# How Far Does Social Group Influence Reach? Identities, Elites, and Immigration Attitudes

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Identification with a social group can operate as a powerful heuristic, allowing an individual to easily make political judgments. But, a person can identify with multiple groups, which may be mobilized toward different political ends. How do opinions and behaviors change when a person's identities are in competition with each other, creating cross-pressures? The Evangelical Immigration Table (EIT)—a broad coalition of evangelical Christian leaders supporting liberal immigration policies—has been working to mobilize evangelical Christians on immigration; however, many evangelical Christians also hold competing partisan identities that push them to maintain their existing conservative immigration opinions. Using both panel and experimental data, I show that while the EIT can influence evangelicals' immigration attitudes, these changes in opinion do not correspond to an increased willingness to act politically in support of reform. Instead, I find the that EIT has been more successful at demobilizing evangelical opponents of immigration reform.

Cohesive political blocs are often forged from existing social groups. Group leaders—whether religious figures, union organizers, or community activists—serve as liaisons between the social and political worlds, providing voters with cues as to how their identifications with particular groups should translate into political preferences and activities. And when these social identities become politically relevant (Huddy 2003), group members—bound together by shared beliefs and outlooks—can mobilize behind a common political cause (Lewis-Beck et al. 2008; Miller et al. 1981; Simon and Klandermans 2001). But, people can belong to multiple groups and hold multiple identities, which may be mobilized by elites toward different political ends. Although many scholars have explored how identities can shape people's political beliefs and actions, less is known about how opinions and behaviors change when identities are in competition with each other, creating cross-pressures.

To understand how social identities interact politically, I look at a particular instance in which two identities—political and religious—that frequently operate in concert provide conflicting attitudinal cues. On the one hand, having a partisan identity is akin to being part of a political team

(Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002), and partisan identities can operate as "enduring" commitments (Campbell et al. 1960) that shape the way partisans view and interpret the world (Bartels 2002). The research on religious identities' relationship with political attitudes, on the other hand, is also well documented (Campbell et al. 1960; Djupe and Gilbert 2009; Green et al. 1996). So how does partisanship compete against another salient social identity that we know matters for political attitudes? The Evangelical Immigration Table (EIT) offers an opportunity to answer this question.

Since its inception in 2013, the EIT—a broad coalition of evangelical Christian leaders and groups in support of comprehensive immigration reform—has both been urging Congress to pass progressive immigration policies and working to rally evangelical Christians under the banner of immigration reform. One of the EIT's aims is to change evangelicals' political attitudes; however, most of the EIT's intended audience also holds a competing partisan identity that pushes them toward a very different set of political opinions. A majority of white evangelical Christians are also Republican and have consistently taken a correspondingly conservative position on immigration policy.

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The EIT's lofty goal of bringing about immigration reform raises two important questions. First, can (and how do) counterattitudinal messages from elites change group members' established opinions? Although elite messages can influence political attitudes, these identities often complement a preexisting political identity. We know less about the effect of such cues when they run counter to most group members' existing attitudes. After first showing that evangelical Republicans' immigration attitudes diverged from other Republicans' attitudes over time, I use experimental data to explore what produced these changes. While born-again Christians are not persuaded by any pro-immigration message, religious messages—particularly coming from a credible source—can influence attitudes.

The EIT's attempts to mobilize its members in support of progressive immigration reform raises a second question: can elites' influence extend beyond changing opinions to also change behaviors? I find that pro-reform attitude shifts do not increase evangelicals' willingness to act in support of reform. Instead, the EIT's strength lies in its ability to demobilize opponents. In the next sections, I provide background on evangelical Protestants' involvement with immigration reform and describe the current state of the literature.

### EVANGELICALS AND IMMIGRATION

When Matthew Soerens and Jenny Hwang Yang began writing a book in 2007 calling on Christians to support compassionate immigration reform, they knew they were facing an uphill battle. The book's intended audience—white evangelical Christians—was strongly opposed to immigration reform, and many evangelical groups, such as the National Association of Evangelicals, which has a membership of 45,000 congregations from 40 denominations, had remained silent while President Bush tried to push through immigration reform in 2006 and 2007 (Jordan 2013; Rubin 2013; Soerens 2014). Despite the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2007 offering a pathway to citizenship and increased border enforcement—two positions the EIT currently supports—President Bush did not have a vocal evangelical support base.

The publication and distribution of Soerens and Yang's (2009) book, titled *Welcoming the Stranger: Justice, Compassion, and Truth in the Immigration Debate*, spurred years of discussion among evangelical leaders. Meetings to coordinate a "Christian response" to undocumented immigrants in the United States culminated with the creation of the EIT in June 2012.

The EIT is an umbrella group of roughly 140 evangelical organizations and leaders advocating for immigration reform that reflects biblical values. The group calls on pol-

iticians to create immigration reform that "respects the God-given dignity of every person; Protects the unity of the immediate family; Respects the rule of law; Guarantees secure national borders; Ensures fairness to taxpayers and; Establishes a path toward legal status and/or citizenship for those who qualify and who wish to become permanent residents" (EIT 2013, http://evangelicalimmigrationtable.com/).

Starting in February 2013, the EIT began trying to influence both elected officials' and evangelicals' immigration opinions. One example is the EIT's "40-day challenge"—a nationwide campaign to encourage pastors and congregants to study one biblical passage on immigration per day for 40 days. The EIT has also hosted grassroots "Pray4Reform" events (Woodruff 2013) and purchased hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of billboard, radio, and website advertisements to reach evangelical Christians throughout the country. To succeed, the EIT must change mass-level immigration attitudes; however, scholars know little about whether the EIT's appeals, which are based on religious-group membership but run counter to the group's existing political inclinations, can transform attitudes and behaviors.

### ELITES, GROUP IDENTITIES, AND ATTITUDES

Groups defined by shared social characteristics can shape how members view a political candidate, party, or policy issue. Indeed, when political differences emerge among groups within society, many assume that these "distinctive [political] patterns are produced, in one fashion or another, by the influence of the group" (Campbell et al. 1960, 295). In particular, pressure to adhere to group norms coupled with the desire to minimize cognitive dissonance can produce common worldviews, shared priorities, and similar preferences among group members (Festinger 1957; McKimmie, Terry, and Hogg 2009), particularly when an identity is salient.

