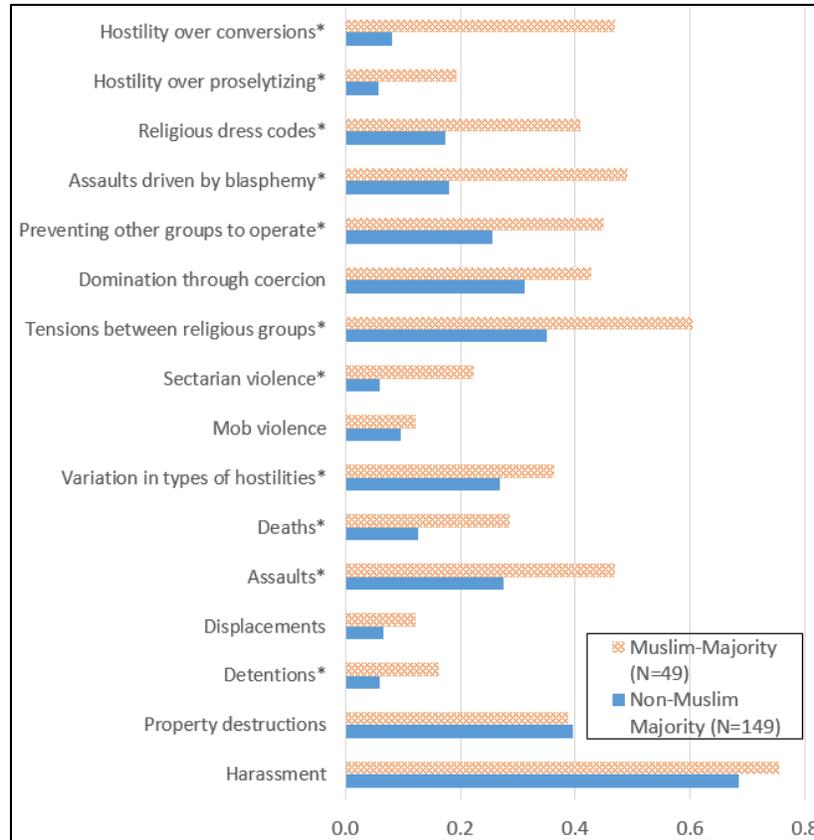
Despite these challenges, recent works have offered preliminary insights on tolerance among Muslims, both in and outside the Muslim world. These studies find that people living in

Muslim-majority countries tend to have relatively lower levels of tolerance when compared to more established democracies (Inglehart 2003, 56) or Catholics in Catholic-majority countries (Gu and Bomhoff 2012). Even in non-Muslim majority countries such as the United States (Djupe and Calfano 2012) or Western Europe (Verkuyten et al. 2014), Muslims are found to be less tolerant, especially on issues that violate religious sensitivities such as homosexuality (Fish 2011).

At least two studies specifically address Muslims' tolerance of non-Muslims. Analyzing the 1999-2004 and 2005-2008 waves of the World Values Survey, Milligan, Andersen, and Brym (2014) find that Muslims have higher objections than non-Muslims do when it comes to having neighbors who are of different religions. In an extensive coding endeavor, Grim and Finke (2006) developed a scheme to code the U.S. State Department reports of religious freedom across the world. This scheme was further refined and is used by the Pew Research Center in their study on global religious restrictions.

Figure 1 compares several indicators of social hostilities in Muslim and non-Muslim majority countries based on a 2016 report by the Center (see the Online Appendix for wording). The social hostilities index (SHI) can be regarded as an indicator of tolerance on the country-level as it focuses on restrictions imposed by the society (including individuals and social groups) and not government regulations of religion. The less religiously tolerant individuals in a society are, the more restrictive the society likely is toward religious minorities.

As the Figure shows, Muslim countries generally have higher levels of social restrictions on religion. These patterns hold up even when European and North American countries are excluded from the list of non-Muslim countries. Having outlined my case that there are indeed lower levels of tolerance, particularly religious tolerance, in Muslim than in non-Muslim countries, I now move to review the mainstream explanations. How have we explained this lower tolerance?



\* Difference is statistically significant at  $p < .05$

**Figure 1. Social Restrictions of Religion in 2014 (Pew Research Center 2016)**

### Explaining Religious (In)Tolerance

In this section I review three major perspectives on the antecedents of tolerance. The first two perspectives—cultural-theological and institutional—focus on Muslim countries, whereas the third perspective—psychological—is discussed in a broader context beyond Muslim countries.

