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How Americans Talk about Separation of Church and State: Moral Frameworks of Justice and Care

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ABSTRACT

This paper draws on data from 12 focus group discussions of a faith-based prison ministry program to examine how ordinary Americans talk about the separation of church and state. The focus groups – conducted in Houston, Minneapolis-St. Paul, and Boston – revealed that program supporters and opponents draw on different moral frameworks, with supporters focusing on a framework of care and opponents focusing on a framework of justice. The findings affirm the centrality of moral concerns in shaping citizen stances on church-state separation and suggest that meaningful political compromise is possible on the issue of government support of faith-based social services.

KEYWORDS

Morality; religion; law; church-state separation; culture wars

Controversies about church-state separation are part of a recurring debate in American public life about the proper relationship between religion and the state. The examples are numerous. Recently the news has brought stories about business owners seeking to deny services to same-sex marrying couples because the practice of same-sex marriage conflicts with their strongly held religious beliefs as well as controversies over employers' denial of birth-control coverage to employees based on religious objections. These cases raise the question of whether the state can enforce anti-discrimination measures that arguably have the effect of curbing the religious freedom of business owners. Other controversies have sprung up around the display of religious content on government property, raising questions about the government privileging one religious viewpoint. The last two decades have also brought controversies about whether the government can fund faith-based services of various kinds. Does such funding violate the Constitution's promise of separation of church and state? Ordinary Americans encounter this sort of controversy with some regularity, but we know relatively little about how average citizens think about the relationship between religion and the state.

Survey data provide some insight. A 2009 Pew Survey found that 69 percent of Americans favored allowing religious entities to apply for government funding to provide social services (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, and Pew Research Center for the People and the Press 2009). That same survey also found that a majority of Americans (52 percent) said it was an important concern whether such funding would interfere with the separation of church and state (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, and Pew Research Center for the People and the Press 2009). A 2014 survey by the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) found strong support among Americans for separation of

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church and state, with 69 percent agreeing that "we must maintain a strict separation of church and state" (PRRI 2014). A 2012 PRRI survey found that Americans were fairly evenly divided on whether the principle of separation of church and state was under threat (PRRI 2012).

Although surveys provide a valuable snapshot of Americans' views, they cannot tell us how ordinary Americans understand the meaning of church-state separation or how they make judgments about whether a specific practice violates the Constitution. This paper deepens our knowledge of how Americans think and talk about church-state separation by drawing on data from focus groups and interviews discussing government support for faith-based social services in the prison context. Our data allow us to identify what people understand to be at issue in a specific instance of faith-based social services, and the reasons they give for identifying a particular prison ministry as violating church-state separation or not, going beyond the tallying of pro and con positions that surveys provide. We find considerable ambivalence, rather than highly-polarized sides consistent with a liberal-conservative "culture war." However, moral and religious factors do help us make sense of the discourse of ordinary citizens on this issue: those who do take sides talk in ways that reveal competing moral frameworks, and religious affiliation shapes the moral frameworks and discourses people use to understand and respond to prison ministry in particular and church-state separation in general. We argue that our data do not support a strong culture-wars thesis, but do illustrate the linkage between divergent moral frameworks and political views about church-state separation. Specifically, those who oppose the program due to concern about violation of church-state separation apply a moral framework of justice, whereas those who support the program and downplay church-state concerns apply a moral framework of care. Despite these differing moral lenses, we find that high levels of ambivalence, along with interest in reforming the proposed program to resolve church-state separation problems, suggest that meaningful political compromise may be possible on this issue.

Morality and Politics

In *Culture Wars*, Hunter (1991) famously argued that intractable cultural conflicts reflected the clash of two competing worldviews in post-1960s America. These competing worldviews, labeled "orthodox" and "progressive," feature fundamental differences concerning the source and nature of moral authority. For adherents of the orthodox worldview, the source of morality is transcendent and external, and truth is fixed and knowable. Adherents of the progressive worldview, by contrast, locate the source of morality in personal experience and scientific rationality, and view truth as relative. Hunter argues that older forms of religious division were replaced by this new alignment, with religious conservatives embracing the moral absolutism of the orthodox worldview and religious liberals joining secularists in the moral relativism of the progressive worldview.

Hunter identified law as a "decisive symbolic territory" (1991:174) in the culture wars, with the separation of church and state as one key battleground. The progressive camp adopts the position of "strict separationism," which holds that "the wall of separation must be high and impervious, because the rights of religious minorities are always threatened when the power of faith is linked with the power of the state" (Hunter 1991:262). The orthodox camp aligns with the position of "accommodationism," which holds that "the

state should never favor one faith over another, yet it should be free to accommodate and even assist all faiths equally" (Hunter 1991:262).

