THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

MERSHON CENTER
for International Security Studies

give

GOD'S NATION: RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN POLITICS

Principal Investigators: Irfan Nooruddin, Department of Political Science

Does religion affect attitudes toward immigrants? Past scholarship has shown that non-believers and members of minority religions are less hostile toward immigrants than members of major religious affiliations, and that Evangelical Christians are most hostile of all. But why?

Irfan Nooruddin, with then-graduate student Allyson Shortle and Eric McDaniel of University of Texas, set out to examine the mechanisms behind these findings. Using symbolic politics and social identity theory, they argue that attitudes toward immigrants are shaped by a religiously informed interpretation of American national identity they call Christian nationalism.

Social identity theory, which examines the need to differentiate one's own group from outgroups, led Nooruddin to hypothesize that people with strong Christian nationalist leanings see immigrants as a threat to their own values and beliefs. Because Christian nationalism intertwines religious and national identity, immigrants pose a threat by sharing in what it means to be American.

To flesh out this hypothesis, Nooruddin use the 2006 Pew Immigration Attitudes Survey and the 2008 Cooperative Congressional Election Survey to test four hypotheses:

- Christians should express higher levels of anti-immigrant attitudes than non-believers and non-Christians.
- Evangelical Christians should show the most pronounced anti-immigrant attitudes.
- Frequency of attendance at religious services should be negatively correlated with anti-immigrant attitudes.
- Those who adhere to Christian nationalism should express more anti-immigrant attitudes than those who don't.

Nooruddin's analysis found that religious conservatism is linked to negative attitudes toward immigrants; these attitudes are based on cultural rather than economic concerns; they are rooted in a belief system of Christian nationalism; and they are strongest among Evangelical Protestants.

The research found two mechanisms for these relationships. While some religious conservatives are less tolerant of all outgroups, others focus on a specific vision of America as a favored nation that has a covenant with God. These groups tend to be less tolerant of immigrants in particular.

Nooruddin's research makes three important contributions: it is the first systematic analysis of the mechanisms by which religion impacts attitudes toward immigrants; it explores how religion influences policy preferences toward non-religious issues; and it shows how symbolic leanings, identity, and self-interest combine to shape opinions.

God's Nation: Religious Nationalism in Contemporary American Politics

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY