Reconsidering Tolerance:
Insights from Political Theory

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Abstract

Tolerance is at the heart of many contemporary controversies, yet theorists and political scientists study it in strikingly different ways. This paper bridges the gap by using recent developments in political theory to enrich empirical research. Our recommendations challenge dominant liberal-democratic frameworks by emphasizing variation across the (1) objects of tolerance, (2) possible responses to difference, and (3) sources of tolerance. We then illustrate the promise of our recommendations with three theoretically-informed experiments. These suggest a marked "convert effect" in tolerance judgments, with the same difference seen as less tolerable when resulting from "conversion" than when given or ascribed. These results demonstrate the benefits of greater dialogue across political theory and political science, while shedding light on a central question of tolerance today.

Among the abstractions beloved of political theorists, tolerance enjoys a special place. In recent years, few topics have received as much sustained attention across theoretical approaches, from the normative and analytic (e.g., Rawls 1999; Scanlon 2003) to the historical (Murphy 2001; Bejan 2017) and critical (Brown 2008; Mahmood 2015). The same is true in political science. Since the publication of Samuel Stouffer's *Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties* (1955), tolerance has become "among the most investigated phenomena in modern political science" (Gibson 2006, 21). Yet unlike deliberative democracy—on which some dialogue, however "aggravating," has taken place (Mutz 2008, 522)—when it comes to tolerance, there has been little engagement across the empirical-theoretical divide.

This may be due to assumptions many on both sides share: namely, that political theory's contribution to the study of politics is essentially normative, and that there should be a strict division of scholarly labor between matters of "value" and "fact" (McDermott 2008). Thus, when it comes to a topic like tolerance—the normative appeal of which seems uncontroversial—what can theory add? But political theory can also be a crucial source of "ontological illumination" offering insight not only into the *should* of politics, but the *what* (Mayhew 2000). A classic illustration comes from the field of tolerance studies itself. The "least-liked" measure developed by Sullivan et al. (1982) drew directly on the theoretical work of Bernard Crick (1974, 70), who argued that the element of disapproval or "objection" was constitutive of tolerance, so that one cannot be said to "tolerate" something without it.

The "least-liked" instrument is now among the most commonly used approaches to measuring tolerance. Nevertheless, since this early moment of cross-field fertilization, political theory and political science have rarely engaged.[1] We argue that both would benefit from

[1] For an exception, see Marcus and Hanson (2003).

renewed dialogue given today's resurgent conflicts of faith, class, and culture. This article starts the conversation by bringing recent insights from political theory to bear on empirical work. We begin by illustrating how studies of tolerance in political theory and political science have diverged, along ontological and descriptive, as well as normative lines.

Synthesizing recent theoretical developments, we then offer three concrete recommendations for empirical research. The first two call for more nuanced understandings of (1) the content and modes of difference (the *objects* of tolerance) as well as the various grounds for *objection* to them, and (2) the vast repertoire of possible responses to difference (the *subjects* of tolerance). Both are crucial for addressing shortcomings in the dominant approaches in political science, which reduce tolerance to passive support for civil liberties and so treat it as possible only among individuals and societies that are liberal and democratic *already*. Our third recommendation draws attention to (3) the "acceptance component" and the *sources* of tolerance by asking a crucial question often neglected by empiricists: why tolerate at all?

In the second section, we illustrate the value of our theoretical recommendations by testing them empirically. We designed and conducted three original experiments on student samples, inspired by a problem central to historical toleration debates: conversion. Given the same cleavage type (religious or non-), are converts tolerated differently compared to non-converts? That is, is a *convert* to radical Islam or atheism—or to secular movements and causes, such as the extreme left or right, or the anti-vaccine movement—more or less tolerable than a non-convert? Our provocative results suggest a marked "convert"—or even "apostate"—effect for secular as well as religious differences, with converts tolerated significantly less than non-converts across a variety of cleavage types, holding the content of difference constant. In other

words, those holding identical objectionable views or identities were tolerated differently based on whether their differences were presented as fixed or changeable.

These results support our theoretical recommendations. Firstly, they illustrate how richer ontologies of difference adapted from political theory can fruitfully inform empirical work when it comes to the *objects* of tolerance. If, as the results suggest, the grounds for objection can significantly affect tolerance judgments, then future experiments ought to take variation in the genesis and expression of difference into account. Secondly, our results confirm theorists' emphasis on the different *subjects* of tolerance, showing important variation in the range of "tolerant" responses by individuals or institutions beyond support for civil liberties, from "minimal" non-interference to more "maximal" responses like respect and power-sharing. Thirdly, our experiments suggest avenues for future research into the "acceptance" component, or reasons to tolerate, highlighted by theorists by asking subjects what they think drives conversion and examining how this affects their willingness to tolerate.

The results of our theoretically-informed experiments also shed light on current controversies about what constitutes a "tolerant" response to issues like immigration, transgenderism, or even "transracialism" (Tuvel 2017). Liberal societies place a premium on individual freedom. Yet our results suggest that those seen to be *choosing* to differ by converting to some disapproved position or identity will be less tolerated than those who simply *are* different. This suggests that conversion will continue to be relevant as a mode of difference, even or *especially* in liberal societies that valorize individual freedom and responsibility. While current empirical approaches do not admit of such variation in the nature of and response to difference, our theoretically-informed strategy suggests a way forward.

Finally, although this article focuses on bringing insights from political theory to bear on political science, we believe both sides have much to gain from dialogue. We touch on the benefits for theorists in the conclusion. In particular, we suggest that empirically-informed work might provide an antidote to the increasingly narrow and moralized understandings of tolerance now dominant in normative political theory. As the challenges of coexistence in the face of diversity intensify across the globe, we anticipate that the study of tolerance, both in theory and in practice, will require ever-greater interdisciplinary collaboration of the kind we pioneer here.

Empirical Assumptions

While the divergence between political theory and political science in the study of tolerance may not be surprising, given their different norms and objectives, it is nonetheless striking, particularly with regard to their ontological and normative assumptions. Since the 1950s, the empirical study of tolerance has developed along the track laid by Stouffer (1955). His work established the "pre-selected" or "fixed" measure of tolerance for use in surveys, with respondents asked the extent to which unpopular groups should be allowed to exercise civil liberties, like holding public rallies and demonstrations.[2]

Sullivan et al. (1982) famously contested this measure as conflating positive (or less negative) affect toward particular groups with "tolerance" and ignoring the "objection component" which, following Crick, they argued must distinguish tolerance from more positive responses to difference like affirmation or acceptance. Their "least-liked" approach asked

[2] The General Social Survey (GSS) uses this approach; see, e.g., Mondak and Sanders (2003), who also offer a useful summary of measurement debates.

respondents about the group they most disliked from various groups presented. A third approach simply asks respondents the extent to which they support policies that limit all citizens' civil liberties (e.g., Hetherington and Suhay 2011).

Political scientists continue to debate the relative merits of these approaches.[3] Nevertheless, all three reflect narrow assumptions about the nature of tolerance as a response to difference by effectively reducing it to passive support for civil liberties. That is, they equate "tolerating" difference with support for a particular set of individual rights—of speech and association—tightly linked with Western-style liberal democracy. While Gibson (2006) and others have noted the risks in conflating tolerance with liberal democracy, the survey measures do so themselves. Thus, while a rich literature has emerged addressing valuable topics such as the correlates and levels of tolerance and intolerance (Peffley and Rohrschneider 2003; Gibson 2008; Sullivan and Hendriks 2009), the effects of situational context on tolerance judgments (Marcus et al. 1995; Nelson et al. 1997; Gibson and Gouws 2001), and the drivers and malleability of tolerance (Finkel 2002; Mutz 2002), noticeable gaps remain.