Hunter's culture wars thesis faced empirically-grounded challenges from many quarters (e.g., DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson 1996; Evans 2003; Evans, Bryson, and Paul 2001; Fiorina 2005; Williams 1997; Wolfe 1998), although some critics did concede that the period in question saw increasing polarization in political parties and elite discourses (Fischer and Mattson 2009). Perhaps the most significant legacy of the culture wars thesis is that it helped stimulate renewed interest in possible causal relationships between individual morality and political views.

Much of the recent work on morality and politics suggests that people's moral and religious beliefs and practices do in fact influence political identities and beliefs. Baldassarri and Goldberg (2014) identify three groups based on political belief structures: ideologues, alternatives, and agnostics. Alternatives are voters who are morally conservative and economically liberal, or vice versa, making it difficult to place them along the liberal-conservative spectrum. Religiosity combines with class location to channel some people into the traditional liberal-conservative polarity and others into the alternative category. Noy and O'Brien (2016) also develop a tripartite categorization of perspectives, based on religiosity and knowledge and appreciation of science, and demonstrate that these perspectives are significant predictors of political views on a range of issues. Edgell and Tranby (2010) identify distinct categories based on moral evaluations of social groups (judgments about whether various social groups share one's vision of America), and show that these categories are significantly associated with beliefs on a range of political issues. All of these survey-based studies call into question the adequacy of the liberal-conservative spectrum for capturing the range of political viewpoints and their connection to moral/religious beliefs and practices.

Outside of sociology, the field of moral psychology has been a rich source of research examining the relationship between morality and politics. Moral psychology initially was investigated as an aspect of cognitive-developmental psychology (Haidt and Kesebir 2010), and researchers identified two primary sets of moral concerns, centered on justice and care. Kohlberg (1969) famously equated moral reasoning with reasoning about justice, an equation that was eventually challenged by Gilligan (1982), who asserted that moral development also includes an ethic of care. More recently, social psychologists have been redefining moral psychology in significant ways, by focusing on morality as encompassing not only rational cognition but moral intuitions, emotions, and social influences, and by identifying moral concerns beyond justice and care.

Moral Foundations Theory (MFT), developed by Haidt and other social psychologists (Graham et al. 2013, 2011; Haidt 2007, 2012; Haidt and Joseph 2004), asserts that moral intuitions shape political identities and views. MFT propounds a dual-process model of moral cognition, in which moral intuitions – occurring automatically – are the primary driver of moral thought and action, with moral reasoning usually happening *post hoc* to develop justifications for positions reached through intuition. MFT expands the scope of moral concerns to include five (or sometimes six) moral foundations that are the basis of moral cognition: care/harm, fairness/cheating, loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion, sanctity/degradation, and sometimes liberty/oppression (Haidt 2012:Chaps. 7–8). Proponents of MFT argue that liberals and conservatives in contemporary Western cultures apply different moral matrices to politics: liberals rely most on the care and

fairness (and perhaps liberty) foundations, whereas conservatives rely on all five (or six) foundations (Graham, Haidt, and Nosek 2009; Haidt 2012; Haidt and Graham 2007; Koleva et al. 2012).

Because political identities and positions are largely the result of moral intuitions, it is difficult to change people's minds on political issues through rational argument. Some proponents have asserted that MFT is especially useful for understanding moral cognitions informing opposing sides on intractable "culture wars" issues (Koleva et al. 2012; Haidt 2012:319–322). The MFT approach is broadly consistent with the culture wars thesis insofar as it emphasizes the ways liberals and conservatives differ in moral cognition and the entrenched nature of political stances grounded in conflicting forms of morality. But Haidt proposes a "social intuitionist" model of moral cognition, in which moral intuitions are primary, but people's views are sometimes affected by the moral judgments and reasoning of others (Haidt 2012:55–56; see also, Haidt 2001). Also, consistent with recent sociological work, some MFT research suggests that the liberal-conservative polarity may not be adequate to capture the complex landscape of Americans' morally-infused political identities (Haidt, Graham, and Joseph 2009).

Bridging sociological and psychological approaches to morality and politics, Miles and Vaisey (2015) test how well different theories of morality predict self-reported political orientation. They find that measures based on both the culture wars thesis and MFT contribute to the prediction of political orientation. The authors conclude that "even if claims about a 'culture war' are overstated, moral differences are still deeply implicated in politics, even among those who are more moderately politicized" (Miles and Vaisey 2015:261).