#### *Cultural-Theological*

The first perspective commonly employed to understand Muslims' political behavior is cultural. Under this perspective are approaches that emphasize Islamic theology (e.g., Huntington 1997) and the effects of modernization on societal values (e.g., Inglehart and Welzel 2005). These two approaches share the view that Muslims' low tolerance can be traced back to the absence of

certain liberal values in the society. The theological approach looks at Islamic doctrines and argues that the all-encompassing nature of the Qur'an (March 2015, 106) prevents Muslims from thinking critically for themselves and encourages them to just obey. Such a sweeping perception certainly overlooks the reality that Muslims across the world live and understand their religion differently (Sadowski 2006). In this sense, a theological approach that attributes Muslims' lower tolerance to the restrictive nature of the Qur'an may inadvertently give theological legitimacy to a certain view in Islam that is intolerant and discredit the more tolerant views as illegitimate at best.

The modernization theory still regards culture as important but adds another explanatory variable: level of socio-economic development. Higher socio-economic development leads to cultural changes, one of them being higher tolerance toward minorities. An obvious limitation of this theory is that it cannot explain the Gulf countries that are less tolerant than one would expect given their levels of development. That is why Inglehart and Welzel (2005, 19) regard cultural starting points as insurmountable, positing that "But cultural change is path dependent. The fact that a society was historically Protestant or Orthodox or Islamic or Confucian manifests itself in coherent cultural zones with distinctive value systems that persist even when one controls for the effects of socioeconomic development." This muddles what we should expect regarding the effects of modernization on Muslims' tolerance. As Muslim societies become more modernized, should we expect Muslims to become at least as tolerant as their non-Muslim counterparts, or should we expect Muslims' tolerance to rise only relative to their tolerance level in the past?

### *Institutional*

Two institutional factors are particularly of interest in relation to Muslims' political behavior: the level of secularism and the nature of political competition. These factors shape

tolerance through a similar mechanism, namely open competition. The more open a polity is, the greater the opportunity for its citizens to disagree and encounter diverse viewpoints. This exposure to diversity, along with the learning process individuals experience in responding to that diversity, in turn help internalize democratic tolerance in the society (Peffley and Rohrschneider 2003).

The level of secularism is concerned with how well separated the state and religious institutions are. A state's neutrality on religious affairs opens up rooms for religious institutions to compete in attracting believers (Finke and Stark 2005). As such, the resulting religious life is more vibrant with believers actively engaging each other. A strict regulation of religion, on the other hand, may privilege certain faiths over the others or privilege believers over unbelievers. It would be hard for citizens to tolerate each other when even the government demonstrates through its laws that not all citizens are equal. As such, this perspective argues, the low tolerance in Muslim countries is driven by laws that advantage Islam over the other faiths.

The logic is the same with the perspective that emphasizes political competition. Arguably the most famous version of it is the inclusion moderation hypothesis. The hypothesis asks if Islamists become more moderate as they participate in electoral competition. A number of studies have offered support for the hypothesis (Schwedler 2011). Electoral incentives induce Islamists to moderate their platforms to attract more votes and political reality forces parties to compromise to advance their agendas (Wickham 2002). According to this perspective, then, the low tolerance in Muslim countries is due to the lack of democracy or political competition in the countries. This lack of competition means there is only little incentive for parties to build inclusive coalitions.

What both perspectives miss, however, is that while free competition can induce moderation, it can also induce religious populism. As opposed to racing to the middle, parties may choose to outflank each other. In Muslim democracy Indonesia, for example, even secular parties

champion religious agendas, often at the expense of minorities (Tanuwidjaja 2010). Another limitation of the institutional explanations is that their level of analysis makes them more suited to explain cross-country differences than individual-level differences. The perspectives are mute when it comes to answering why different individuals in the same country have different levels of tolerance despite their being exposed to the same institutional arrangements. The social relationships-based argument that I propose, on the other hand, is capable to answer why different individuals and different societies have different levels of tolerance.

### *Psychological Antecedents*

A third set of antecedents are not constrained to Muslims and concerned with psychological processes. Three of such antecedents have received scholars' greatest attention (Sullivan and Transue 1999). The first relates to cognitive ability and includes variables such as level of education and political expertise. People with higher political sophistication tend to be more tolerant (McClosky 1964), presumably because they are exposed to dissonant political views more often and have a better internalization of democratic values.

The second antecedent of tolerance is threat perception (Marcus et al. 1995). Individuals are more likely to tolerate a group they disagree with if they perceive the group as possessing little or no threat to them or their way of life. Politicization of social cleavages can greatly affect this threat perception. When certain groups are portrayed as ancient enemies, members of each group would perceive the other group as threatening, making intolerance more likely.

Third, in terms of personality type, intolerance has been linked to close-mindedness and dogmatism (Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus 1982). These predispositions increase the likelihood of individuals conforming to established social norms while rejecting unorthodox views. Since

religiosity is related to a strong adherence to beliefs (Saroglou 2002), these predispositions can explain why highly religious people tend to be less tolerant (Gibson 2010). Consequently, that Muslim societies are generally religious might explain their lower tolerance.