Not only is there a dearth of empirical work on tolerance outside the liberal democratic West, there is also a limited basis for understanding *how* and *why* tolerance emerges at all in the absence of "liberal" institutions. Even in the West, tolerance emerged historically in contexts that can hardly be described as fully liberal or democratic. Yet current survey instruments assume that a healthy culture of civil rights must be in place for tolerance to be present. A presentist perspective is certainly appropriate for scholars concerned with contemporary challenges. Still, a methods- and measurement-driven research paradigm that significantly limits the sites of

[3] For a recent overview, see Gibson (2013).

tolerance open to investigation is problematic—especially should the culture of civil liberties in Western countries itself come under threat.

Developments in Political Theory

While political scientists occasionally acknowledge that tolerance may not be an unmitigated good, the general impression remains that there can never be enough. As Kuklinski et al. (1991) observe, denying that a tolerant posture towards difference is better than an intolerant one "is akin to denying the pleasures of sex or eating candy" (3). Yet political theorists have become increasingly critical of this "more is more" approach to tolerance, with many arguing for more restrictive definitions and others questioning whether tolerance is a virtuous response to difference, at all

Conceptual

Since the late 1960s, political theorists' interest in tolerance has been largely conceptual and analytic. The indelible impression left by theory on the empirical study of tolerance—in the form of the "least-liked" measure—was of this sort. Still, two conceptual questions debated by theorists have scarcely registered among political scientists. First, is there a difference between "tolerance" and "toleration"?[4] The uneasy consensus among theorists is to use the former to refer to an *attitude*, with positive connotations of acceptance or non-judgment, and the latter to refer to

[4] While the language of "toleration" is dominant in political theory, we use "tolerance" to conform to the empirical literature.

a *practice* or *policy* with the negative sense of "putting up with" an acknowledged evil (Murphy 2001).

Second, theorists distinguish between the "horizontal" dimension of toleration and the "vertical," with the former describing a first-person or interpersonal practice, and the latter the state policies or institutional arrangements governing difference in society (Williams and Waldron 2008). On this view, the individual rights of worship, speech, and association enforced by a secular state, neutral between its citizens' "comprehensive doctrines" (Rawls 1993), religious or non-, belong to the practical sphere of vertical toleration, and not the affective realm of horizontal tolerance. Thus for political theorists, the catchall language of *tolerance* used by political scientists runs together these attitudinal/practical and horizontal/vertical aspects, while the empirical focus on individual attitudes appears unduly narrow.

As we have seen, theorists have also done important conceptual work unpacking toleration into its constituent parts. These include the "objection component"—the negative valuation many argue distinguishes "tolerance" from acceptance or affirmation (Crick 1974; Forst 2013). Yet this position has come under pressure from those who think that negative toleration can (and should) transform into something more positive (e.g., Walzer 1997; Galeotti 2002), or that objection is not necessary and a more permissive conceptual approach required (King 1976; Zagorin 2008; Balint 2017).

Theorists also highlight the "acceptance component" of toleration—that is, the contravening reasons that counter-balance or overrule one's objections (Forst 2013). For many, non-interference with a disapproved difference does not count as "toleration" unless done for the right (i.e., moral rather than pragmatic) reasons (Gardner 1993; Cohen 2004). Many theorists also extend this moralizing approach to the objects of tolerance, insisting that objectionable

differences must be changeable, so that the tolerated can be seen as responsible for them—making "racial tolerance," for example, a contradiction in terms (Bellamy 1997; Shorten 2005).[5]

Thus, while empiricists have embraced the "objection component," theorists are asking deeper questions about the nature and necessity of objection, as well as what kinds of reasons for objection *and* acceptance distinguish toleration from other responses to difference. While the limits of toleration have been of long-standing interest, theorists now stress that there are, in fact, two key limits involved in any tolerance judgment: *objection* and *interference*. For many, toleration exists only in the space between these two boundaries. Forst (2003) describes toleration as a "normatively-dependent" concept, with both boundaries drawn by an individual's other moral or non-moral commitments. Hence, asking "how tolerant" individuals are—as much empirical work does—will not tell us anything about how, why, or where they draw the line between tolerable differences and intolerable ones.[6]

Normative

Discussions of toleration's limits raise normative questions. Where should one set the limits of objection and interference, respectively? Should our answers as private individuals or public citizens differ? Political theorists have long examined whether we have a duty to tolerate the intolerant and other "paradoxes of toleration" (Rawls 1971; Forst 2013). These discussions have intensified in response to debates about multiculturalism and "illiberal" religious or cultural minorities living in liberal democracies (Taylor et al. 1994; Kymlicka 1995). Similar difficulties arise around hate speech (Waldron 2012; Bejan 2017). Should a tolerant society tolerate hateful

[5] For pushback, see Jones 2007 and Newey 2013.

[6] For important empirical exceptions, see Petersen (2011) and Sniderman et al. (1989, 2014).

speech? Or must it restrict the rights of racists or religious fundamentalists, in the name of tolerance itself?

In contrast with political scientists' normative certainty, recent years have also seen growing normative dissatisfaction surrounding tolerance among theorists. Following early critics like Thomas Paine and Goethe, some theorists question whether tolerance is a virtue (Heyd 1998), and others whether toleration is a *good* thing at all. As a form of grudging sufferance or permission, they worry that toleration conveys an unmistakable whiff of contempt towards the tolerated while perpetuating asymmetries of power at odds with a genuinely inclusive and "well-ordered" society. This disillusionment has been encouraged by a rising postcolonial sensitivity to tolerance as a discourse of power, and the way in which contrasts between the "intolerant" East and "tolerant" West function as civilizational justifications of Western empire (Brown 2008; Mahmood 2015).[7] For these critics, toleration serves to depoliticize difference and empower the sovereign (and ostensibly "neutral" secular) state, rather than realize "a happy community of differences" (Brown 2008, 28).

These arguments present a serious challenge to the normative desirability of tolerance/toleration assumed in most theoretical and empirical accounts. In response, some theorists argue that critics conflate particular abuses of the "discourse" of tolerance with the concept itself, while relying implicitly on its normative desirability in making their critique (Bowlin 2016; Laborde 2017). Still, others have responded by seeking to replace "mere" toleration with something more robust, like multicultural recognition, equality, or mutual respect (Galeotti 2002; Nussbaum 2008; Gutmann and Thompson 2009), or defining the concept of

[7] These critics build on Marcuse (1965), which argues that the discourse of tolerance serves oppression and downplays dissent.

toleration itself more narrowly as a morally righteous response to difference (Gardner 1993; Cohen 2004; Forst 2013).[8]

The result has been much greater theoretical sensitivity to the variety of possible responses to difference. For instance, Forst (2013) develops a fourfold distinction between different *conceptions* of toleration—permission, coexistence, respect, and esteem—based on context (the relative power of the subject and object of toleration) and the morality of the reasons for objection and acceptance.[9] As we discuss below, even if one rejects the moralizing tendency at work, such theoretical distinctions in the *subjects* of tolerance provide a helpful corrective to empiricists' reductive focus on support for civil liberties.

Historical

Many of these theoretical developments have been inspired by engagement with historians. If toleration is a "normatively-dependent" concept, it is equally a "historically-dependent" one, and recent work has sought to reconstruct the complicated relationship between different theories and practices of toleration over time (Walzer 1997; Kymlicka 1998; Murphy 2001; Forst 2013; Bejan 2017).