Research Questions

There is an emerging cross-disciplinary consensus that morality matters for understanding politics, including the political views of ordinary citizens. Studies based on representative survey data demonstrate that various aspects of morality are useful for identifying broad groupings within the electorate, as well as for predicting people's general political orientation, views of social outgroups, and positions on issues. So far, no research has investigated the link between individual morality and how ordinary Americans understand the separation of church and state and respond to controversies over this issue.

We complement and extend the rich survey-based literature on morality and politics with a detailed analysis of qualitative data that provide insight into how ordinary people talk about the separation of church and state. Our specific research questions are:

- How do people discuss and debate whether a hypothetical faith-based prison program violates the separation of church and state? What factors are most relevant to people's judgments about the program and church-state separation? What kinds of moral evaluation (if any) appear in deliberations on this issue?
- Are there any suggestive patterns in people's response to this issue? Do any such patterns align with existing theories regarding the relationship between morality and politics?
- What impact (if any) does group deliberation have on people's evaluation of this issue?

Data and Methods

Data for this paper come from focus groups and interviews conducted by the Talking About Social Controversies (TASC) project, a study of how people talk about controversial social issues. TASC included 36 focus groups across three geographic sites, with each focus group assigned to discuss one of three vignettes. This paper analyzes the 12 focus groups that discussed a vignette about government support of faith-based prison ministry. Four groups were conducted in each of the TASC field sites: the Boston, Houston and Twin Cities (Minneapolis-St. Paul) metro areas. We used a multi-city design to evaluate possible regional differences in our findings. We also conducted individual interviews with two randomly-selected focus group members per group, including a pre-interview right before the focus group and a post-interview 4–6 weeks later.[1] For this analysis we pooled the data from the focus groups and interviews because sometimes in the interviews people elaborated on what they had said in the focus groups in ways that were interesting and relevant to our understanding the moral framework they were using.

We assembled focus groups made up of religious conservatives, religious liberals, non-religious people, and mixed religious identification, with social class variation within these religious categories. We recruited study participants through outreach to local religious congregations, contacting relevant community and online groups, and advertising. We recruited and selected participants with the goal of maximizing the religious and social class variation in our sample, because prior research led us to believe that religious identification and class might account for some of the variation in how people talk about social controversies. A total of 88 study participants took part in the 12 focus groups on the prison ministry vignette. See Table 1 for this subsample's distribution on selected demographic characteristics.

The prison ministry focus groups had an average of seven participants and typically ran for 60–90 minutes. Groups were facilitated by the authors and graduate research assistants. The prison ministry vignette concerned a proposed contract between a state department of corrections and a faith-based service provider. Study participants were asked to imagine they served on an advisory board tasked with deciding whether the contract should go forward. The proposed program had explicitly religious components and delivered a range of social services from a faith-based perspective. Prisoners could volunteer for the program, with program staff deciding which prisoners were appropriate. Program participants received various special benefits, such as greater privacy and more visits with family members. The explicit purpose of the program was to reduce recidivism. The vignette text appears in the Appendix. See Sullivan (2009) for an excellent analysis of the real-world case that was the basis for the vignette. Focus group facilitators led discussion using a set of questions and additional background information. All focus groups and interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The resulting data are ideally suited to answer our research questions. Focus groups generate dialogue that can reveal the underlying assumptions and interpretive frameworks employed by people grappling with a particular topic (Gamson 1992; Wilkinson 1998). Surveys are good for capturing reliable data when the concepts being measured are well-established and measures are well-validated. But surveys are less useful for getting at how people interpret complex situations with multiple factors (e.g., does a particular prison ministry program violate church-state separation), or how people may be conflicted or

Table 1. Sample characteristics.

Sex	N	Valid %
Female	44	50%
Male	44	50%
Race		
White	53	62%
Nonwhite	33	38%
Missing	2	
Education		
Some high school or less	3	3%
High school diploma	6	7%
Some college	24	28%
College degree	33	38%
Master's deg. or more	21	24%
Missing	1	
Class*		
Middle Class	62	74%
Working Class	22	26%
Missing	4	
Political Identification		
Democrat	46	53%
Republican	3	3%
Independent	20	23%
None	18	21%
Missing	1	
Religious Affiliation		
Religious conservative	19	22%
Religious liberal	22	25%
Other religious	26	30%
None/spiritual	19	22%
Missing	1	
Field Site (Metro Area)		
Boston	30	34%
Houston	29	33%
Twin Cities	29	33%

*Respondents with a college degree or higher or a household income of 50 USD,000 or higher were coded as middle class; all others were coded as working class.

ambivalent. We began the study knowing that the culture wars thesis had been critiqued as not characterizing well the complexity of the views of ordinary citizens, so qualitative methods were appropriate for an exploratory data collection to chart this uncharted territory.