### **Why Social Ties Matter**

The three approaches have contributed to our understanding of tolerance. However, as discussed above, they face certain limitations in their explanatory powers. More importantly, they are incomplete because they overlook an important component of the political life: relationships between individuals themselves. Social relationships affect not only the individuals' political behavior (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Nickerson 2008), but also how the society functions (Putnam 1993). Social ties improve the efficiency of the government and society (Putnam 1993, 167), facilitate collective action (Coleman 1988, 98), and nurture a feeling of reciprocity and trust among individuals (Brehm and Rahn 1997; Putnam 2000, 16).

Not all social ties are equal or always have desirable effects, however. Social ties that are inward-looking (bonding relationships or relationships with ingroup members) are more likely to produce undesirable effects on attitudes toward an outgroup compared to ties that are outward-looking (bridging relationships or relationships with outgroup members). There are three reasons why bonding relationships may be related to more negative evaluations of an outgroup and, by implication, why religious bonding may be related to lower religious tolerance.

The first relates to the flow or transmission of social norms and information (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1987). Individuals receive political and social cues from their surroundings (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954). Psychological works on social learning theory (Bandura 1976) and on attitude-behavior congruency (Ajzen and Fishbein 1977) also suggest that one's social

environment shapes what is considered appropriate or inappropriate behavior and attitudes. As such, the higher one's level of bonding relationships, the more likely it is, then, for the social networks to facilitate the flow of norms and information that are favorable to the ingroup and unfavorable to the outgroup (Huckfeldt, Mendez, and Osborn 2004).

The second mechanism concerns enhanced ingroup identity. In an experimental setting, Levendusky, Druckman, and McLai (2016) show that interactions with politically similar others have the potential to enhance partisan identity. Coupled with preferential treatments for ingroup members, such an attachment to the ingroup may lead to intolerance and rejection of the outgroup (Brewer 1999). In the context of religious life, religious social identity also has been shown to lead to intolerance toward and rejection of religious outgroups (Ben-Nun Bloom, Arikan, and Courtemanche 2015; Rhodes 2012).

The literature on religious economy offers another example of how bonding with one's religious ingroup may lead to intolerance toward the outgroup. According to this perspective (Finke and Stark 2005), strict churches (or strict religious congregations in general) have the incentive to ask more from their members to weed out free riders. This creates a more cohesive congregation with high levels of participation. On the other side of the coin, the emphasis on group identity and group loyalty discourages dissents and cultivates rejections of non-mainstream outgroups, as exemplified by studies on Evangelical churches (e.g., Reimer and Park 2001).

The third reason of why bonding may lead to intolerance and negative attitudes toward the others concerns lower levels of bridging relationships. To the extent that maintaining relationships are costly in that one has to devote time to one's friends (Wellman et al. 1997, 36) or one's group (Campbell 2004), likely there would be a trade-off between bonding and bridging. The more one

devotes time and other resources to one's ingroup, the less that one can devote to one's relationships with outgroup members.

Bridging relationships, on the other hand, have been linked to tolerance and acceptance of outgroups (Allport 1954; Cigler and Joslyn 2002; Harell 2010; Ikeda and Richey 2009; Mutz 2006; Putnam and Campbell 2010). Positive interactions with people from a different group reduce anxiety about the group (Pettigrew and Tropp 2008) and increase the ability of individuals to empathize with and understand the viewpoints of the other group. Perspective-taking, in turn, nurtures tolerance and mutual understanding (Galinsky and Moskowitz 2000). That high levels of bonding may take up the time and resources needed to develop bridging relationships might, in turn, hinder the developments of these positive effects.

Based on the preceding review, I argue that one of the reasons, if not the primary reason, why we see lower tolerance in Muslim countries is because there is a higher level of religious bonding in these countries. Supporting this argument requires two pieces of evidence. First, I need to show that religious bonding is indeed related to lower tolerance among Muslims. To date, no such cross-national analysis has been done. Second, I need to show that religious bonding in Muslim-majority countries is indeed higher than in non-Muslim majority countries.

*Hypothesis 1: Religious bonding is negatively related to religious tolerance among Muslims*

*Hypothesis 2: Religious bonding is higher in Muslim countries than in non-Muslim countries*

To test the hypotheses, I analyze data from two surveys. The first is a survey of "The World's Muslim" (TWM; Pew Research Center 2013). This survey was conducted between October 2011 and November 2012. Respondents were 32,604 Muslims in 26 countries. Of the 26 countries surveyed, three are not Muslim-majority according to data by the Pew Research Center

(2014b): Bosnia-Herzegovina, Russia, and Thailand. I excluded these countries in my models. The second dataset is a survey of “Religion in Latin America” (RILA; Pew Research Center 2014a) that covers 30,326 respondents in 19 Latin American countries. The survey was conducted between October 2013 and February 2014. This dataset is used as a comparison to assess the second hypothesis. The use of these datasets is driven by practical reasons as no major comparative politics survey ever included a question that tapped into religious bonding (or any kind of bonding relationship). These surveys are the only comparative surveys that have asked such a question.