Regardless of their historical or geographic focus, these accounts view "toleration" alike, not as a product of Enlightenment or philosophical commitments but as a horizontal social practice of "unmurderous" coexistence realized in different institutional arrangements and

[8] For pushback, see Balint 2017 and Bejan 2017.

[9] Forst insists on the "respect"-conception as the "correct" form for liberal democracies (29-30). Brown is skeptical of such conceptions in politics, yet concedes the existence and necessity of tolerance in everyday life (Di Blasi and Holzhey 2014).

interpersonal strategies over time. Clearly, neither tolerance nor toleration requires the robust backdrop of Western-style civil liberties suggested by common survey measures.

Historically-informed work has two important implications for contemporary theories of toleration: (1) A greater appreciation for the varying approaches to difference among the (individual or institutional) *subjects* of tolerance, including in modern liberal democracies—for instance, the persistence of established churches or the criminalization of hate speech in Europe, in contrast with the "First Amendment" approach in the US (Waldron 2012). And (2): an understanding of toleration not as a binary (X person/regime is in/tolerant towards Y), but a wide range of personal, social, and institutional responses to difference.

Consider the variable treatment of two familiar *modes* of difference: conversion and proselytism. Whereas both are considered signal religious freedoms in Western-style liberal democracies that equate tolerance with individual rights, the Ottoman "millet"-system was predicated on restricting these activities on the part of non-Muslim minorities (Kymlicka 1998). While conversion to Islam was permitted, apostasy was formally a capital offense. Nevertheless, it still seems right to classify the Ottoman system as "tolerant," even in the absence of liberal freedoms of conscience. And indeed, many "tolerant" Western democracies restrict proselytizing activities today (Bejan 2015)—despite political scientists' emphasis on support for objectionable groups' rights to free speech as the *sine qua non* of tolerance.

Bridging the Divide

Since their early moment of cross-fertilization, the theoretical and empirical literatures on tolerance have moved increasingly apart. To bridge the gap, we offer three broad recommendations for enriching empirical research with insights from political theory.

(1) The first concerns the *objects* of tolerance. While empirical researchers focus almost exclusively on objectionable "groups," theorists speak of "difference" as a broader phenomenon manifesting across groups, certainly, but also across individuals, ideas, and practices, which can arise and be expressed in distinctive ways. The empirical focus on "group" identity without differentiation risks conflating objects of tolerance. Thus, when survey respondents say they favor limiting the political expression of a group they dislike, it is not clear whether they judge the *group* to be offensive or the group's *behavior* (Mondak and Hurwitz 1998). Likewise, some groups may be found objectionable no matter what they do, be it peaceful demonstration or violent protest (Gibson and Gouws 2001). The group/individual distinction is also crucial (Golebiowska 1996), as when a member of one's family or tribe who is gay may be tolerated, but not the LGBTQ+ community in general (or vice versa).

To account for this diversity, we recommend investigating both the *content* of difference and the *mode* of differing in more systematic ways. By "content" we mean whether differences are, for example, religious, political, ideological, ethnic, racial, or gender-based. By "mode" we mean *how* they are expressed. The empirical focus on measuring levels and correlates of tolerance as a generalized attitude, akin to happiness or health, means that existing research does not delve into variations in the content of difference as often as one might expect. While recent work suggests that tolerance varies substantially by target group (e.g., Lee 2013; Golebiowska 2014), it ignores what it is *about* different groups that leads some to be tolerated, and others not—and how this might reflect subjects' differing reasons for objection.[10]

[10] We agree with Petersen et al. (2011) that "scholars should increasingly focus on how tolerance judgments vary across distinct groups and theorize about how the specific characteristics of a group influence the way tolerance is expressed" (595). See also Sniderman et al. (2014) and Schwedler (2006).

The *mode* of difference also matters—for example, its expression in words/deeds, public/private, action/thought. Early modern debates about toleration revolved precisely around such distinctions (Bejan 2017). Despite the presentist assumptions of empiricists and normative political theorists, these questions are by no means outdated; for example, in the United Arab Emirates, adults may be punished with fines or jail time for eating or drinking in public during daylight hours while Ramadan is underway, though they are free to do so in private.[11] An especially clear way in which modes of difference can vary is conversion, as we examine empirically in the next section.

By taking variation in the *content* and *mode* of difference seriously, researchers can better capture not only how actors construct the absolute limits of tolerance relative to different grounds of objection—as when the tolerated are seen as *responsible* for the objectionable difference in question or not—but also how *conditionality* enters into tolerance judgments—as when people or governing institutions are willing to tolerate a difference expressed in private but not in public, or in argument but not in action.[12]

(2) Our second recommendation concerns the *subjects* of tolerance—both the agents of tolerance (be they individuals or institutions) and the attitudes, choices, and behaviors they exhibit. We argue that the range of possible "tolerant" responses to difference studied in empirical work must expand beyond the conventional civil rights-based approach to explore

[11] Shaaban 2015.

[12] See, for example, the logic of reciprocity in Petersen et al. (2011) and "quiet coexistence" as a condition for tolerance in Hong Kong (Lee 2013).

tolerance adequately outside of, as well as within, liberal democracies.[13] Debates in political theory provide a fruitful foundation by arranging "tolerant" responses to difference along a continuum from minimal to maximal (e.g., Creppell 2003; Abrams 2008; Forst 2013). "Minimal" responses might include indifference, resigned acceptance, and other forms of "non-interference," while maximal ones go beyond "mere" tolerance of difference to more robust responses such as respect, recognition, mutual understanding, and active support for civil liberties.

Other useful typologies of response to difference emerge from theorists' horizontal/vertical and tolerant/tolerationist distinctions. The former maps partially onto social vs. political tolerance in the empirical literature, in that surveys of "political tolerance" focus on attitudes toward the *state* interfering with the freedom of disliked others (e.g., to speak in public), while surveys of "social tolerance" focus on attitudes toward *citizens* interfering (e.g., opposition to someone moving in next door). Yet theorists do not consider one of these "political" and the other not. Indeed, *both* citizens and the state can limit freedom and suppress difference in politically meaningful ways, especially in democracies. As Gibson (1992) suggests (following John Stuart Mill), an overlooked political consequence of intolerance "can be found in the constraints on political thought and action that citizens impose *upon each other*" (339).[14]

[13] Although empirical researchers have also examined what it means to be (behaviorally) tolerant and intolerant, they have typically done so within a conventional rights framework (e.g., Marcus 1995, 183).

[14] The social/political distinction seems especially ill-equipped to capture questions of tolerance outside of a liberal democratic framework. "Social" tolerance may take on politically heightened meaning in contexts where there is no official acceptance of minorities.

Tolerant responses to difference are clearly more varied and complex than the empirical literature suggests. We thus encourage empirical efforts to capture the minimal and maximal manifestations of tolerance suggested by normative theoretical debates surrounding the *extent* and *kind* of tolerance best for liberal and multicultural societies today. In addition, contemporary immersion in technology and social media suggest new and as yet under-theorized types of response to difference available to empiricists. For example, in what sense might cutting oneself off from those one disapproves of via social media or "safe spaces" constitute a form of intolerance, or alternatively, a "progressive" form of tolerance *a la* Marcuse (1965)? Investigating a wider range of responses to difference is thus another potentially fruitful way of bridging the theoretical-empirical gap.

(3) Finally, while interest in the philosophical, historical, and normative reasons to tolerate often drives political theorists, the "acceptance" component and the question "why tolerate?" rarely appear in the empirical literature—even as political scientists recognize that tolerating one's enemies is counter-intuitive, at best (e.g., Finkel 2000; Peffley et al. 2001). This neglect may stem from the ontological and normative assumptions outlined earlier. Indeed, it is typical to read that tolerance is important to study *because* it is essential to liberal democracy (e.g., Gibson and Gouws 2005, 46). Thus, the answer to "why tolerate?" is given by the value of that regime.

This is limiting for two reasons. First, it means researchers lack the resources needed to investigate tolerance in authoritarian, hybrid, proto-, or post-democratic regimes—precisely the contexts where efforts to promote tolerance may bear the most fruit (Marquart-Pyatt and Paxton

2007).[15] Second, explaining the value of tolerance in terms of liberal democracy overlooks other possible reasons to tolerate. Empirical researchers often follow J.S. Mill by justifying tolerance with reference to the marketplace of ideas (Stouffer 1955; Sullivan et al 1982). Yet political theorists have highlighted many other (moral and non-moral) reasons to tolerate (Walzer 1997; Sabl 2008), the differential appeal of which in different cultural, economic, and political contexts deserves greater empirical attention.

Finally, when it comes to *teaching* or *promoting* tolerance, its role in supporting liberal democracy will often not be the most appealing rationale. Empiricists should therefore investigate people's *own* reasons for tolerating difference and how these reflect or extend existing rationales in political theory in order to understand which may be most useful in modifying tolerance in different contexts. Reorienting empirical research toward reasons for "acceptance" (as well as "objection") may thus also reveal the deeper and less morally edifying purposes tolerance may serve—including the perpetuation of asymmetries of power highlighted by critical theorists.

Putting Theory into Practice: The Case of Conversion

Thus far, we have argued for the benefits of dialogue across empirical and theoretical approaches to tolerance. In this section, we put our theoretical recommendations into practice and demonstrate the value of a theoretically-informed approach.

[15] A number of authoritarian regimes today are seeking to instill liberal values such as tolerance, yet little empirical research has investigated their efforts (e.g., Jones 2015, 2017).

The experiments below focus primarily on the first of our three recommendations, concerning the *objects* of tolerance—and particularly the *mode* of differing—by turning to the example of conversion. As theorists note, when it comes to the kinds of difference for which we demand tolerance today, some (such as race) are expressed and/or interpreted as "given" and fixed—by genetics, God, or cultural upbringing—while others are seen as changeable and (often implicitly) the product of personal choice—as with political affiliation, or when a person converts to a new religion.

Conversion is a complex concept (Scherer 2013; Rambo and Farhadian 2014). Is it a binary process of converting from point A to point B? Or a crystalline process of transformation in which multiple views and identities combine? How much choice is involved? These questions have been central to discussions of multiculturalism in political theory (Kymlicka 1995; Barry 2001) as well as in the empirical literature on nationalism and political identity (e.g., Smith 1998; Huddy 2001). But these complexities have important implications for tolerance, too, as *varieties* of difference beyond the static, largely one-dimensional groups favored by empirical studies. Not only has religious conversion been at the heart of debates over toleration in the Christian and Islamic worlds for centuries, it remains so in much of the Arab Muslim world today (Sarkissian 2011).

Conversion can thus be a useful lens for examining contemporary questions of tolerance with the benefit of historical and cultural perspective. In contrast to the more rigid identities of the past, identities today are more fluid, allowing a greater role for self-authorship and personal choice (Baumeister 1986; Thomson 1989; Frable 1997). A heightened emphasis on "self-expression" is connected to contemporary notions of modernity, freedom, and democracy (Inglehart 1997). Phenomena as diverse as immigration, multiculturalism, transgenderism,

transracialism, socio-political sorting, and intersectionality all evoke questions of fluid, shifting, or overlapping identities. Moreover, the extent to which a particular difference is understood as a matter of choice or something else—genetics, manipulation, or the recovery and expression of a more "authentic" identity—is itself subject to cultural, historical, and geographical variation.

In the experiments described below, our goal was simple: to test the hypothesis suggested by debates over toleration in political theory that the *mode* of difference matters. Specifically, we hypothesized that differences presented as chosen—as the dynamic product of free will embodied by the idea of a recent convert—would be associated with less tolerance than those presented as given, holding the *content* of the difference constant.

Experimental Design and Measurement

To test this hypothesis, we conducted three experiments across samples of US-based college students, ages 18-30, via Amazon Mechanical Turk.[16] Studies suggest this platform provides access to samples that, while different from nationally representative samples, behave similarly in experimental replications to subjects recruited in other ways (Berinsky, Huber, and Lenz 2012; Krupnikov and Levine 2014). The limitations on age and college enrollment were selected deliberately to explore tolerance among college students with scenarios on campuses, which have been flashpoints in recent discussions of tolerance and free expression. In addition, the demographics and political attitudes of younger Turkers better match nationally

[16] The experiments were approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at [University].

representative samples of younger people (Huff and Tingley 2015).[17] Subjects were allowed to participate in only one of the three studies.

The experimental design was similar in all three studies: after reading the scenario to which they were randomly assigned about either a convert—or a non-convert—subjects answered several questions about their attitudes toward the student in the scenario. To align with prior work, the key dependent variable—tolerance—was measured first in conventional, rights-oriented ways, using an index of five items, including "This student should be allowed to make a speech in our community," "This student has the right to express any opinion he or she has," and "This student should be banned from running for student government" (reverse scored); higher scores on the index indicate higher tolerance.[18] All respondents were also asked demographic questions, how the student in the scenario made them feel, and how they viewed a number of groups in society, including those featured in the scenarios. All scenario texts and question wording can be found in Appendix A.

While our first study focused on differentiating the *objects* of tolerance, in our second and third studies we turned attention to differentiating its *subjects*, as well, by exploring broader ways of measuring "tolerant" responses to difference beyond a strictly rights-based interpretation. Subjects were asked how they personally would behave toward the student in the scenario and others like him. The options drew from political theory, including a "minimally" tolerant behavior limited to non-interference ("avoid them"); "moderately" tolerant behaviors emphasizing social and economic practice ("be polite and kind to them," "do business with them," "let them do what they want in private"); and more "maximally" tolerant ones touching

[17] For demographics on the samples used here, see Appendix B.

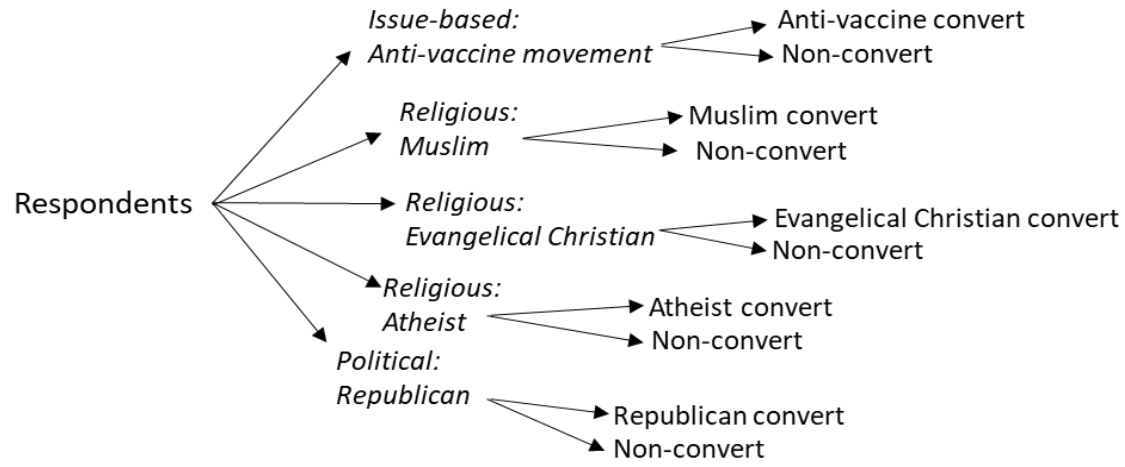
[18] Cronbach's alpha for this index pooled across the studies was 0.89.

on mutual respect, freedom, and power (e.g., "let them do what they want in public," "try to understand their differing perspective," "allow them to occupy positions of power in society"). Finally, to build knowledge about *why* converts may be less tolerable, subjects in Studies 2 and 3 were invited to tell us what they think drives conversion.