Our general analytic strategy employs interpretive methods developed by cultural anthropologists and sociologists who use the talk of ordinary people to identify the broader cultural schemas and moral orientations that animate their perspectives on specific subjects (Pugh 2013). Our focus groups and interviews elicit what Quinn (2005) calls expository or explanatory discourse, the kind of talk people engage in when trying to make sense of a complex issue or solve a particular problem. Analysis proceeded in several stages. First, a sizable portion of the focus group transcripts was open-coded (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011) by the authors and graduate research assistants. These initial codes guided discussion and decision-making to develop focused codes for each vignette. Full transcripts were then coded with the focused codes, and a detailed descriptive memo was written for each vignette. For the current paper, we relied on some of the focused codes developed for the prison ministry transcripts as well as additional coding and analysis

tailored to the research questions. The first author re-read all the prison ministry focus groups and interviews and made detailed notes leading to more specific codes for the reasons study participants gave for supporting or opposing the prison ministry program, and their reasoning about the separation of church and state. Two graduate research assistants coded study participants for their position on the prison ministry program and their view on whether the program was a church-state violation. The research assistants also coded study participants for whether they had changed their position. The first author cross-tabulated participants' positions on prison ministry and on church-state violation with selected demographic characteristics to look for suggestive patterns. The first author also completed a detailed review of the focus group conversations for cases in which one or more participants changed their position, seeking to identify any aspects of the group dynamics that might have contributed to shifts in opinion.

Findings

A plurality of participants (43%) expressed opposition to the prison ministry program. Roughly one third (35%) expressed ambivalence, and roughly one in five (22%) expressed support. On the question of church-state violation, a bare majority (51%) expressed the view that the program did violate church-state separation, but about one third (32%) stated that it did not, and nearly one in five (18%) expressed uncertainty.[2] Cross-tabulation of participants' views on the program and church-state violation reveals a strong relationship (Table 2). Participants who thought the program violated church-state separation were more likely to oppose the program than those who saw no violation or who were uncertain about church-state violation. We know from the substance of the focus group discussions and interview responses that concerns about church-state violation did play a part in many participants taking a position of opposition or ambivalence toward the program.

These overall patterns of response must be interpreted with caution, given that the study sample was not randomly drawn and is therefore not representative of all Americans' views on these questions. With this caveat, we note that these patterns indicate that the vignette did not cause the focus groups to bifurcate into two clearly opposed camps. With almost all participants weighing in on whether the program deserved support, a sizable proportion held an ambivalent position. A smaller proportion expressed uncertainty about church-state violation, but 31 participants could not be coded on this question, and it seems likely that many of those who refrained from expressing an opinion on church-state violation did so because they did not hold a firm position. Thus, the overall patterns imply that ordinary Americans placed in

Table 2. Crosstab of views on prison ministry program and church-state violation.

		Position on Prison Ministry Program		
		Support	Ambivalent	Oppose
Position on Church-state Violation	Yes	2	5	22
	Unsure	1	7	2
	No	6	6	4

Table only includes participants who received a code on both prison ministry question and church-state violation question (N = 55).

a deliberative context with a hypothetical prompt concerning church-state separation will not sort themselves into two clearly opposed positions that align with a liberal-conservative polarity, as predicted by the culture wars thesis. The patterns also demonstrate that views on church-state separation matter for how non-experts evaluate a relevant policy question; most participants who saw a church-state violation expressed opposition to the program, whereas relatively few others opposed it.

Major Themes

We found that focus group participants draw upon competing moral frameworks in talking about church-state separation in general and the prison ministry program in particular. Study participants expressing opposition to the program or concern about church-state violation frequently offer reasons and observations consistent with a moral framework of justice, whereas participants who support the program or dismiss concerns about church-state violation talk in ways that reflect a moral framework of care.

Opposition to the Prison Ministry Program

Opposition was often rooted in a moral framework of justice, as participants articulated concerns about coercion, unfairness, and illegality. In the terminology of Moral Foundations Theory, this justice framework emerges from the moral foundations of fairness and liberty.