Elites represent a fundamental link in this chain of influence by connecting group members and making group norms known. They do this by disseminating information, framing the debate in the media, and serving as group representatives (Hogg and Reid 2006; Zaller 1992) to a generally uninformed electorate (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996) looking to form political judgments without much cognitive effort (Popkin 1994; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1991). While cues and endorsements from group leaders can influence policy opinions (Lupia 1994; Mondak 1993; Popkin 1994), what happens when leaders take positions that stand in opposition to group members' existing preferences and broader group norms?

The EIT is not trying to shore up evangelicals' opinions on immigration reform but to transform the religious group least supportive of liberal immigration policies (Jones et al.

2014) and more supportive of deportation than the general public (Djupe 2013) into champions of immigration reform. This poses a challenge for the EIT as individuals tend to reject dissonant information (Zaller 1992), use new information to reach their desired conclusions (Kunda 1990), and consider both the content of the information as well as the source when forming opinions (Druckman et al. 2010; Joslyn and Haider-Markel 2006). Moreover, interpersonal interactions mitigate elites' influence on public opinion (Druckman and Nelson 2003), and even minimal support from a peer can reduce the pressure to conform (Asch 1955; Stroebe and Diehl 1981). These findings call into question whether common explanations of group influence will apply in the EIT case, as elite cues run counter to group members' shared beliefs on immigration reform.

Moreover, while we might think that religious leaders, imbued with moral authority, are particularly well positioned to influence group members' opinions, religion and politics scholars have faced difficulty isolating the effect of religious elites on attitudes. Adkins et al. (2013) do not find evidence of religious cues influencing evangelicals' attitudes on cultural policies, such as homosexual rights. Similarly, Robinson (2010) shows that messages from evangelical leaders in favor of capital punishment and stricter immigration policy do not influence evangelical Protestants' levels of political tolerance. Because religious and political attitudes often move in concert, it is unclear from these null results whether religious elites fail to shape opinions or elite influence took place before the experiments.

Other studies have shown that religious leaders can influence attitudes under certain circumstances. While overtly political cues from religious elites are generally ineffective (Djupe and Gilbert 2009), elites can influence attitudes by priming a particular value (Djupe and Calfano 2013), when a political position comes with a specific religious justification (Djupe and Gwiasda 2010) and when there is vocal consensus among religious leaders (Campbell and Monson 2003). On the basis of these findings, I expect that the EIT's strategy of bringing together a large number of religious leaders and emphasizing religious reasons to support immigration reform can successfully change evangelicals' opinions on immigration.[1]

In trying to mobilize evangelical Christians around progressive immigration reform, the EIT is also encouraging evangelicals to adopt and act on a policy position that conflicts with another identity, potentially creating cross-pressured voters. Many white evangelical Christians are also Republicans. These people therefore not only hold conservative immigration attitudes, but these attitudes are consistent with their partisanship—another strong and stable identity that influences political preferences and behaviors (Green et al. 2002). This misalignment between white evangelicals' religious and partisan identities can have consequences for mobilization. Individuals, for example, are more likely to act on their attitudes when they perceive these opinions to be congruent with group norms or when new information comports with previously held attitudes (Terry, Hogg, and Duck 1999).

Cross-pressures have also been shown to reduce political involvement in particular. Individuals who have conflicting pressures—coming from identities such as partisanship, religion, class, and social status—vote at lower rates, delay making decisions about which candidates to support, and are generally less politically involved (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Campbell et al. 1960) and knowledgeable (Hutchings 2001) relative to individuals who do not experience such cross-pressures. Social interactions that include political disagreement also result in lower levels of political participation (Mutz 2002). Although hearing the other side of an argument can legitimize an opposing viewpoint (Mutz 2002), the mixed messages prove detrimental for political engagement by increasing ambivalence about the attitude object (Lavine 2001) for those wanting to avoid interpersonal conflict (Mutz 2002). Djupe and Gilbert (2009) find similar evidence in the religious context: clergy messages increase participation only in politically homogenous religious environments with politically consonant clergy messages. When there is any sort of political disconnect—either between churchgoer and clergy or between churchgoer and other congregants—political messages from the pulpit do not correspond with changes in political engagement. Building on this research, I expect that even if the EIT successfully transforms white evangelicals' immigration attitudes, Republican partisan identities and exposure to crosscutting messages should inhibit evangelicals from acting on their newfound opinions. The empirics that follow test how group leaders'

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1. Existing research testing religion's influence on immigration attitudes leaves much unresolved. Daniels and von der Ruhr (2005) and Knoll (2009) find that church attendance is positively associated with liberal immigration attitudes, while Nteta and Wallsten (2012) show that self-reported exposure to clergy messages is correlated with less restrictive immigration attitudes. Data limitations, however, restrict the inferences that can be made. First, people may choose a church or to attend services more frequently on account

of their preexisting attitudes. Second, it is impossible to attribute the correlation between church attendance and immigration views to religious leaders' actions and not to another factor. Third, self-reported measures of exposure are unreliable, particularly within houses of worship (Djupe and Gilbert 2009), because people more readily remember messages that agree with their preexisting beliefs (Nickerson 1998).

messages operate when group members hold conflicting attitudes and other politically relevant identities.

## HAVE IMMIGRATION ATTITUDES CHANGED OVER TIME?

Before exploring the causal process through which cues might influence attitudes, I first test whether evangelicals' immigration attitudes and behaviors have actually changed over time. I do so using three-wave nationally representative panel data collected by the American Panel Study (TAPS) at Washington University in St. Louis. TAPS uses a nationally representative sample of 2,000 adults in the United States. Respondents were recruited by and the surveys were conducted through Knowledge Networks. In addition to capturing attitudes on immigration reform, the survey collects religious and demographic information.

The first wave took place in February 2013. The data were collected just weeks after the EIT announced its large-scale campaign but before it took effect. The first wave also took place before the "Gang of Eight" introduced the bipartisan Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act (S.744) in April 2013. The second wave was collected seven months later in September 2013. Between the two waves, the EIT had organized and promoted the 40-Day Challenge, held a rally in Washington, DC, met with leaders on immigration reform, and purchased radio and billboard advertisements throughout the country. Also during the intervening months, the Senate passed the immigration bill; however, debate stalled in the Republican-controlled House. The third wave was collected in February 2014 just days after Representative John Boehner (R) announced House Republican leaders' reform principles, which stressed border enforcement as a precursor to handling those living in the country without legal documents and criticized a special pathway to citizenship. While immigration reform was initially touted as a bipartisan effort in the Senate, Republicans in the House became vocally opposed to the reforms over the course of 2013. With a large majority of white evangelicals identifying as Republicans and evangelicals being twice as likely to trust the Republican Party over the Democratic Party to handle immigration (Djupe 2013), I test how immigration attitudes of white evangelical Republicans changed compared to Republicans who are not white evangelicals. I present and describe analyses using the full sample of respondents in the appendix, available online.