It is worth noting that this study analyzes observational data. This means that some limitations commonly found in an analysis of such data also apply to this study. The first concerns causal ordering. While the argument championed in this study is that religious bonding lowers religious tolerance, it is possible that an empirical relationship between bonding and tolerance is driven by already less tolerant people being more likely to befriend religiously similar others. Second, unlike in an experimental study where randomization renders void the effects of confounding factors, both observed and unobserved, an analysis of observational data relies on the observables. Only those that are measured can be controlled. To address these concerns, my analysis takes into account, as far as the data allows, alternative explanations by including in the models an extensive set of control variables. I also present a country-level analysis where I take advantage of the temporal ordering of the variables as an identification strategy. This analysis provides additional evidence for the causal effect of religious bonding on religious tolerance.

### **Religious Bonding and Religious Tolerance among Muslims**

I employed multilevel regression with random intercept models to test the first hypothesis. The models are appropriate because respondents are nested within countries and respondents

within the same country are likely more similar to each other than they are to respondents from other countries. Using fixed effects models where countries are modeled with dummy variables does not change the results and are available in the Online Appendix.

### *Variables<sup>2</sup>*

*Religious bonding*, which is the independent variable of interest, is constructed from a question that asked respondents “How many of your close friends are Muslim?” Responses were “all of them”, “most of them”, “some of them”, “hardly any of them”, or “none of them”. I coded the answers so that higher scores indicate higher levels of religious bonding.

As dependent variables, I employed five measures of social tolerance. The first two variables were calculated from two questions that asked respondents “How comfortable would you be if a son (daughter) of yours someday married a Christian?” I recoded the responses into a 5-point scale of “not at all comfortable”, “not too comfortable”, “depends on situation”, “somewhat comfortable”, and “very comfortable”. The third variable asked respondents “In your opinion, how many Christians in our country are hostile toward Muslims?” I placed the responses into a 6-point scale ranging from “none”, “very few”, “just some”, “many”, “most”, to “all”. The fourth variable was built from a question that asked respondents “From what you know, do you think that the Muslim religion and the Christian religion have a lot in common, or do you think that the Muslim religion and the Christian religion are very different?” Responses were binary choices “are very different” and “have a lot in common”. I coded the latter as the “1” response. The fifth dependent variable taps into the Muslim respondents’ perception of the condition of religious freedom in their

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<sup>2</sup> Full wording is available in the Online Appendix.

countries. The question asked “In our country, how free are people from religions different than yours to practice their religion?” Responses were coded as “not at all free”, “not too free”, “depends”, “somewhat free”, and “very free”. Since non-Muslim minorities generally face a degree of restrictions in these countries as discussed in the preceding section, I expect religious bonding to make the respondents less aware of these restrictions.

As the reader may have noticed, four of the dependent variables specify Christians as the target group. This may raise a generalizability issue: Does the relationship apply to other minority groups? While this is an understandable concern, specifying Christians as the target group does not harm the theory’s generalizability or relevance for two reasons. First, Gibson (1992) finds that an *a priori* specification of the target group affects studies that focus on descriptive statistics (i.e., how many people tolerate a particular group) but not studies that examine antecedents of tolerance. Second, while religious conflicts are rarely purely religious, several conflicts between Muslims and Christians around the world carry with them strong religious sentiments (Ayoub 1989), making Muslims-Christians relation an important topic to study<sup>3</sup>. The importance of understanding the relation becomes even more obvious once we consider how the war on terror is sometimes wrongly framed by either side as a Christian West’s war on Islam.

To account for alternative explanations, I included in the models 10 individual-level and five country-level control variables. The individual-level covariates include age, gender, whether living in a rural or urban area, level of education, level of political efficacy, perception of personal

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<sup>3</sup> I do not deny the importance of examining Sunni-Shia divide, but space and data constraints force me to focus on Muslims and Christians. The 2013 Pew survey also reveals that Muslims in many countries did not identify themselves in a sectarian way (see the Online Appendix).

economic condition, support for democracy, frequency of prayer, belief in Islam as one true faith, and whether the respondent has ever participated in interfaith activities. Level of education is intended to capture cognitive sophistication. I followed the coding scheme of Blaydes and Linzer (2012), recoding each respondent's education as less than high school, at least high school, and at least college degree. Political efficacy is intended as a proxy for political involvement, which has been shown to be a predictor of tolerance. Studies show that the two are positively correlated (Galston 2001). Personal economic condition serves as a proxy for income and existential security (Norris and Inglehart 2012), which should be positively related to tolerance. Support for democracy was measured with a binary variable that asked respondents whether they thought that the people should rely on a democratic government or a strong leader to solve the country's problems. Frequency of prayer and belief in Islam as one true faith tap into religiosity, albeit different types of it. The first relates to piety, whereas the latter is more about orthodoxy. While correlated, the two may have different consequences when it comes to how individuals translate their faiths into actions (Muluk, Sumaktoyo, and Ruth 2013). Lastly, participation in interfaith activities is a binary variable that asked respondents "Do you ever participate in religious group, classes, or meetings with Christians or not?" I use this variable to tease out the effects of bonding relationships from the effects of engagements in interfaith social activities.