Participants who saw the prison ministry program as coercive usually mentioned the special treatment that prisoners would receive while participating in the program in explaining why it was in fact coercive despite being technically voluntary. Prisoners were not required to participate in the program, but many would be enticed by the special treatment and thus would enroll in a program they otherwise would not find appealing. In a Boston focus group, one participant explained the coercive nature of the program by referencing her own faith. Katie told the other focus group participants:

> I'm Jewish, for example, so when I read about Christian faith-based in-prison program I think, you know, I think if I were to somehow end up in prison this would be a very coercive situation for me because I would want to see my family but I don't want to be constantly exposed to something that goes very much against my sincerely held religious beliefs … but at the same time I also know that the United States is something like 93% Christian, so at the same time you want to balance what's good for the vast majority of people, but at the same time respecting the rights of, there are Jewish people, there are Muslim people and … you don't want to create these situations.

Katie invokes the language of rights to capture the impact of the proposed program on people from minority faiths. Other study participants specifically linked the idea of coercion to a perceived violation of the separation of church and state. In a different Boston focus group, Nancy, who has no religious affiliation, offered this initial reaction to the vignette:

> When I first started reading I thought, oh this is a great idea, and then I got to the point where you had to go to these Bible classes and revival meetings, and I thought, wow, it sounds like extortion a little bit now, it's not sounding so wonderful because it's forcing people into some sort of religious tradition that they may or may not have … It sounds like they force you in … and it sounds like you get rewarded for basically giving up your own beliefs,

> whatever they may be, and that doesn't sound like a good idea. That sounds like the church and state are getting kind of mushed.

While concerns about coercion focus on prisoners who participate in the program, concerns about unfair treatment focus on prisoners who do not. The special treatment afforded to prisoners in the program is seen as central to the fairness problem. Focus group participants noted that some prisoners would choose not to participate in the program because the version of Christianity on offer runs counter to their own faith or to their lack of belief. Logan, a non-denominational Christian, made the following observation in his Twin Cities focus group:

> If this program is getting favors, financial and access type favors that make it difficult for a prisoner who doesn't like the religious part of it to get similar access, then it's not fair … I think have a hodge-podge of programs; have a Buddhist program, have a Hindu program … .

Logan's solution to the problem of unequal treatment is to create parallel programs for other religious groups and for the non-religious; this idea was popular with many of the focus group participants who objected to the unfairness of the proposed program.

Many focus group participants who opposed the program because it seemed coercive or unfair also viewed it as a violation of the separation of church and state. Indeed, First Amendment concerns were among the most common reasons people gave for rejecting the program. Most focus group participants who saw the prison ministry program as a clear violation of the separation of church and state offered one or more reasons. Most often, these participants cited public funding for the program, the program being limited to a single religious viewpoint, or the extra benefits in the program being coercive.

Many people argued that if payment was involved, the arrangement crossed a line into violating church-state separation. In a Houston group, participants were asked for their initial thoughts on the vignette, and Naomi (who listed her religious affiliation as "other") offered this response: "I have an issue with it more because of separation of church and state issues more than anything else. I mean, it's fine if it does help the person, but I don't think it should be funded by the state." In a Twin Cities group, Nathan questioned whether public funding would be acceptable if multiple religious viewpoints were represented in the program:

> To me, I'm thinking that separation of state and religion, I think, has a lot to do with the funding stream, so if it were general tax dollars being used to promote this one specific program where I think that would be, I'm trying to think, I think it would still be a violation if it were to offer a wide spectrum of different religious viewpoints because it's still mixing religion, it's kind of coming from the state's impetus.

Nathan ultimately concludes that public funding of the program violates the Constitution even if a range of religious perspectives are included in the program; for him, the public funding is the problem in the final instance, rather than the fact that the program only delivers a single religious perspective.

Many participants pointed to the fact that the proposed program promoted a single religion as likely a violation of church-state separation. Unlike Nathan, many people citing this concern suggested the problem could be resolved if similar programs representing other faiths as well as a secular version were made available. However, because the

program described in the vignette presented a single religious viewpoint, many focus group participants argued it was exclusionary and unfair. In their view, the First Amendment protects against such unfairness by restricting the state from advancing a particular religious perspective. Woody, who is Jewish, explained to people in his Boston focus group:

> So I think I really, really hear what people are saying that it's the [inaudible] funding and it's going to be imperfect, you have no perfect system and maybe even though there are dangers and problems with this, that maybe the benefits outweigh the costs. At the same time it still seems very, very clearly just unconstitutional, just can't do it because it very, very clearly violates the separation of church and state in terms of favoring one religion over others, meaning favoring prisoners of a particular religion … . No matter how open-hearted and open-worded you try to be, unless you specifically design it as a universal program it will be against that law …

Woody specifically references the idea of designing a "universal" prison ministry program that combines the wisdom of many faith streams as a possible solution to the church-state problem. Some participants endorsed this solution, but others were skeptical that such a program could be created.