Study 1

In Study 1, subjects were randomly assigned to one of several potential scenarios of difference across religious, partisan, and issue-based cleavages, as shown in Figure 1. Treated subjects were asked to imagine that a student at their university wants to hold a public rally and demonstration on campus, with the student in the scenario described as a recent convert having recently adopted the view in question. For example, in our issue-based scenario, treated students were given the following prompt: "Imagine that a student at your university has recently changed his mind and decided that vaccines are harmful to society. This student would like to hold a public rally and demonstration on campus in support of the anti-vaccine movement."

Figure 1. Experimental Design for Study 1



Control students, by contrast, were simply asked to imagine that a student at their university who believes that vaccines are harmful to society would like to hold a public rally and demonstration on campus in support of the anti-vaccine movement. The content of the difference (i.e., being anti-vaccine) remained the same. The other scenarios followed suit with control students asked to imagine a non-convert and treated students a convert (e.g., "recently decided to become a Republican," "recently converted to Islam," "recently converted to Evangelical Christianity," or "recently decided he is against all churches and religions"). These cleavages were selected either because they feature in prior work on tolerance (e.g., atheists, Muslims) or because we had reason to suspect, and subsequently confirmed with our results, that the target groups would be unpopular with our sample.[19]

As Figure 2 illustrates (and Table 1 reports in more detail), respondents who imagined a *convert* to the anti-vaccine movement were significantly less tolerant of the student compared to those who imagined a non-convert ($p=0.022$), even though the content of the difference—being a member of the anti-vaccine movement—remained the same. The same was true for respondents who imagined a convert to Islam, as opposed to a Muslim student ($p=0.073$). Both were small-to-medium size effects (Cohen's $d=0.37, 0.46$), with converts reducing tolerance by 6-7% compared to non-converts with identical views. While respondents were also less tolerant of atheist and Republican converts, the difference was not statistically significant as it was for anti-vaccine and Muslim converts. In addition, we found that the convert consistently made subjects

[19] The anti-vaccine movement is generally unpopular, and Study 1 results confirm this (Appendix C). Republicans and Evangelical Christians were selected because of the nature of the sample; both college students and Turkers are known to be more liberal and less religious on average than nationally representative samples (Berinsky, Huber, and Lenz 2012; Huff and Tingley 2015; Lewis et al. 2015).

feel more worried across all five scenarios, with the difference significant in the case of an Evangelical Christian convert (p=0.043) and pooling across the five scenarios (p=0.054). (The tolerance index, when pooling across the five scenarios, fell shy of statistical significance at p=0.13, with the difference in the expected direction.)

Figure 2. Study 1, Mean Tolerance Index by Scenario and Treatment

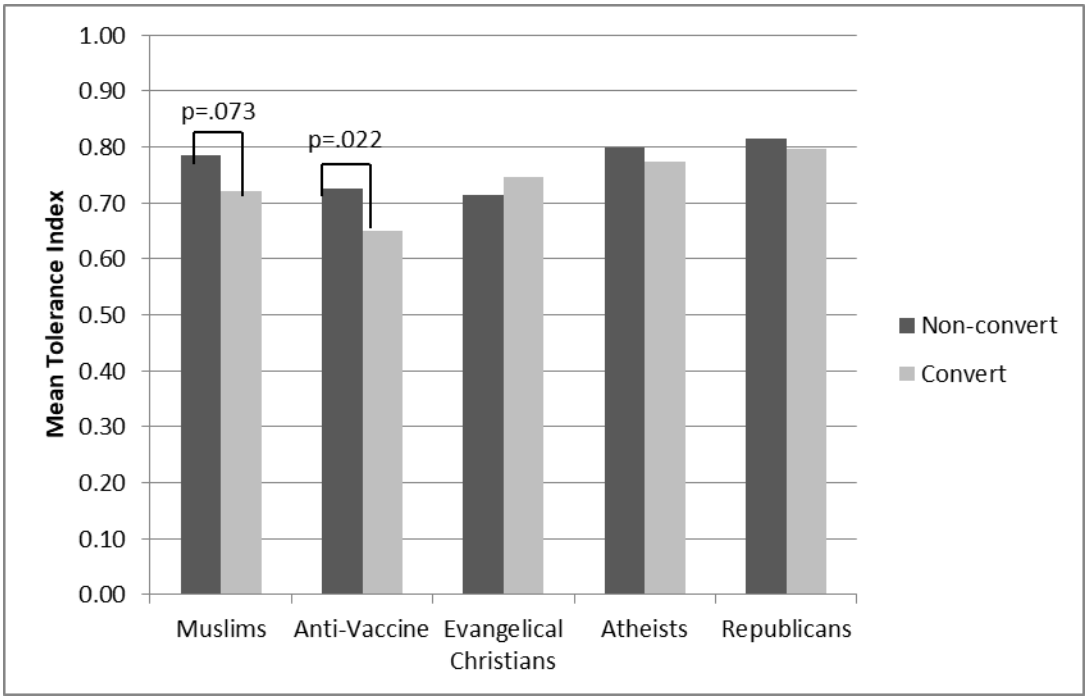


Table 1: Study 1, Dependent Variables by Scenario and Treatment

		Muslim *n=100*		Anti-Vaccine *n=104*		Evangelical Christian *n=105*		Atheist *N=90*		Republican *N=102*		Pooled *n=501*	
		Means	*Difference*	*Means*	*Difference*	*Means*	*Difference*	*Means*	*Difference*	*Means*	*Difference*	*Means*	*Difference*
Tolerance Index	*Nonconvert*	0.78 (0.17))	0.06 (0.04) p=0.073^ d=.37	0.72 (0.15)	0.07 (0.03) p=0.022* d=.46	0.71 (0.17)	-0.03 (0.03) p=0.333	0.8 (0.2)	0.02 (0.04) p=0.557	0.82 (0.16)	0.02 (0.03) p=0.556	0.76 (0.17)	0.02 (0.02) p=0.134
	Convert	0.72 (0.19)		0.65 (0.17)		0.75 (0.16)		0.77 (0.2)		0.8 (0.16)		0.74 (0.18)	
Worried	*Nonconvert*	0.28 (0.27)	-0.02 (0.06) p=0.698	0.37 (0.31)	-0.08 (0.06) p=0.194	0.16 (0.21)	-0.10 (0.05) p=0.043* d=.44	0.28 (0.27)	-0.04 (0.06) p=0.534	0.14 (0.18)	-0.05 (0.04) p=0.260	0.25 (0.27)	-0.05 (0.03) p=0.054^ d=.17
	Convert	0.30 (0.3)		0.46 (0.34)		0.26 (0.29)		0.31 (0.27)		0.18 (0.22)		0.3 (0.3)	
Uncom-fortable	*Nonconvert*	0.31 (0.26)	.00 (0.06) p=0.952	0.37 (0.33)	-0.03 (0.07) p=0.627	0.22 (0.26)	-0.11 (0.05) p=0.041* d=.41	0.29 (0.3)	0.02 (0.06) p=0.784	0.16 (0.21)	-0.02 (0.05) p=0.667	0.27 (0.28)	-0.02 (0.03) p=0.408
	Convert	0.30 (0.29)		0.4 (0.33)		0.33 (0.3)		0.27 (0.28)		0.18 (0.25)		0.29 (0.3)	

Table shows sample means and standard deviations, along with mean difference, standard errors, p-values, and Cohen's d.
*** p≤.001; ** p≤.01; * p≤.05; ^ p≤.10

Why were the religious (Muslim) and issue-based (anti-vaccine) scenarios the only ones to produce a significant "convert effect" here? Partisan, religious, and issue-based differences are theoretically distinctive, and the dynamics of conversion and implications for tolerance likely vary across cleavage types. For example, it is possible that conversions across broader varieties of difference are less threatening than specific issue-based ones due to greater potential for overlap, or because they are seen as less determinative of ultimate choices and behavior. These issues merit further study, and underscore our larger point about the importance of variation in the objects of tolerance. The results also raise the possibility that a convert effect exists only for cleavage types with idiosyncratic characteristics, such as a public health connection in the anti-vaccine case. We suspect, however, that the other scenarios were neither threatening enough nor uniformly disliked enough for many respondents to consider denying others their rights, which brings us to our next two studies.

Studies 2 and 3

In Studies 2 and 3, we applied a branching approach based on social identity theory (Tajfel et al. 1971), so that respondents would be faced with opinions and identities likely to be opposed to their own, and we also rendered them more extreme. Social identity theory posits a natural tendency for people to think in terms of ingroups and outgroups, favoring the former and/or denigrating the latter. Although it features heavily in the prejudice literature, it has played a limited role in research on tolerance.[20]

[20] As Gibson (2006, 25) has observed, "To a truly remarkable degree, those who study intergroup prejudice and those who work on political intolerance rarely intersect."

Study 2 focused on political ideological conversion. Conservatives in the "convert" treatment condition were asked to imagine that the student in the scenario "used to be politically conservative," yet "now adheres to extreme left-wing thinking." By contrast, those in the control condition were asked to imagine that "a student at your university adheres to extreme left-wing thinking." Thus, the content of the difference (i.e., extreme left wing) again remained the same. Liberals and moderates received identical convert/non-convert scenarios, except that the scenarios substituted "extreme right" for "extreme left" and, in the convert condition, described the student as having previously been politically liberal.[21] The convert was therefore described as deliberately adopting outgroup membership.

Study 3 turned to religious conversion. Due to the association between religiosity and conservative political views (Layman 2001; Malka et al. 2012), conservatives were branched to a radical atheist scenario, while liberals and moderates were branched to an extreme religious scenario due to greater secularism among them found in Study 1.[22] Specifically, conservatives in the convert condition were asked to imagine that a student at their university "used to hold conservative views," yet "now adheres to an extreme and radical form of atheism." For liberals and moderates, the convert condition involved a student converting to "an extreme and fundamentalist form of Islam," having previously held liberal views. As in the previous studies,

[21] Subjects identifying as moderate were exposed to the same branch as liberals in Studies 2 and 3 because moderates in Study 1 tended to identify more with the Democratic Party than the Republican Party. Those moderates also reported religiosity that was closer to liberals compared to conservatives.

[22] We continued to branch here on the basis of political ideology because today's heightened levels of political polarization (e.g., Iyengar and Westwood 2014) make political identity, as compared to general levels of religiosity, an especially salient cleavage type that drives ingroup/outgroup thinking.

in the control condition, the student was presented as a non-convert (to radical atheism/fundamentalist Islam).

Studies 2 and 3 also expanded upon Study 1 by adding a third experimental group to each branching, as shown in Figure 3. Thus far the "convert" condition involved a student converting *to* the outgroup defined as a different and potentially disliked identity, ideology, or issue position, while the non-convert condition involved a student who merely adheres to it. In Studies 2 and 3, a third group was added—a convert *away* from it *to* the presumed ingroup—in order to represent the "reverse convert" condition.

Figure 3. Experimental Design for Studies 2 and 3

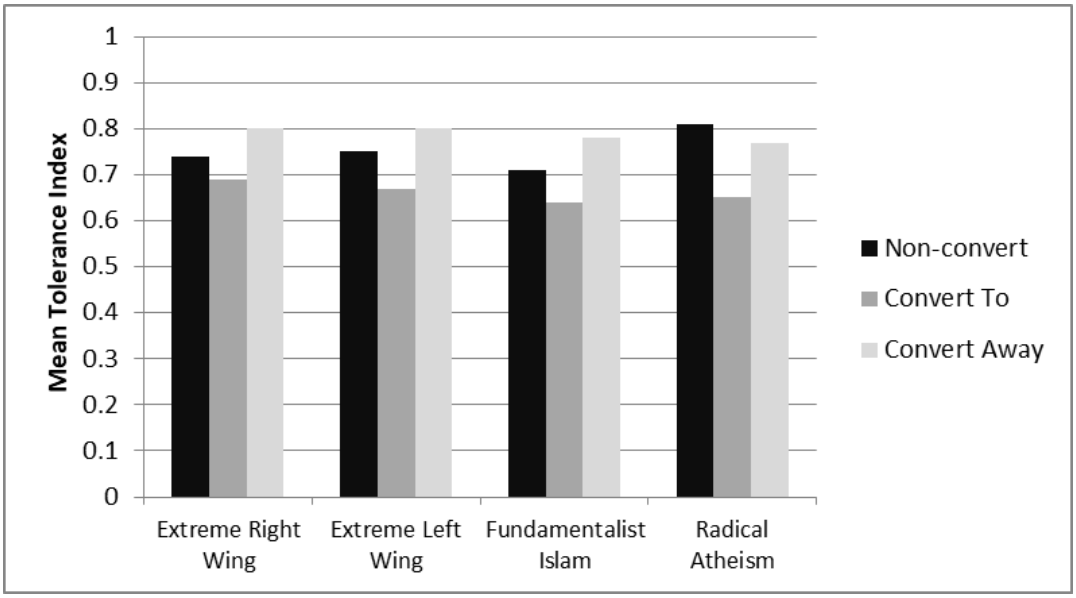
	Respondents*	**Object of tolerance**	**Condition**
Study 2: Political ideology	Liberals Moderates	Extreme Right Wing	Non-convert Convert *to* Convert *away*
	Conservatives	Extreme Left Wing	Non-convert Convert *to* Convert *away*
Study 3: Religious ideology	Liberals Moderates	Fundamentalist Islam	Non-convert Convert *to* Convert *away*
	Conservatives	Radical Atheism	Non-convert Convert *to* Convert *away*

*Subjects who checked "Not sure" to the question about their political viewpoint were omitted from analysis for both studies.