The main measure of immigration reform support asks: "The current policy in the United States is to deport illegal immigrants. Some people suggest changing the law so that illegal immigrants could apply for legal status and possibly stay in the country permanently. Do you support or oppose this kind of change to the law?" The question taps into the most controversial part of the immigration reform debate: what to do with the estimated 11 million people living in the United States without legal documents. Support for immigration reform, therefore, refers specifically to whether respondents support allowing undocumented immigrants to remain in the country legally. I classify evangelical respondents using Steensland et al.'s (2000) religious denominational coding scheme.[2] All results are weighted using a dynamic weighting scheme. Although the TAPS study is designed to be nationally representative, panel attrition poses a problem for researchers trying to make claims about the broader population. The dynamic weighting approach uses population margins on age, gender, ethnicity, education, region, metropolitan status, and income from the Current Population Survey and Annual Social and Economic Supplement to account for panel attrition and item nonresponse over time. The weighted and unweighted results are substantively and statistically similar.

I first present the raw results graphically to show trends without making any modeling assumptions. The left panel of figure 1 presents the immigration opinions of white evangelical Republicans between February 2013 and February 2014, while the right panel presents the same opinion data for Republicans who are not white evangelicals. The circles and solid lines represent the percentage of respondents who support—either strongly or somewhat—immigration reform. The squares and dashed lines represent the percentage of respondents who neither support nor oppose immigration reform. And finally, the triangles and dotted lines represent the percentage of respondents who oppose, both somewhat and strongly, immigration reform. The best fit line between the two waves of data connects each set of points, and the vertical bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

The opinions of white evangelical Republicans and other Republicans shifted in opposite directions over time. Among white evangelical Republicans, opposition to reform decreased from 60% in wave 1 to 49% in wave 3, while support for reform increased from 22% to 29% over the same time period (fig. 1, left panel). This attitude shift does not extend to other Republicans, however. Support increased slightly between waves 1 and 2 (29%–32%) but then declined to 25% by wave 3. Meanwhile opposition rates rose from 51% in wave 1 to 57% in wave 3 (fig. 1, right panel). As nonevangelical Republicans decreased support for immigration reform, their white evangelical counterparts became more supportive.

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2. Section A of the online appendix offers a detailed discussion about this methodology.
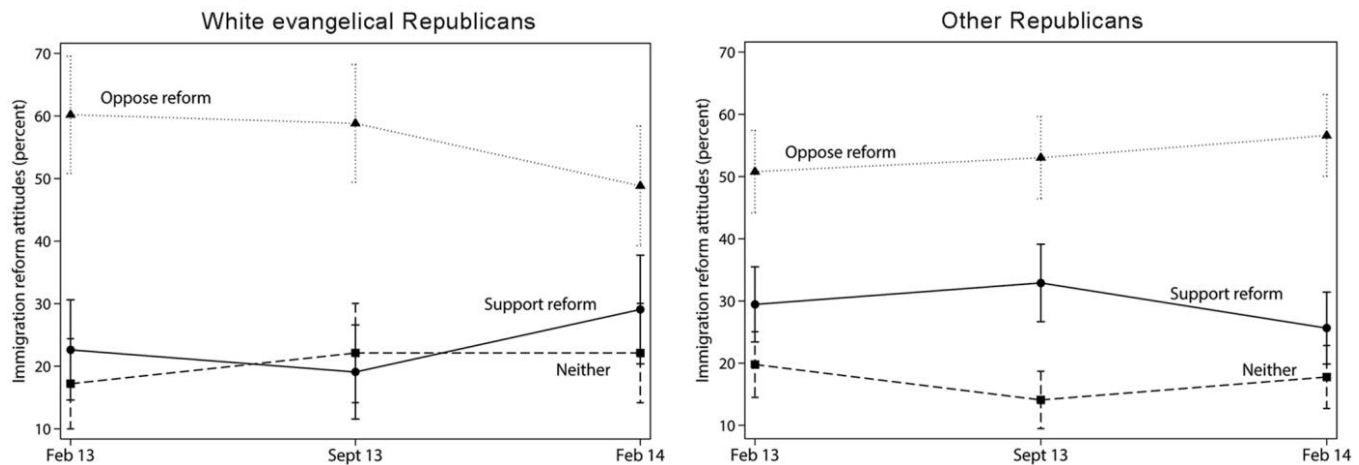
Figure 1. Republicans' immigration attitudes over time. Vertical bars represent 95% confidence intervals. (Data source: TAPS.)

I build on the graphical results using parametric tests, presented in table 1. Here, the dependent variable is the five-point measure of immigration reform support, ranging from 0 (strong opposition) to 100 (strong support). Each row of data represents an individual in a particular wave, the coefficients are from ordinary least squares (OLS) models, and standard errors are clustered at the individual level.[3] In particular, I am interested in how white evangelicals' attitudes changed relative to Republicans who are not white evangelicals. More specifically, I estimate the following model:

$$\text{support}_{it} = \alpha_i + \beta_1 W2 + \beta_2 W3 + \beta_3 \text{ white evan}_i + \beta_4 W2$$
$$\times \text{ white evan} + \beta_5 W3 \times \text{ white evan} + \varepsilon$$

in which $\beta_1$ and $\beta_2$ are dummy variables indicating whether the response came from wave 2 or wave 3, respectively, with wave 1 serving as the reference category. The binary variable $\beta_3$ identifies whether the respondent is a white evangelical (1) or not (0). And finally, $\beta_4$ and $\beta_5$ are interactions between being a white evangelical and the survey wave. The interaction terms test whether white evangelical Republicans' and other Republicans' attitudes moved in the same direction over time. Positive coefficients mean white evangelicals became more pro-reform over time relative to nonevangelicals, negative coefficients mean white evangelicals became more opposed to immigration reform over time relative to nonevangelicals, and coefficients near 0 indicate that the initial attitude gap remained constant over time. Another estimation strategy, a fixed-effects model, produces virtually identical results, which are presented in tables A8 and A9 in the online appendix.