I also included five country-level covariates: logged GDP per capita in 2010; percent urban population in 2010; percent population who are Muslim; government restrictions on religion (GRI) in 2010 as reported in the 2016 Pew's religious freedom report (Pew Research Center 2016); and Polity IV score in 2010. GDP per capita and percent urban population are indicators of modernization. Data for both variables were obtained from the World Bank website. In terms of proportion of Muslims, one may derive two predictions. A higher proportion of Muslims might be

related to a higher tolerance because fewer non-Muslims might lead to a lower perception that they are a threat to the Muslim majority. On the other hand, a higher proportion of Muslims might lead to a lower tolerance exactly because there are now more opportunities to bond with fellow Muslims and fewer opportunities to bridge with non-Muslims. Data for the variable came from the Pew Center's (2014b) study on global religious composition. The GRI and Polity IV scores aim to capture the effects of institutional factors. A society's tolerance should be negatively related to how tight the government regulates religion and positively to its level of democracy.

### *Results*

Table 1 presents results of the analysis. All models were estimated with mixed-effects linear regression except one that concerns similarities between Islam and Christianity that was estimated with mixed-effects logistic regression since it is a binary variable. I standardized all non-binary dependent and independent variables to have mean zero and standard deviation one.

The results support the expected relationships. A higher level of religious bonding is related to a lower acceptance of interfaith marriage, a higher perception that Christians are hostile to Muslims, and a lower perception that Islam and Christianity have a lot in common. Also, as expected, the higher the level of religious bonding, the more likely the respondents were to think that non-Muslims were free in practicing their religions. Given restrictions on non-Muslims in the countries studied, this finding suggests that religious bonding decreased not only the respondents' tolerance of non-Muslims, but also their awareness of restrictions the groups faced.

There are consistent negative effects of the two religiosity variables (frequency of prayer and belief in Islam as one true faith). This contradicts studies that argue that piety is different from fundamentalism but fits nicely with the growing evidence of how religiosity is negatively related

to tolerance (Gibson 2010). The effects of other variables are less consistent. Participation in interfaith activities is positively related to some measures of tolerance, but not the others. The same is true with personal economic condition. The effect of the variable is in the expected direction when it comes to interfaith marriage and perception of hostility but not when it comes to minorities' religious freedom. Another variable with interesting effects is government regulation of religion. As regulation of religion increased, respondents were less likely to accept interfaith marriage and to think that Islam and Christianity share commonalities. All in all, the analysis supports the hypothesis that religious bonding is related to a lower tolerance among Muslims. The next question, then, is whether religious bonding is indeed higher in Muslim countries.

**Table 1. Regressions of Tolerance on Religious Bonding<sup>c</sup>**

Predictor	OK Son Marries Christian	OK Daughter Marries Christian	Think Christians Hostile to Muslims	Islam and Christianity Have a Lot in Common	Think that Religious Minorities are Free
<b>Individual-level</b>					
Bonding	-0.122*** (0.01)	-0.064*** (0.01)	0.058*** (0.01)	-.075*** (.02)	0.030*** (0.01)
Freq Praying	-0.111*** (0.01)	-0.115*** (0.01)	0.093*** (0.01)	-.056** (.02)	0.021** (0.01)
Education	0.023*** (0.01)	0.020*** (0.01)	0.073*** (0.01)	.187*** (.02)	-0.013 (0.01)
Age	-0.024*** (0.01)	-0.033*** (0.01)	-0.011 (0.01)	.063*** (.02)	-0.000 (0.01)
Female	-0.022 (0.01)	-0.009 (0.01)	0.029 (0.02)	-.091** (.04)	0.035** (0.01)
Rural	-0.012 (0.01)	-0.030** (0.01)	-0.070*** (0.02)	-.033 (.04)	-0.001 (0.02)
Political Efficacy	-0.010 (0.01)	-0.029*** (0.01)	-0.043*** (0.01)	-.022 (.02)	-0.032*** (0.01)
Personal Economy	0.033*** (0.01)	0.036*** (0.01)	-0.063*** (0.01)	-.018 (.02)	0.085*** (0.01)
Prefer Democracy	0.006 (0.01)	0.002 (0.01)	-0.111*** (0.02)	-.150*** (.04)	0.095*** (0.02)
Islam True Faith	-0.278*** (0.02)	-0.378*** (0.02)	0.117*** (0.03)	-.582*** (.05)	0.036* (0.02)
Interfaith Activity	0.160*** (0.03)	0.205*** (0.02)	-0.083** (0.04)	.063 (.07)	0.009 (0.03)