Another common issue for participants concerned about church-state separation was the provision of extra benefits to prisoners in the program. As noted earlier, these extra benefits were seen not only as unfair to prisoners excluded from the program, but also as coercive toward prisoners who joined the program to access the benefits. Both the unfairness and the coercion were sometimes overtly framed as First Amendment violations. In a Houston focus group, Chase, who identifies as "spiritual," articulated the concern about the unfairness of the denial of extra benefits to prisoners based on their religion:

> I have a problem with them being segregated, having more freedom, more privacy than others do. That's what I have a problem with, and that could I think potentially be interpreted by some as, well, you're getting across that line of separation of church and state because you're saying to somebody, "If you become a Christian we're going to give you this, but if you're a Buddhist or a Hindu or a Muslim then we're not going to give it to you."

In these comments, Chase explicitly links the unfairness of the extra benefits to the legal issue of church-state violation; the program is not merely unfair, but unfair in a way that is illegal. The concern about the extra benefits coercing prisoners to join the program also linked to church-state concerns. In a Boston focus group, Emeka, who is Catholic, gave this response when asked for his initial thoughts about the value of faith-based prison ministries:

> I think that generally yes, they're a good idea, but I think in this specific case … these people are clearly getting benefits from this faith-based program, it even says the facilities are better and they have more privacy. And I think … that's where the concern about separation of church and state [is] because it's basically implying that if you join this faith-based program you will get better facilities, which is implying that it is better, and I think that's not forcing inmates to join but basically telling them that if they don't, they're better off if they do, which in some ways inclines them to join.

Emeka acknowledges that the program is technically voluntary but points to the extra benefits as having an illegal coercive influence on prisoners' decisions about whether to join. Many participants who objected to the extra benefits explicitly stated that if those benefits were removed, the program might no longer violate church-state separation.

Taken together, participants' concerns about fairness, coercion, and the legality of the program point to a moral framework of justice animating their discourse. These participants are focused on the rights of prisoners to be treated fairly and not subjected to undue pressure. In the language of Moral Foundations Theory, this discourse reflects the foundations of fairness (equal treatment) and liberty (freedom from coercion). Other moral concerns may also be in play among opponents of the program, but when they are pushed to take a position, the justice framework prevails.

Support for the Prison Ministry Program

In contrast to the moral framework of justice expressed by opponents of the program, study participants who supported the prison ministry program or dismissed concerns about church-state violation expressed a moral framework of care. They placed highest priority on finding something that would "work," i.e. would transform prisoners in such a way that they would not end up back in prison. Their focus on effectiveness partly reflected the perceived social benefit of reducing recidivism, but many speakers specifically expressed concern for the prisoners themselves. The voluntary nature of the program, in their view, ensures that the program is caring rather than coercive.

Numerous focus group participants referenced the prison ministry's ability to help prisoners avoid a return to prison as a key consideration in their support for the program. Curtis, a Presbyterian in a Boston focus group, mentioned in his pre-interview that he was familiar with the group running the program and might even have donated money to the group in the past. Curtis stated, "From what I've heard, it works," and went on to observe: "I'm sure it doesn't work all the time, but just considering that prisons are awful places and anything, I wouldn't say anything, but lots of things are worth trying. And certainly this." Many participants who supported the program for its effectiveness framed their support as a pragmatic response to an urgent need, particularly in an era of prison overcrowding and pinched government budgets. Noelle, a Jewish woman in a Houston focus group, forcefully articulated the need for such interventions:

> I'm interested in anything that will work. It is a serious issue what we have today with people in prison walking out, becoming worse criminals and going right back. If there is something that works, that's great. Whether it's religious based or not religious based, I'm just interested in something that's going to be successful. So here we have something that's religious based, they're saying they provide substance abuse, anger management, I just would like to see in there life coaching, life skills because that's what people that are in prison need. They're going to need life skills, they didn't get that or they wouldn't be prison.

Participants like Noelle perceived prisoners as a disadvantaged population that would be unable to escape their circumstances without caring intervention by others. Although some participants who talked about program effectiveness wanted assurance that the benefits of the program outweighed its costs, others expressed the view that the program would be worth doing if it helped anyone, or that it was "worth a try."