Figure 4 displays the main findings on tolerance, and Table 2 reports all results. Strikingly, the data revealed remarkably consistent evidence of a "convert effect"—or, perhaps more precisely, an "apostate effect"—on tolerance across all four scenarios. Hence subjects were

significantly more inclined to deny rights to converts to the extreme right (p=0.023), extreme left (p=0.089), fundamentalist Islam (p=0.049), and radical atheism (p=0.027) than to non-converts whose given views were otherwise identical. As Table 2 shows, the results are especially notable for conservatives in the extreme left and radical atheism scenarios, given that their numbers were relatively low. The results also show that the convert made subjects significantly more uncomfortable in both the extreme right (p=0.009) and radical atheist scenarios (p=0.08).

Figure 4. Studies 2 and 3, Mean Tolerance Index by Scenario and Treatment



Additional Analysis

What of those who convert *away* from these points of view? Both the long history of religious conversion and social identity theory suggest that ingroup-to-outgroup conversion should be less tolerable than outgroup-to-ingroup conversion, so much so that it may seem debatable whether tolerance is at issue in the latter case at all. However, recent converts even to one's own ingroup can provoke suspicion. For example, Jensen (2008, 401) illustrates how

ethnic Danes who convert to Islam may be labeled by the Muslim immigrant community in Denmark as "the wrong kind of Muslim."

Table 2: Studies 2 and 3, Dependent Variables by Scenario and Treatment

		Study 2: Ideology				Study 3: Religion			
		Extreme Right Wing *n=280*		Extreme Left Wing *n=64*		Fundamentalist Islam *n=135*		Radical Atheism *n=38*	
		Means	*Difference*	*Means*	*Difference*	*Means*	*Difference*	*Means*	*Difference*
Tolerance Index	*Nonconvert*	0.74 (0.17)	0.05 (0.02) p=0.023• d=.28	0.75 (0.17)	0.08 (0.05) p=0.089^ d=.44	0.71 (0.18)	0.06 (0.03) p=0.049• d=.35	0.81 (0.15)	0.16 (0.07) p=0.027• d=.77
	Convert	0.69 (0.2)		0.67 (0.21)		0.64 (0.18)		0.65 (0.21)	
Worried	*Nonconvert*	0.47 (0.29)	-0.06 (0.04) p=0.100^ d=.20	0.38 (0.25)	-0.08 (0.07) p=0.261	0.56 (0.29)	-0.07 (0.05) p=0.143	0.39 (0.31)	-0.11 (0.11) p=0.296
	Convert	0.53 (0.29)		0.46 (0.31)		0.63 (0.27)		0.51 (0.3)	
Uncomfortable	*Nonconvert*	0.43 (0.29)	-0.09 (0.04) p=0.009•• d=.32	0.4 (0.24)	-0.05 (0.07) p=0.502	0.6 (0.27)	0.02 (0.05) p=0.671	0.3 (0.28)	-0.18 (0.10) p=0.080^ d=.60
	Convert	0.53 (0.3)		0.45 (0.3)		0.57 (0.3)		0.48 (0.29)	
Minimal	*Nonconvert*	0.65 (0.27)	-0.07 (0.03) p=0.026• d=.27	0.6 (0.24)	-0.12 (0.06) p=0.047• d=.52	0.67 (0.27)	-0.04 (0.04) p=0.384	0.5 (0.25)	-0.11 (0.09) p=0.216
	Convert	0.72 (0.23)		0.72 (0.24)		0.71 (0.25)		0.61 (0.25)	
Moderate	*Nonconvert*	0.65 (0.15)	0.04 (0.02) p=0.038• d=.25	0.66 (0.21)	0.06 (0.05) p=0.213	0.66 (0.16)	0.08 (0.03) p=0.002•• d=.56	0.7 (0.11)	0.07 (0.06) p=0.300
	Convert	0.61 (0.16)		0.61 (0.16)		0.57 (0.14)		0.63 (0.21)	
Maximal	*Nonconvert*	0.57 (0.2)	0.04 (0.02) p=0.120	0.62 (0.24)	0.06 (0.05) p=0.312	0.55 (0.2)	0.08 (0.03) p=0.012• d=.44	0.68 (0.14)	0.14 (0.07) p=0.057^ d=.66
	Convert	0.53 (0.18)		0.57 (0.19)		0.47 (0.16)		0.54 (0.23)	

Table shows means and standard deviations, along with mean differences, standard errors, p-values, and Cohen's d.
*** p≤.001; ** p≤.01; * p≤.05; ^ p≤.10

Nevertheless, we found strong evidence that "converts *away*"—across all four scenarios in Studies 2 and 3—were significantly more tolerable than either non-converts or "converts *to*," as Appendix D's regression results show (and Figure 4 also shows graphically). While these results are not surprising, they underscore important questions not only about the directionality of conversion, but also its potential for multidimensionality. After all, individuals may convert to an ingroup or otherwise "liked" position in one sense yet remain part of an outgroup or "disliked" perspective in another. Although recent work on identity emphasizes such complexities (e.g., Roccas and Brewer 2002), the implications for tolerance judgments in the context of conversion are not well-understood.

The main analysis above focused on the conventional tolerance index. As shown in Table 3, which pools results by study, respondents were generally less tolerant of converts along the broader set of minimal-to-maximal measures drawn from political theory, as well, with some suggestive variation. In both Studies 2 and 3, subjects were less inclined to share power, form friendships, and seek understanding with converts ("maximally" tolerant behaviors, p=0.068, 0.009). They were also less inclined to forgive them, be polite to them, and do business with them, among other "moderately" tolerant behaviors underscoring social and business practice (p=0.016, 0.003).

However, on minimal tolerance—i.e., avoidance—they differed. In the case of ideological conversion (Study 2), respondents were significantly more inclined to *avoid* a convert (p=0.004), but in the case of religious conversion (Study 3), they were not. It may be that avoiding a political or ideological convert is more socially acceptable than avoiding a religious one, at least in secular liberal-democratic contexts. Political theorists often note that religious claims of conscience are more tolerated than secular ones (Leiter 2014, Laborde 2017). Thus,

subjects may have felt that avoiding a religious convert would be *intolerant*, while avoiding a political one is not.

Table 3:
Pooled Findings for Study 2 (Ideology) and Study 3 (Religion)

		Study 2: Ideology Pooled (Extreme Right Wing and Extreme Left Wing) *n=344*		Study 3: Religion Pooled (Fundamentalist Islam and Radical Atheism) *n=173*	
		Means	*Difference*	*Means*	*Difference*
Tolerance Index	*Nonconvert*	0.75 (0.17)	0.06 (0.02) p=0.005** d=.31	0.72 (0.18)	0.07 (0.03) p=0.009** d=.40
	Convert	0.69 (0.2)		0.64 (0.19)	
Worried	*Nonconvert*	0.46 (0.29)	-0.06 (0.03) p=0.055^ d=.21	0.54 (0.29)	-0.06 (0.04) p=0.21
	Convert	0.52 (0.29)		0.6 (0.28)	
Uncomfortable	*Nonconvert*	0.43 (0.28)	-0.08 (0.03) p=0.009** d=.21	0.56 (0.29)	0.01 (0.04) p=0.836
	Convert	0.51 (0.3)		0.55 (0.3)	
Minimal	*Nonconvert*	0.64 (0.27)	-0.08 (0.03) p=0.004** d=.31	0.65 (0.27)	-0.03 (0.04) p=0.429
	Convert	0.72 (0.23)		0.68 (0.25)	
Moderate	*Nonconvert*	0.65 (0.16)	0.04 (0.02) p=0.016* d=.27	0.66 (0.15)	0.07 (0.02) p=0.003** d=.46
	Convert	0.61 (0.16)		0.59 (0.16)	
Maximal	*Nonconvert*	0.58 (0.21)	0.04 (0.02) p=0.068^ d=.20	0.57 (0.2)	0.08 (0.03) p=0.009** d=.41
	Convert	0.54 (0.18)		0.49 (0.19)	

Table shows means and standard deviations along with mean differences, standard errors, p-values, and Cohen's d.
*** p≤.001; ** p≤.01; * p≤.05; ^ p≤.10

In addition, avoidance—based on the principle of non-interference—may be a more ambiguously "tolerant" response to difference than initially suspected. While avoidance is more tolerant than active interference, such as violently opposing one's enemies, and in that sense is a

minimal form of tolerance (as in the Ottoman millet system), it may also suggest intolerance—particularly when it can be understood as "interfering" in some other sense, as for example with the free flow of ideas as critics of "safe spaces" on college campuses charge. Either way, the prospect of secular-political conversion appeared to affect respondents more profoundly than religious conversion, with the former triggering an avoidant response deserving further study.