Table 1 column 1 presents a parsimonious model without control variables, the first three rows of which show the mean difference in immigration attitudes for white evangelical Republicans compared to Republicans who are not evangelicals for each survey wave. The initial attitude gap between evangelicals and nonevangelicals is roughly −6 points. The statistically insignificant result demonstrates that Republicans—evangelical and nonevangelical alike—held similar views on immigration in wave 1 of the survey. And to the extent that there is a difference across the groups, evangelical Republicans are slightly more opposed to immigration reform. The size of the gap, however, shrinks over time. The −6 difference in wave 1 is a +8-point difference 12 months later in wave 3. I present the interactions from the model in the subsequent two rows. Between waves 1 and 2, white evangelical Republicans became slightly more supportive of immigration reform compared to nonevangelical Republicans ($\beta_4 = 4$, SE = 4), but these results do not reach statistical significance. Between waves 1 and 3, however, the change in immigration attitudes is more noticeable between the two groups ($\beta_5 = 14$, SE = 5). By wave 3, a 14-point gap—representing more than one-half the distance between two response options—emerged between white evangelical and nonevangelical Republicans.

Of course, white evangelicals differ from other Republicans on a host of characteristics, and these differences could affect the changing relationship between religious identification and immigration views. To address this possibility, models 2–5 include individual-level characteristics and opinions that may change immigration attitudes over time. Table 1 column 2 includes demographic variables of gender, race, age, age squared, education, income, and county-level Hispanic presence. Column 3 includes respondents' perceptions about their personal financial situation and the financial situation of

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3. Ordered logit models produce the same substantive results.

Table 1. White Republicans' Immigration Attitudes Diverged over Time

|  | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Evangelicals − not evangelicals:** |  |  |  |  |  |
| Wave 1 | −6 | −6 | −6 | −6 | −4 |
|  | (6) | (4) | (4) | (5) | (5) |
| Wave 2 | −2 | −4 | −3 | −3 | −2 |
|  | (7) | (5) | (5) | (5) | (5) |
| Wave 3 | 8 | 6 | 6 | 7 | 9* |
|  | (7) | (5) | (5) | (5) | (5) |
| **Attitude change over time:** |  |  |  |  |  |
| Between waves 1 and 2 ($\beta_4$) | 4 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
|  | (4) | (4) | (4) | (4) | (4) |
| Between waves 1 and 3 ($\beta_5$) | 14** | 12** | 12** | 13** | 13** |
|  | (5) | (4) | (5) | (5) | (5) |
| **Controls:** |  |  |  |  |  |
| Demographics | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Perceptions of economy | No | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Feelings toward immigrant groups | No | No | No | Yes | Yes |
| Politics | No | No | No | No | Yes |

Source. TAPS.

Note. The sample is restricted to white Republicans. The dependent variable is a five-point measure of immigration reform support ranging from strongly oppose (0) to strongly support (100). The coefficients are ordinary least squares estimates. Clustered standard errors are in parentheses. Demographics include gender, race, age, age squared, education, income, and county-level Hispanic presence (measured by percentage Hispanic in county and percentage Hispanic in county squared). Economic perceptions include a question about respondents' personal financial situations and the financial situation of the country as a whole. Feelings toward immigrant groups include respondents' feeling thermometer scores toward Hispanics and Asians. Politics includes respondents' political ideologies. $N = 789$.

\* $p < .1$.

\*\* $p < .05$.

the country as a whole. To account for feelings toward groups frequently linked with immigration, column 4 includes feeling thermometer scores toward Hispanics and Asians. And finally, column 5 includes political ideology. Each control variable is interacted with the wave variables to allow its effect to vary over time. All control variables were measured before the first wave of the immigration study.[4] The inclusion of control variables does not change the results from the parsimonious model in column 1. In each specification, white evangelicals' attitudes diverged from the rest of the Republican population, with the former becoming more supportive while the latter simultaneously became more opposed.[5]

Do these changing attitudes translate into actions? Research on cross-pressured identities finds that holding competing identities may decrease political participation, raising the question of whether evangelical Republicans will act on their immigration attitudes. I use the panel data to test whether the electoral importance of immigration changed over time. In all three waves respondents answered this question: "How likely is it that your views about illegal immigration will influence your vote in the 2014 midterm elections?" I code this variable as 1 if respondents answered "very likely" and 0 if respondents answered "somewhat likely" or "unlikely." The top panel of table 2 displays the predicted probabilities from a logistic regression for an evangelical reform supporter. A supporter had only a 0.15 probability of acting on her views in wave 1. This probability increases to 0.27 in wave 2 ($p = .06$). The mobilization around immigration reform, however, stalls. By wave 3, the probability that a supporter's immigration views would influence her vote dropped to 0.22, a probability that is statistically indistinguishable from wave 1 levels ($p = .43$).

These null results are striking given that a self-reported measure of vote influence represents a particularly easy test of political action. Voters only need to *say* that their views on immigration will influence their votes to count as political mobilization, which allows respondents to engage in cheap talk and expressive responding. Despite the low bar, the results are weak. If white evangelicals mobilized around the issue of immigration reform at all, the energy faded quickly.

The bottom panel of table 2 runs the same analyses on evangelical respondents who are opposed to immigration reform. While the probability decreases between waves 1 and 2 somewhat (0.62 to 0.57), the probability decreases dramatically by wave 3 (0.37; both changes between waves 1 and 3 and waves 2 and 3 have $p < .01$). Importantly, this demobilization of reform opponents only occurs among evangelicals: the probability of immigration reform influencing the vote of nonevangelical opponents is unchanged between waves 1 and 3. Evangelical Republicans' immigration attitudes and behaviors changed in systematic ways as the immigration

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4. As a further robustness check, I classified all respondents that are not part of the "white evangelical" category on the basis of their religious faiths. I then reran the analyses dropping individual faiths from the sample to ensure that one religious group does not drive the results. Dropping each subgroup within the "nonevangelical" category produces substantively and statistically similar results.