The voluntary nature of the program – the fact that prisoners had the choice about whether to participate – was another important factor in participants' support for the program. Lena is a non-denominational Christian who participated in a Houston focus group. In her pre-interview, when asked if she thinks faith-based prison ministries are generally a good idea, she replied:

> Yeah, I think they're a good idea. You know, it's volunteer. If they want to come, I know the one I was involved with everybody had a choice … . You know, we would usually have a hundred, and then they'd cut it off and start turning them away. You know, they'd have the line-up. Yeah, I think it's effective, on a volunteer basis, you know, they should come if they want to come.

Based on her own past involvement with such a ministry, Lena saw such ministries as a worthwhile option that would draw participants if offered on a voluntary basis. Many participants made a point of emphasizing that their support for the program was contingent on prisoners having a choice about whether to participate.

Focus group participants who expressed some level of support for the prison ministry program had two forms of response to concerns about separation of church and state. They sometimes offered substantive arguments for why the program was not a violation, but just as often they argued that pragmatism should prevail over principle. The substantive arguments included the fact that the program was voluntary and the idea that separation is violated only if the government tries to impose a single religion on everyone. People endorsing a pragmatic approach argued that legalistic concerns were outweighed by the value of the program.

The voluntary nature of the prison ministry program was the most common substantive argument for why the program does not violate church-state separation. In one of the Twin Cities focus groups, a discussion of the issue led to the following exchange between three members of a Methodist congregation:

> Andrea: Okay. I'm going to say no, I don't think … I think we have developed this separation of state and church for so long that anything that, you know, if you say the Bible or God or anything, that means you can't have it. And I think that the state should represent everyone and if it's a voluntary group that shows promise and they're coming in and doing this, no, I don't think it violates it. I think people will think that, but I don't think that.
>
> Georgette: As long as it's voluntary. We're not forcing people into it. I think you could make an argument that it doesn't violate it.
>
> Lois: And that you would entertain other contracts. I mean it's a contract relationship with an alternative program.
>
> Georgette: You would have to be ready to fund another faith stream that came in with a similar program.
>
> Lois: You'd have to be open.

Andrea's initial comment that the program does not violate church-state separation, even though it may appear to, prompts Georgette and Lois to respond in agreement. Georgette specifically mentions the fact that the program is voluntary. Lois then adds that the state would need to be open to funding contracts with other religious groups as well, but does

not argue that these other contracts would need to be in place for church-state separation to be preserved.

The other substantive argument for the program not violating the separation of church and state was that the First Amendment is simply intended to prevent the state from imposing a single religion on everyone, which the prison ministry program does not do. This sentiment was expressed in the following statement by Maryn, a Catholic participant in a Houston group:

> I think it's also more not about religions getting involved in state matters, I think it's about the state not saying, "This is the religion of the United States of America." I think that's more what we should be looking at. It's not the state is telling us only Catholics can be openly religious, only Protestants can be open, you know, whatever. I think they're just saying we're never going to say this is the religion that is going to rule our country. I feel like that's more of how we should be looking at it, not that we can't fund different faith-based organizations.

Participants like Maryn articulated a narrow reading of the First Amendment, that it only bars the state from establishing an official state religion.

Some study participants sidestepped the problem of church-state separation by arguing for a pragmatic, problem-solving approach that placed more importance on helping prisoners than on maintaining church-state separation. Toward the end of a Boston focus group, Alison, who identifies as agnostic, stated: " … speaking as a religious minority, my personal opinion is that if the research supports it, I just feel like the good outweighs the bad. Sure it might be, it might be a violation of church and state, but as I said before, if it translates into lives saved, you know, I think it's worth it." In a different Boston group, Troy, who has no religious affiliation, also advocated pragmatism:

> I mean, you look at it like this, skip the Constitution and all that because the Constitution is being violated all the time with the government … . I feel like the more opportunities that are provided to help one that is incarcerated better themselves, the more the merrier, I would say, as opposed to using technicalities as restrictions to a person's development, whether spiritually or mentally …

Troy starts out making the case for pragmatism by noting that constitutional violations are routine, and then asserts that "technicalities" should not stand in the way of helping prisoners. Like Alison, and others who advocated pragmatism, Troy effectively acknowledges that the program might indeed violate church-state separation, but insists this violation must be weighed against the good the program can do helping prisoners.

Participants who voiced support for the prison ministry program applied a moral framework of care, in which the urgent need to help prisoners was paramount. Approaching the issue from this framework meant that supporters of the program had to dismiss or at least downplay the justice concerns raised by opponents. Concerns about coercion led supporters to emphasize the voluntary nature of the program. The issue of church-state separation was sometimes addressed substantively, but often supporters simply asserted that the need for care was so great that questions of legality should be set aside. The moral framework of care generated discourses that contrasted sharply with the discourses generated by the justice framework.