<b>Country-level</b>					
Log GDP per capita	0.126 (0.12)	0.290** (0.14)	-0.085 (0.13)	-.101 (.33)	-0.031 (0.14)
Percent Muslims	0.050 (0.06)	0.022 (0.06)	0.456*** (0.10)	.150* (.16)	-0.109* (0.07)
GRI	-0.276*** (0.07)	-0.358*** (0.07)	0.065 (0.05)	-.467*** (.18)	-0.119 (0.07)
Polity IV	-0.023 (0.07)	0.100 (0.08)	-0.202*** (0.07)	-.308 (.20)	-0.042 (0.08)
Percent Urban	-0.131 (0.12)	-0.302** (0.13)	0.779*** (0.15)	.162 (.31)	-0.028 (0.13)
Intercept	0.252*** (0.06)	0.292*** (0.07)	0.628*** (0.14)	-.211 (.17)	-0.144** (0.07)
<b>Var Components</b>					
SD(intercept)	0.236*** (0.04)	0.261*** (0.05)	0.131*** (0.04)	.637 -	0.266*** (0.05)
SD(residuals)	0.898*** (0.00)	0.835*** (0.00)	0.842*** (0.01)	- -	0.953*** (0.01)
<b>N Observations</b>	17208	17217	6632	14,834	17024
<b>N Countries</b>	17 <sup>a</sup>	17 <sup>a</sup>	7 <sup>b</sup>	17 <sup>a</sup>	17 <sup>a</sup>

\*\*\* p<.01 \*\* p<.05 \* p<.10

<sup>a</sup> Albania, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Niger, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Turkey.

<sup>b</sup> Albania, Egypt, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Malaysia

<sup>c</sup> In the Online Appendix, I present models where a dummy variable for Middle Eastern countries is included.

### Levels of Religious Bonding in Muslim Countries

To test the second hypothesis that religious bonding in Muslim countries is indeed higher I now incorporate the RILA survey. I included in the analysis only 17 countries that are Catholic majority<sup>4</sup> and respondents who were Catholics—in other words, Catholics in Catholic-majority Latin American countries. This inclusion criteria is justified in light of my goal to find a comparison standard for Muslims in Muslim-majority countries. Catholics are relatively well defined, compared to more generic terms such as Protestants or Evangelicals that encompass different denominations (Steenland et al. 2000). There is also the practical reason that the RILA

<sup>4</sup> Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Venezuela



To more formally test that Muslim countries are higher in religious bonding, I run mixed-effects linear regressions similar to ones used in the first analysis. This time the dependent variable is level of religious bonding. I retained all control variables except for political efficacy that is not available in the RILA survey. The way the questions were asked is largely the same in the TWM and RILA surveys (see the Online Appendix).

Since I analyzed only Muslims in Muslim-majority countries and Catholics in Catholic-majority countries whether or not a respondent was Muslim is similar to whether or not the respondent was part of the TWM or RILA survey. In other words, the dummy for Muslim is a country-level variable. This dummy is our independent variable. As Model 1 in Table 2 shows, there is a positive effect of this variable, suggesting that even after controlling for the other variables, Muslim countries are higher in religious bonding than Catholic-majority countries.

There are also significant effects from some control variables. More religiously devoted respondents had higher levels of bonding. People in rural areas also had higher bonding compared to those living in the cities. Also, as common sense dictates, respondents who never participated in interfaith activities had higher levels of bonding and countries that were more religiously homogeneous had higher levels of bonding. Perhaps of interest to scholars of institutions, countries with higher levels of government regulation of religion are found to have higher bonding. While some degree of regulation of religion may be inevitable, this finding reiterates again the potential harms of such regulation if done in excess.

One may wonder, is it the case that the results were driven by theological distance? The second largest religious tradition in the Muslim countries is Christianity, whereas in the Catholic countries it is not Islam but other traditions of Christianity such as Protestantism or Evangelism. Maybe it was easier for the Catholic respondents to befriend non-Catholics because for them it

would mean befriending other Christians. On the contrary, Muslims may be predisposed to befriend other Muslims because the theological distance between Islam and Christianity is wider than between Catholicism and Protestantism.

To address this concern I take advantage of a question that asked whether respondents thought that “the Muslim religion and the Christian religion” (the TWM survey) or “the Catholic religion and the Protestant/Evangelical religion” (the RILA survey) have a lot in common. Responses were binary with “1” representing a perception that the two traditions have a lot in common and “0” representing that the two are really different. About 33% Muslim respondents thought that Islam and Christian share similarities. The number was comparable among Catholic respondents (36%). In that sense, the theological distance argument is not supported by evidence.

I tested the argument more formally in Model 2 of Table 2, including perceived shared similarities as another control variable. The inclusion of this variable did not change the statistical significance of the Muslim dummy or other variables. The attentive reader would correctly point out that perceived similarities was one of the dependent variables in Table 1. This would raise the issue of causal direction. In the next section I address this concern by offering a more elaborate discussion on the causal effect of bonding on tolerance and conducting an additional analysis with a stronger identification strategy.

**Table 2. Regressions of Religious Bonding in Muslim- and Catholic-majority Countries**

	Religious Bonding Model 1	Religious Bonding Model 2
<b>Individual-Level</b>		
Frequency Praying	0.070*** (0.01)	0.076*** (0.01)
Education	-0.006 (0.01)	-0.003 (0.01)
Age	0.031*** (0.00)	0.031*** (0.01)

Female	0.024** (0.01)	0.017* (0.01)
Rural	0.098*** (0.01)	0.097*** (0.01)
Personal Economic Condition	-0.011** (0.00)	-0.011** (0.01)
Prefer Democracy	-0.010 (0.01)	-0.012 (0.01)
Own Religion One True Faith	0.143*** (0.01)	0.139*** (0.01)
Interfaith Activity	-0.109*** (0.01)	-0.102*** (0.01)
Have a Lot in Common		-0.040*** (0.01)
<b>Country-Level</b>		
Muslim Country Dummy	0.259** (0.12)	0.267** (0.12)
Logged GDP per capita <sup>a</sup>	-0.056 (0.07)	-0.060 (0.07)
Share of Majority Religion	0.204*** (0.04)	0.196*** (0.04)
GRI	0.127** (0.06)	0.129** (0.06)
Polity IV <sup>a</sup>	-0.003 (0.05)	-0.004 (0.05)
Percent Urban <sup>a</sup>	0.051 (0.08)	0.056 (0.07)
Intercept	-0.222*** (0.08)	-0.211*** (0.08)
<b>Variance Components</b>		
SD(intercept)	0.177*** (0.02)	0.171*** (0.02)
SD(residuals)	0.840*** (0.00)	0.847*** (0.00)
N	33,872	30,245
N Countries	33 <sup>b</sup>	33 <sup>b</sup>

\*\*\* p<.01 \*\* p<.05 \* p<.10

<sup>a</sup> 2010 for the TWM and 2012 for the RILA (that is, one year before the survey began)

<sup>b</sup> Countries in Table 1, plus countries in footnote 4 minus Puerto Rico. In the Online Appendix I present models where Muslim countries that are more religiously homogeneous than the most homogeneous Catholic country are excluded. This is to show that the results are not driven by overly homogeneous Muslim countries. I also present models that include a dummy variable that represents Middle East countries. The findings continue to hold up in all of these specifications.

### **Is the Relationship Causal?**

The issue of causality is one of the most common challenges in an observational analysis. I contend that religious bonding would still shape tolerance even if tolerance shaped religious bonding. There are two reasons for this. First, research has documented factors that constrain the ability of an individual to deliberately select friends or discussion partners, one of them being the demographic composition of one's social context (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995). In the context of the present study, even if a Muslim person is highly intolerant and wants to interact only with fellow Muslims, her work environment, neighborhood, or school, to name a few social contexts, might still have few non-Muslims with whom the individual had to interact with, however superficially. This might reasonably affect how homogeneous the individual's social network would be in the end.

Furthermore, politics, including religious tolerance, "is not at the forefront of most choices that most individuals make" (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1987, 1199). When the average person befriends another person, it is unlikely that that friendship is primarily driven by similarities of opinions on politics or religion. As Lazer et al. (2010) note in their study of networks evolution, "We find significant conformity tendencies: Individuals shift their political views toward the political views of their associates... We also find that political views are notably unimportant as a driver for the formation of relationships" (p.248). This does not completely rule out the possibility of a self-selection, but it should at least convince us that selection cannot be the whole story.

The second reason is grounded on studies that go beyond observational data. Putnam and Campbell (2010) employ panel data to show that changes in the religious composition of one's friendship network predicted one's tolerance at a later time point. Green and Wong (2008) conducted a field experiment where they manipulated the racial composition of student groups

participating in a wilderness activity. Students embedded in more racially diverse groups developed higher tolerance toward minorities. Similar results were obtained by Van Laar et al. (2005) who studied the effects of college roommate assignments on ethnic attitudes.

While it is not possible to conduct an experimental or longitudinal analysis with the individual-level survey data used in this article, it is possible to provide stronger causal evidence for the relationship on the country-level. This is because the Pew Center annually released their religious freedom reports, resulting in a multi-year dataset. This enables me to take into account temporal ordering and utilize it for a stronger causal identification.

Since the analysis is on the country-level, the dependent variable is now the social hostilities index (SHI) reported by the Pew Research Center. The SHI runs from 0 to 10 with higher scores indicating higher levels of social hostility or lower levels of societal tolerance. Scores of the Muslim countries are from 2013 (i.e., one year after the survey), whereas scores of the Catholic countries are from 2014 (the most recent released). I use as predictors the same set of country-level variables used in the preceding sections with the country's level of religious bonding (calculated as in Figure 2) as the independent variable of interest.