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5. Evangelical Democrats' opinions on immigration reform remained relatively stable throughout the period, which is consistent with the trend for nonevangelical Democrats. This might be because evangelical Democrats in the sample attend church less frequently than evangelical Republicans and are therefore less likely to be exposed to the EIT's message on immigration reform or evangelical Democrats—by virtue of holding identities that frequently produce cross-pressures—are less receptive to politically motivated religious messages.

Table 2. The Electoral Importance of Immigration Changed for Reform Supporters and Opponents

|  | Probability of Vote on Immigration |
|---|---|
| **Reform supporters:** |  |
| Evangelicals in wave 1 | .15 |
|  | (.07, .23) |
| Evangelicals in wave 2 | .27 |
|  | (.17, .36) |
| Evangelicals in wave 3 | .22 |
|  | (.11, .33) |
| **Reform opponents:** |  |
| Evangelicals in wave 1 | .62 |
|  | (.52, .71) |
| Evangelicals in wave 2 | .57 |
|  | (.46, .67) |
| Evangelicals in wave 3 | .37 |
|  | (.26, .48) |

Source. TAPS.

Note. The top portion of the table is restricted to white evangelicals who support immigration reform. The bottom portion of the table is restricted to evangelicals who oppose immigration reform. The dependent variable is a binary variable asking whether illegal immigration would likely influence the respondent's 2014 midterm vote (1) or not (0). Cell entries represent the probabilities for each of the panel waves; 95% confidence intervals are in parentheses. Models include the full set of control variables described above.

debate unfolded. But these descriptive results do not explain why these changes took place.

## CAN THE EIT MESSAGE MARSHAL SUPPORTERS?

This section describes and presents the results from a survey experiment designed to test whether and how the EIT's radio advertisements—different versions of which ran in 20 states—would affect potential listeners. The 1,000 person experiment ran from March 7–14, 2014, using a national sample recruited through Survey Sampling International (SSI).[6]

Respondents were told that the study was interested in how individuals react to political advertisements. All respondents first watched a video advertisement for a fictitious congressman running for reelection. After watching the ad, which did not mention immigration reform, respondents provided their impressions of the politician in the ad. Participants were then randomized into one of three conditions.

Respondents in the religious advertisement condition listened to the EIT radio advertisement that aired in Colorado. In the unedited advertisement, two pastors asked listeners to join a movement of Christians that support immigration solutions rooted in biblical values. After listing the EIT's goals for immigration reform—including a pathway to citizenship—the advertisement asked listeners to pray for their elected officials and tell their representatives that they support immigration reform. Respondents in a second, secular, treatment condition listened to an edited version of the EIT advertisement. Here, I removed the religious language; respondents heard only the pro-immigration reform message. By separating the religious component from the immigration message itself, I isolate the religious appeals' effects. The advertisement text is available in section B of the online appendix. Finally, respondents in the control condition watched the congressional reelection advertisement but did not listen to an immigration radio spot.

The dependent variable measures respondents' attitudes toward immigration reform using the same question wording as the panel data. I present experimental treatment effects on two additional immigration policy attitudes, support for the DREAM Act and support for allowing undocumented immigrants who have American-born children to remain in the country, in table B2 of the online appendix.

I am particularly interested in how white born-again Christians responded to the radio ad, as they represent the core group the EIT is attempting to persuade. I identify these individuals with a question asking white self-identified Christians whether they consider themselves to be "born again."[7]

The left panel of figure 2 plots the experimental treatment effects for white born-again Christians. The x-axis displays the experimental conditions, and the y-axis represents the percentage of respondents who support immigration reform (either strongly or somewhat). I present the percentage of respondents in the control condition supporting immigration reform in the center of the graph, 28%. The average level of reform support for respondents in the religious and secular conditions lie to the left and right of the control group, respectively. Support among those who received the full, unedited EIT message is significantly higher than support among those in the control condition. I present the difference-in-means estimate (approximately 21 percentage points), along with its p-value (.03) between the two points on the figure.[8]

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6. SSI recruits participants through online communities, social networks, and website ads and endeavors to recruit hard-to-reach groups. SSI recruited a target population that matched the (18-and-over) census population on education, gender, age, geography, and income without using quotas. The resulting sample is a diverse national sample.

7. Section B in the online appendix discusses the theoretical and empirical differences between classifying respondents as "evangelical" and "born again."

8. Models that include sociodemographic controls are available in table B3 of the online appendix.
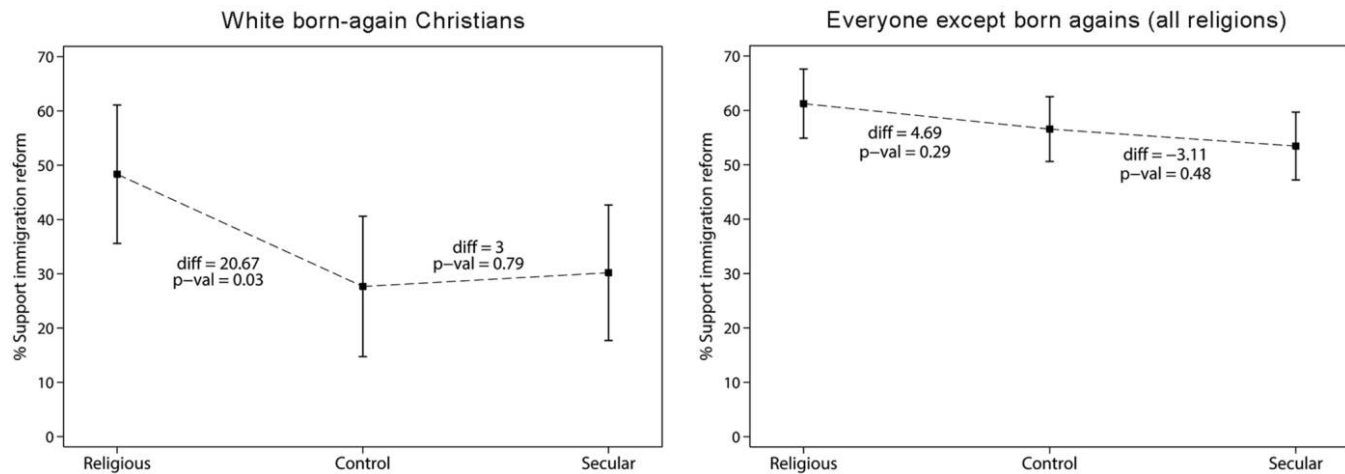
Figure 2. Immigration attitudes differ based on treatment condition. Vertical bars represent 95% confidence intervals. The differences and *p*-values correspond to the difference-in-means estimates that emerge from comparing the treatment groups and the control condition. (Data source: SSI survey experiment.)

Although the religious condition significantly affected immigration attitudes, the same message without the religious rhetoric did not. The difference between the secular and control conditions is both substantively small—about 3 percentage points—and statistically insignificant. While born-again Christians can be persuaded by a religious message, they are not otherwise open to liberalizing their immigration attitudes.

The EIT's efforts were aimed at evangelicals—for example, its ground campaign partnered with evangelical churches around the country—but there was undoubtedly spillover from the radio, billboard, and website advertisements as well as from mainstream news outlets covering the EIT. How might nongroup members react to the different immigration messages? The right panel of figure 2 presents the same results for all those who are not born-again Christians. This includes both Christians who do not identify as born again as well as non-Christians. I find that the EIT's religious appeal did not dramatically change the reported immigration attitudes of those who are not born-again Christians. Respondents in the religious treatment condition were more supportive of immigration reform (either strongly or somewhat) relative to respondents in the control condition (difference = 4.69, p = .29). The result trends in the pro-reform direction; however, the difference is statistically indistinguishable from zero at conventional levels and substantively smaller than the effect found for born-again Christians. I also find no evidence that the radio advertisement stripped of religious language persuaded listeners (difference = −3.11, p = .48). In a direct comparison of the two treatment conditions, respondents who received the religious radio ad were slightly more supportive of immigration reform relative to respondents who heard the secular radio ad (difference = 7.79, p = .09). Considering both panels together, the EIT's message successfully

changed immigration attitudes among born-again Christians—the EIT's intended audience—while doing little to others' viewpoints.

Table 3 replicates and expands on figure 2's results. The regressions use the four-point dependent variable, and coefficients represent the difference in means between each treatment condition and the excluded control condition, whose mean appears in the table as the regression intercept. Columns 1 and 2 corroborate figure 2, which used a collapsed measure of support: the religious message had a large positive effect on born-again support for immigration reform (col. 1) and virtually no effect on non-born-agains (col. 2). Among Christians who are not born again (col. 3), neither treatment resulted in immigration attitudes that differ significantly from the average attitude among respondents in the control group. Finally, column 4 looks at religious nonidentifiers. Adkins et al. (2013) find evidence of a backlash effect in which religious nonidentifiers used the evangelical label as "a negative political referent in shaping policy attitudes" (255). While one unintended consequence of the EIT's strategy might therefore be increasing reform opposition among seculars, I do not find a backlash effect. Neither the secular nor the religious immigration message produced a detectable change in reported attitudes.

To directly test whether attitudes conformed to the EIT's stated goal of providing a pathway to citizenship, I asked respondents specifically about what should happen to citizens without legal documents. White born-again Christians who heard the unedited EIT radio spot were 17 percentage points more likely to support a pathway to citizenship compared to respondents in the control condition. Again, respondents who heard the secular version of the ad had similar support levels for a pathway to citizenship relative to those

Table 3. Experimental Treatment Effects on Different Religious Groups

|  | White Born-Agains (1) | Non-Born-Agains (All Religions) (2) | Non-Born-Again Christians (3) | Religious Nonidentifiers (4) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Religious message | 14.81** | 3.06 | 3.79 | −3.80 |
|  | (6.68) | (3.11) | (6.70) | (5.28) |
| Secular message | −3.29 | −1.70 | −7.59 | −3.06 |
|  | (6.64) | (3.08) | (6.18) | (5.04) |
| Intercept | 29.08** | 50.69** | 47.49** | 55.56** |
|  | (4.92) | (2.09) | (4.41) | (3.43) |
| Observations | 160 | 741 | 191 | 249 |

Source. SSI survey experiment.

Note. The dependent variable is a four-point measure of immigration reform support ranging from strongly oppose (0) to strongly support (100). The coefficients are ordinary least squares estimates. Robust standard errors are in parentheses. The intercept represents the average level of immigration support among respondents in the control condition. Columns 1 and 2 replicate the results from fig. 2 using the four-point scale, while cols. 3 and 4 extend the analysis to additional religious categories.

* $p < .1$.

** $p < .05$.

in the control condition (difference = −3.9, $p = .65$). Section B of the online appendix presents a detailed discussion of these results.

Participants' responses also varied on the basis of whether cross-pressures were present. First, born-again Republicans may be more likely to feel their religious and political identities pulling in different directions compared to born-again Christians who are either Independents or Democrats. I find suggestive evidence that non-Republican born-agains became relatively more supportive of immigration reform than their Republican counterparts; however, because of the small sample size the substantively meaningful finding is not statistically distinguishable from zero at conventional levels ($p = .30$). Second, born-again Republicans may feel more pressure to update their immigration attitudes than Republicans who are not born-again Christians, as the radio advertisement specifically targeted evangelical Christians. I find that Republicans who are not born-again Christians actually reacted against the religious radio advertisement—becoming less supportive of immigration reform—whereas born-again Republicans became more supportive. Together, these results suggest that the ad's effectiveness differs on the basis of whether cross-pressures are present.

I again test whether these attitudinal shifts correspond to an increased willingness to act using a quasi-behavioral measure. The question asked respondents whether they would be willing to sign a petition in order to share their stated immigration opinions with their members of Congress. I find that the strong 20-point change in reported attitudes does not carry

over into action. While 22% of white born-again Christians in the control condition were willing to sign a petition in favor of a pathway to citizenship, 26% of their counterparts hearing EIT's message—including the religious rhetoric—were willing to do so. This 4% shift is both substantively small and statistically insignificant (SE = 0.08, $p = .61$). Conversely, the secular pro-immigration advertisement actually energized pro-deportation respondents, increasing the likelihood of a respondent signing a petition to nearly 50% (up from 38% in the control condition), while the EIT's religiously tinged pro-immigration message decreased the likelihood to 30% (difference = 18%, SE = 9, $p = .04$). In other words, the religious and secular radio advertisements—despite both taking the same pro-immigration reform stance—had opposite behavioral effects on white born-again Christians who were in favor of deportation after hearing the ad. Whether demobilization occurred because respondents' resolve in their pro-deportation position waned or because the increased salience of a crosscutting identity decreased general political participation is unclear; however, the results point to the EIT's unexpected strength and ability to demobilize opponents even when a secular, yet otherwise similar, message results in a backlash and higher rates of participation.

The survey experiment answers how the EIT's religious messages can affect its evangelical audience but leaves open an important question about the EIT's strategy: to what and to whom are evangelicals responding? First, the radio advertisement offered two distinct source cues—one from the EIT, who explicitly sponsored the radio advertisement, and

one from the pastors, who identify themselves as religious leaders at the ad's outset. The literature on elite persuasion has explored both how the perceived credibility and expertise of a cue provider affect individuals' responses to elite messages (Kuklinski and Hurley 1994) and how groups themselves offer valuable decision-making information (Hutchings, Walton, and Benjamin 2010). But little is known about the relative effectiveness of cues from groups—which represent a broad class of people—and an individual who serves as a leader or stereotypical member of the group. Second, the EIT used two pastors in their radio ad, but we do not know whether their religious titles provided additional source credibility or whether the religious message alone is largely responsible for the effects found.

## DOES THE SOURCE MATTER?

This section uses a field experiment to test how the source of religious messages about immigration reform affects evangelicals. Pursuant in their goals to mobilize evangelical Christians, the EIT commissioned an independent political firm to send out six e-mails about immigration reform to evangelical Christians around the country.[9] While the ubiquity of e-mail has allowed organizations to reach large groups of people easily and cheaply for a wide variety of purposes, the first step in getting people to act is to induce them to open the e-mail. In many cases, the identity of the e-mail sender affects the recipients' willingness to both open an e-mail and act on a request that appears in the e-mail's body (Fang, Wen, and Pavur 2012; Gueguen and Jacob 2002; Gueguen, Jacob, and Morineau 2010; Porter and Whitcomb 2003).

In order for the EIT to maximize its reach, each of the six main e-mails was first piloted with between six and eight subject lines. Each subject line can be thought of as a religious message regarding immigration reform. Importantly, the sender—or source—of the religious message was also randomized in the pilot phase. For example, two groups of people received e-mails with the subject line "What does the Bible say about immigration reform?" Half of the people who received this subject line had the EIT as the sender of the e-mail, while the other half received the e-mail from Reverend Samuel Rodriguez. The same is true for the other seven subject lines tested before the first e-mail campaign. Approximately 1,500 people received each subject line–sender combination, and the subject line–sender combination that produced the highest rate of opened e-mails was sent to approximately

9 million people around the country in the summer of 2013.[10] The identity of the individual sender also changed across e-mails. Three of the individual senders—Reverends Samuel Rodriguez, Gabriel Salguero, and Jim Wallis—were all identified as reverends, while Jenny Yang and David Beckmann, two people affiliated with the EIT's efforts but without a religious title, also sent e-mails. I test whether evangelicals were more likely to open a religiously titled e-mail from the EIT or from these two types of individuals. In doing so, the e-mail experiment expands on the survey experiment by assessing whether the source of a religious message matters.

In total, 47 pairs of e-mail subject lines were piloted over the course of the campaign, with each subject line randomly sent by either the EIT or an individual. Each religious message in the form of a subject line, therefore, represents an experiment that allows me to test how different sources affect an individual's willingness to open an e-mail about immigration reform. Open rates for the EIT's campaign varied between 0.6% and 3.1%, with an average of approximately 1.6%.[11]

E-mail recipients are more likely to open e-mails from individual senders, particularly reverends, than e-mails sent by the EIT. In a comparison across all 47 pairings, the e-mail sent by the individual produced a higher open rate than the e-mail sent by the EIT in 46 cases. In all six piloted e-mails, the most successful subject line–sender combination had an individual send the e-mail, not the EIT. Consequently, none of the six e-mails sent on behalf of the EIT and in support of the EIT's policies used the EIT as the e-mail sender.

Formal tests, presented in table 4, provide more detailed results. Column 1 reiterates the average open rate, approximately 1.6%. Column 2 presents OLS estimates from a model that includes a dummy variable to distinguish whether the e-mail sender was an individual or the EIT along with subject-line fixed effects to allow open rates to vary on account of the subject line or the timing of the six pilot tests. About 1.3% of recipients opened an e-mail from the EIT. Having an individual sender increased open rates by about two-thirds of a

Table 4. E-Mail Recipients Respond to Religious Leaders, Not Groups

|  | (1) | (2) | (3) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Average | 1.6 |  |  |
|  | (.06) |  |  |
| Individual |  | .67** |  |
|  |  | (.14) |  |
| Secular individual |  |  | .54** |
|  |  |  | (.08) |
| Religious individual |  |  | 1.04** |
|  |  |  | (.12) |
| E-mail pairing fixed effects |  | Yes | Yes |
| Constant |  | .67** | .73** |
|  |  | (.07) | (.04) |

Source. Source cue e-mail experiment.

Note. The dependent variable is the percentage of e-mail recipients who opened the e-mail. The coefficients are ordinary least squares estimates. Clustered standard errors are in parentheses.

\* $p < .1$.

\** $p < .05$.

percentage point (difference $= 0.67$, $p < .01$), increasing the average open rate to 2%, a 50% increase over the EIT sender.

Table 4 column 3 breaks out the individual sender into religious versus secular individuals, categorized by whether the sender had "reverend" as part of his title. This second specification produces two interesting results. First, e-mails from a nonreligious sender still resulted in a half a percentage point increase in opened e-mails relative to e-mails from the EIT (difference $= 0.54$, $p < .01$). E-mail recipients—despite being religious and likely receptive to evangelical messages—were more likely to open an e-mail from a random, religiously unaffiliated person over the EIT. The result highlights the EIT's limited ability to serve as an effective source cue in this instance of digital outreach, a point that I return to below. Second, e-mails from a religious sender produced an even higher open rate. The change in open rate when the EIT is the sender (1.3%) compared to an e-mail sent by a religious individual (2.34%) represents an 80% increase in e-mail openings (difference $= 1.04$, $p < .01$). The difference in open rates between religious individuals and secular individuals is also statistically significant ($p = .01$), with the religious senders garnering more e-mail openings.[12]

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12. One concern related to the direct comparison of religious and nonreligious senders is that the six piloted studies occurred at different time periods. I find no evidence that open rates varied across the piloted studies. Among those who received an e-mail from the EIT, 1.3% opened the e-mail when the alternative was a nonreligious individual while 1.36% opened the e-mail when the alternative was a religious individual (difference $= 0.06\%$, $p = .65$).