But why did our subjects generally find converts less tolerable overall—not only Islamic, radical Islamic, and radical atheist ones, but also converts (or "apostates") to the extreme left and extreme right, to say nothing of converts to the anti-vaccine movement? Put another way, why tolerate non-converts, when their views are the same?

This question touches on the third of our recommendations emphazing the "acceptance component" of tolerance. Our qualitative data provide some valuable hints. When subjects were asked why the student might have converted to the new perspective—in the "convert to" condition—the top reasons given emphasized emotions, such as frustration and anger; persuasion by others; and deliberate agreement with the new perspective (Appendix E). It may be that converts, as opposed to long-time adherents, bring especially alarming prospects to mind, such as the dominance of emotion over reason, those on the "wrong side" acquiring committed members who strongly agree with the cause, effective proselytizing, and recruitment by one's enemies.

This explanation for lessened tolerance for converts would support critical theorists, who see tolerance primarily in terms of power. Thus, the non-convert case may reflect Forst's "permission"-style conception of tolerance, in which respondents magnanimously allow alternative viewpoints to exist, so long as their superior social position remains secure and the tolerated difference narrowly circumscribed. Yet the convert signals a possible change in the status quo, with the alternative viewpoint attracting followers and thus growing in power relative

to the respondent. If tolerance depends on asymmetric power relations, as Brown argues, then it makes sense that the former should be more tolerable than the latter, despite their identical views.

A related possibility is that converts are seen as "responsible" for their objectionable viewpoints compared with non-converts, and so may be viewed as less deserving of tolerance. Theorists of multiculturalism have long debated the importance of individual choice, suggesting that the liberal state has a responsibility to address inequalities that result from "unchosen" circumstances, including economic starting points and—more controversially—minority cultural membership (Kymlicka 1995; Barry 2001). Non-converts may be viewed as "unlucky," having been born into an objectionable way of thinking through no fault of their own, and so less responsible for their views. Converts, however, might be viewed as having deliberately *chosen* their objectionable views—an act others may feel correspondingly less obligated to tolerate, especially in liberal cultures that emphasize individual responsibility.

Here, we return to the salience of different reasons for objection. In our samples, religious conversion was seen as driven by emotion, while political conversion was viewed as driven more by persuasion and strong agreement with the cause. This suggests a possible reason why political conversion may have provoked a stronger avoidant response than religious conversion. The former may be viewed as a deliberate decision, for which converts must be held responsible, while the latter may be seen as more "emotional" and less rational choice. This would again suggest important differences in the nature of conversion by cleavage type, and the need for further empirical research into the relationship between different logics of objection and acceptance.

Summary

Although our experiments cannot address every concern raised in Part I, they illustrate empirically and powerfully the value of deeper collaboration across political theory and political science along the lines we suggest. Following our recommendations, the experiments focus directly on (1) more nuanced understandings of how difference is generated and expressed by way of conversion, while also touching on (2) the subjects of tolerance who may respond in different (e.g., more minimally or maximally tolerant) ways based on (3) their reasons for and logics of acceptance.

Our findings are striking. As predicted on the basis of political theory, the *mode* of differing—as one type of variation in a more expansive and theoretically-informed ontology of difference—can indeed matter for tolerance judgments and responses across a variety of cleavage types, from issue-based to political ideological and religious, despite the *content* of the difference remaining the same. Further empirical work should seek not only to replicate and extend these results with additional samples, but explore other types of variation in the nature of and response to difference, including the public/private, horizontal/vertical, tolerant/tolerationist, attitudinal/practical, and speech/deed dimensions highlighted by theorists.

Finally, our experimental findings of a "convert effect" are provocative in their own right. They suggest that conversion is salient as a mode of difference beyond religion, raising important questions about the possibility of *secular* apostasy. For example, if people generally find conversion more threatening than non-conversion, then this would help to crack one of the persistent "enigmas of tolerance"—threat as an unexplained variable (Gibson 2006). Importantly, Western liberal democracies place a high premium on self-expression and personal freedom. But if citizens are less likely to tolerate those who *choose* to be different along disliked or

controversial lines, then they lack precisely the tolerance that liberal democracy prides itself on. One's effective *freedom* to differ—that is, to differ or disagree by choice—declines accordingly.

Conclusion

Reopening the dialogue on tolerance between political scientists and political theory is long overdue. In this article, we have sought to move beyond the "pattern of competitive distrust" dividing theorists and empirical political scientists and bridge the growing theory-empirical divide (Marcus and Hanson 1993, xv). To do so, we drew from recent political theory to propose three new directions for empirical research, which emphasize (1) the objects of difference, (2) subjects' responses to it, and (3) the sources or reasons for tolerance (i.e., the "acceptance component").

We also demonstrated the promise of greater cross-disciplinary collaboration along the lines we suggest. The problem of conversion represents just one example of variation within the richer, more adaptive, and dynamic ontology of difference and responses to it that contemporary conditions of intensifying globalization and multiculturalism demand. Our work raises the possibility that *conversion* may be as threatening a mode of difference in liberal democratic contexts that privilege personal freedom in the construction of identities as in "illiberal" religious regimes that do not. Indeed, we have provided suggestive evidence that those seen as *choosing* to differ across issues and politics as well as religion can attract significantly less tolerance than those seen as "merely" different. Not only does this apparent rebuke of individual freedom and agency suggest further avenues for comparative, cross-national work on tolerance, it also demonstrates how engagement with political theory can open up conceptual and interpretive possibilities for such work.

Although our focus in this article has been to bring theoretical insights to bear on empirical research, political theorists also stand to benefit from dialogue with an empirical literature with which most are unfamiliar. Greater engagement with the concrete, practical challenges of tolerance studied by political scientists demonstrates the persistence of "negative" affect in the encounter with difference, even in the secular and multicultural liberal democracies many theorists see as "beyond" toleration. Similarly, the wide range of responses to difference and reasons for acceptance captured by empiricists offer a much-needed corrective to the "profound moralizing tendency" of recent normative work determined to construe toleration ever more narrowly (Zuolo 2013, 219), even as the everyday challenges of unmurderous coexistence in our own liberal democratic societies increase (Balint 2017, Bejan 2017).

As political theorists and political scientists continue to contemplate the demands of tolerance in theory and practice today, further dialogue along the lines we pioneer here promises to reveal embedded assumptions while pointing towards richer research agendas inspired by and adequate to the dilemmas of tolerance in our own times.

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