To more stringently test for the causal effect of religious bonding, I also included in one of the models the previous SHI score as another control variable. As scores of social hostilities and government regulations are highly stable in the Pew reports, if religious bonding still has a significant effect on the SHI even after controlling for the previous SHI score, it would suggest that the variable has a unique explanatory power on the SHI that is unaccounted by either the stability of social hostilities in the society or other variables controlled in the model. Lastly, since all predictors were measured before the dependent variable, the correct temporal ordering provides us with a stronger causal leverage.

Table 3 presents results from the models. Religious bonding is positively related to the level of social hostilities, even after we include the lagged SHI score. In fact, religious bonding is the only variable that maintains its statistical significance after the lagged SHI score is included. All in all, the analysis indicates that even after taking into account the correct temporal ordering and using a different specification of the dependent variable religious bonding continues to significantly predict social intolerance toward religious minorities. This, together with the empirical fact that individuals often do not have a full control over the composition of their social networks, should provide us with a greater confidence that the process is indeed causal.

**Table 3. OLS Regressions of the Social Hostilities Index**

	SHI Model 1	SHI Model 2
Level of Bonding	4.348** (1.58)	2.273* (1.15)
Logged GDP per capita	-0.148 (0.78)	0.148 (0.54)
GRI	0.541** (0.23)	0.068 (0.18)
Polity IV	0.270*** (0.08)	0.077 (0.06)
Percent Urban	0.017 (0.04)	-0.010 (0.03)
Lagged SHI		0.671*** (0.12)
Intercept	7.092 (4.87)	3.534 (3.42)
N	35 <sup>a</sup>	35 <sup>a</sup>
R-sq	0.604	0.818

\*\*\* p<.01 \*\* p<.05 \* p<.10

<sup>a</sup> Countries in Table 2, plus Morocco and Puerto Rico.

### Discussion

This paper argues that one of the main reasons why Muslim countries are low in religious tolerance is because of the homogeneous friendship networks of Muslims in these countries. Two

pieces of evidence have been presented to support this argument. First, I show that religious bonding is negatively correlated with measures of tolerance among Muslims in 17 Muslim-majority countries, even after controlling for the traditional predictors of tolerance. Second, using Catholic-majority Latin American countries as comparisons, I show that levels of religious bonding are indeed higher in Muslim countries. I hope that this work motivates scholars of the Muslim world to pay more attention to social relationships and interactions in explaining Muslims' political behavior. A short-term, but significant, improvement in this direction would be for major comparative surveys to include questions about social relationships in their questionnaires. As data becomes more available, we will be able to gain more insights on the mechanisms and institutional contexts that may amplify or mitigate the effects of religious bonding or bridging.

Increased data availability will also enable us to inquire about the antecedents of religious bonding. What explains Muslim countries' high levels of bonding? Or, more generally, what shapes the levels of bonding and bridging relationships in a society? To be clear, bonding is generally the norm when it comes to social relationships. Humans are more likely to form relationships with similar than dissimilar others, a tendency sociologists call homophily or "love of the same" (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001). There is little reason, however, to argue that something unique about Islam as a religion makes its followers more predisposed to religious bonding than followers of other religions are. If a deterministic view that links Islam to high religious bonding is inadequate, then we will need to incorporate social and political contexts in our explanation of Muslim countries' high levels of bonding.

Two hypotheses are particularly fruitful to explore. The first is political. Political Islam is driven largely by social movements as opposed to political parties competing in an institutionalized system (Sadowski 2006, 226). Informal networks such as volunteers and mosques are hugely

important for these movements to survive repressions of the authoritarian state, the type of state many Muslims still live under today (Wickham 2002). Mosques, in particular, are more than a place of worship as they also serve as a center of political activities. While church can also be a nexus of political activities (Djupe and Gilbert 2008), these activities are different in that they revolve around advocacies of social issues and not about changing the regime. How social movements shape bonding or bridging therefore is related to what these movements are organized for. Movements that place themselves vis-à-vis the regime likely promote bonding more than bridging. That religious movements in Muslim countries are more political than religious movements in non-Muslim countries may contribute to the countries' higher levels of bonding.

The second hypothesis to test is social psychological. Several studies have discussed how some Muslims share or adhere to the idea of a global ummah (Roy 2006). The notion that all Muslims are one big family is unique in that it goes beyond the traditional concepts of nations, countries, and borders. It is different from Catholics' relationship with the Pope or the Vatican in that a global ummah concerns both cultural and political matters while the Pope is largely a cultural symbol that has no jurisdiction over political matters of Catholic countries. It is also different from Judaism in that Judaism is more confined to a specific geographic area, compared to a global ummah that transcends borders and continents. A perception that all Muslims are family arguably is more conducive to bonding than bridging. This should be more pronounced if the individuals believe that the family is under attack either militarily through "the war on terror" or culturally through globalization. Future studies will benefit from exploring if and how this perception of a global family and solidarity influences Muslims' patterns of social relationships.

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