The results, which test whether the source of the e-mail affects recipients' willingness to engage with the EIT's message, offer two main insights. First, the source of religious messages matters. Evangelicals do not respond to religious messages in the same way and may interpret messages differently on the basis of where the information comes from. Second, the EIT, possibly because it is a new organization and does not have ubiquitous name recognition, is not poised to influence evangelical attitudes on its own. Instead, the EIT's strength likely comes from having affiliated organizations and support among a large number of religious leaders.[13] The EIT would have a more difficult time influencing opinions without this coalition of support.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

A great deal of research has looked at how groups and group leaders can influence opinions and behaviors, but we know less about what happens when such cues run counter to a preexisting opinion or another identity. By taking on a prophetic role and espousing a religious truth about immigration reform, the EIT and the religious elites associated with it provide the opportunity to study the reaches and limits of social group influence.

I began by testing whether attitudes have changed over time. Whereas cross-sectional analyses look at religion and immigration attitudes at a single point in time, following the same individuals as the immigration debate unfolded offers new descriptive insight. Despite being a key Republican constituency, white evangelical Republicans became more supportive of reform while other Republicans became less supportive over time. By the third wave of the data, Republicans who were not white evangelicals held immigration attitudes that more closely resembled the rhetoric of Republican elites than their white evangelical counterparts. Possibly on account of having two salient identities, evangelical Republicans diverged in their immigration positions relative to other Republicans despite holding similar immigration attitudes at the panel's outset.

Having shown an interesting over-time trend, I next tested whether the EIT might have helped produce this change. While born-again Christians were not responsive to a secular pro-reform message, the EIT radio advertisement resonated with group members. These results comport with Djupe and Gwiasda (2010), who find that evangelicals respond to environmental appeals when the appeal includes both a religious identity cue and a decision-making process cue in which the

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13. Section C of the online appendix discusses how to interpret the results assuming different levels of familiarity with the EIT.

religious leader describes how he reached his stated position. The field experiment further shows that the source of the religious immigration message matters and that individual religious leaders are likely a crucial part of any success the EIT has had in changing attitudes. Importantly, the pastors (in the radio advertisement) and reverends (in the e-mail campaigns) are not known quantities to many evangelicals. Evangelicals are therefore responding to religious leaders, identified only by their titles. Together, these results show how group leaders can overcome the commonly noted barriers to persuasion, even when presenting dissonant information.

The experimental results also show that evangelical cues do not inevitably divide the electorate. Bolce and De Maio (1999) find that the growth of "anti-fundamentalist" sentiment in the United States is linked to evangelical involvement in politics, and Adkins et al. (2013) find evidence of this when nonreligious individuals who received a conservative evangelical cue subsequently moved in the liberal direction, away from the evangelical leaders' stated position. In contrast, I do not find evidence of a backlash among religious nonidentifiers, despite the religious message making explicit references to Christ, the Bible, and evangelicals. These results indicate that less religious Americans do not blindly react against religious cues; they also consider the ideological direction of the message.

Although counterattitudinal messages can change attitudes, I find that actions do not necessarily follow. The panel data show that supporters have not mobilized around immigration reform, even in a nominal sense. Additionally, while the radio advertisement successfully shifted reported attitudes, the experimental treatment did not change whether born-again Christians would sign a petition expressing their support for immigration reform. These results, which are consistent with previous work on cross-pressured voters and hearing dissonant messages, highlight the limits of group influence in a world in which people hold multiple identities. Even when successful at changing opinions, leaders of social groups may struggle to mobilize members around an issue.

Instead, counterattitudinal messages seem well-positioned to demobilize opponents. In both the panel data and survey experiment, reform opponents became less likely to act on their stated position. This is particularly noteworthy as reform opponents in both wave 1 of the panel data and the experimental control condition reported a much greater readiness to act compared to reform supporters. These findings comport with and build on the social categorization literature, which finds that holding attitudes perceived to be consistent with group norms increases the likelihood of taking action (Terry et al. 1999). Indeed, a white evangelical Re-

publican holding an anti-immigration reform viewpoint before the EIT's campaign could readily assume her attitudes were congruent with both her religious and partisan identities, which may have incentivized her to act. Over time or in response to an experimental treatment, however, this same person received new information calling into question whether her actions are appropriate for group members. The demobilization findings, therefore, contribute to the literature by showing how group leaders can exert political influence without changing attitudes.

The results from this article also open the door for future research. First, under what circumstances can group leaders influence group members' attitudes? The results show that group leaders can lead on public opinion. But additional research testing group salience, source credibility, and message effectiveness can offer more nuanced explanations for when counterattitudinal messages can effectively shape attitudes and behaviors for different sorts of groups and leaders, both religious and secular. Second, what, if anything, can group leaders do to successfully mobilize cross-pressured voters? Is group-level political mobilization possible when group members are exposed to dissonant viewpoints? Klar (2013) finds that an identity's impact on opinion is larger when the identity is perceived to be under threat. This result is consistent with social identity theorists who note that "shared interests (perceived or actual) and related grievances play a role in producing political cohesion" (Huddy 2003, 531). It is therefore possible that group cues that threaten a particular identity are strong enough to not only change opinions but also encourage group members to act on these opinions. And third, while the data demonstrate the extent to which evangelical and born-again Christians' attitudes changed on immigration policy, the article does not address other, unintended consequences of the EIT's strategies. Social groups are constructed, and individuals may compensate for holding dissonant political attitudes by changing their participation in the social group (Margolis 2018) or engaging in other social activities to reduce cognitive dissonance stemming from holding views that are out of line with the majority (Finifter 1974). Future research can explore this question by testing how unpersuaded evangelical or born-again Christians handle holding political attitudes that are at odds with the religious leadership.

The results from this article along with avenues for future research address important, yet unexplored, questions related to identities, group influence, opinion change, and participation. Immigration reform is one policy domain that cuts across traditional partisan lines and has created unlikely bedfellows. When elites change their positions or new issues

emerge on the scene, group members must decide whether to update their views or hold onto their previously held stances. The findings from this article provide insight into whether, how, and to what extent group cues can influence group members' attitudes and behaviors.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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