Demographic Patterns

To examine the focus group data for suggestive patterns, we inspected cross-tabulations of prison ministry position and church-state violation position by sex, race, class, education,

place of residence, religious affiliation, and political party identification. We did not perform statistical testing of the crosstabs, because our sample was not randomly drawn and some cells had very small Ns. Rather, we examined these distributions to check for differences that were large enough to suggest the demographic characteristic might be correlated with the prison ministry position or the church-state separation position.

Numerous minor differences were present in these data, but religious affiliation was the one demographic characteristic for which large differences appeared. Specifically, study participants in the "none/spiritual" category held positions that were notably different than participants in the other three categories (conservative religious affiliation, liberal religious affiliation, and other religious affiliation). None of the religiously unaffiliated participants supported the prison ministry program, 74% opposed it and 26% were ambivalent about the program. By contrast, 29% of religious conservatives, 20% of religious liberals, and 42% of other religious supported the program, and the proportion opposed was lower than for religiously unaffiliated participants across all three religiously affiliated groups. For position on church-state violation, a similar pattern emerged, with 71% of the religiously unaffiliated seeing a violation, compared to 50% of religious liberals, 44% of religious conservatives and 41% of other religious. Only 14% of the religiously unaffiliated saw no church-state violation, whereas 44% of religious conservatives, 31% of religious liberals and 41% of other religious saw no violation.

Our study was designed primarily to explore how people talked about church-state separation rather than to assess quantitative patterns in positions held, but the apparent salience of religious affiliation is striking. Study participants with any religious affiliation appear less likely to oppose the prison ministry program and less likely to perceive a church-state violation than religiously unaffiliated participants. Even so, only a minority of religiously affiliated participants expressed clear support for the prison ministry, and the religiously affiliated were fairly evenly divided on the question of church-state violation. Having a religious affiliation does not directly translate into support for the prison ministry program or lack of concern about church-state violation, but it appears to incline people in those directions when compared to the religiously unaffiliated.

Although it is more difficult to detect demographic differences in the substance of people's comments about the program and church-state separation than it is to review crosstabs for differences in position, we did review all the discussions of church-state violation in the groups to see if there were qualitative patterns in how people talked about the issue. Two qualitative demographic patterns emerged, one based on race/ethnicity and the other based on race/ethnicity and gender. First, when people talked about government funding for the prison ministry program as a reason it violated church-state separation, whites were much more likely than nonwhites to identify such funding as coming from taxpayer dollars. This took various specific forms, such as mentions of "tax money" or "my taxes," or speculating about what "taxpayers" would think about this use of the money. Second, it appeared that nonwhite men were particularly likely to advocate a pragmatic approach to the question of church-state violation, because the need for effective programs is so great. Several different nonwhite (mostly African-American) men expressed the view that the welfare of prisoners should take precedence over strict adherence to the principle of church-state separation.

These qualitative patterns of difference are open to interpretation; in our view, they represent the possibility of racial differences in the understanding of church-state separation, at least in the context of government funding of faith-based programming. Whites'

greater reliance on the framing of program funds as coming from taxpayer dollars suggests that whites might be especially likely to think about taxpaying citizens as stakeholders who have a right or entitlement to say how their taxes are spent by the government. Such thinking might reflect a greater sense that the government should operate on behalf of their interests or that the government must be responsive to their needs and preferences. Given the long history of racial oppression tolerated or even executed by the state in the U.S., it is perhaps unsurprising that nonwhite study participants would not share whites' sense that the government should or will be responsive to their interests and concerns.

The finding that nonwhite men were especially likely to advocate for a pragmatic approach that prioritizes the needs of prisoners suggests that an intersectional lens might be useful for understanding their perspective, with race and gender working in concert to produce a particular angle of vision (cf. Noy and O'Brien 2018). Based on these men's own comments in the focus groups, we infer that they feel more personally connected to the plight of prisoners, which is perhaps understandable in an era of racially-biased mass incarceration. (Indeed, one of the nonwhite male focus group participants shared with his group that he had a personal history of being incarcerated, unjustly in his view.) Many other study participants besides nonwhite men referenced the unfairness and brokenness of the U.S. criminal justice system, but nonwhite men appeared more likely to view such problems with the system as reasonable grounds for disregarding or downplaying church-state separation concerns in order to offer effective help to those trapped in the system.

Taken together, these suggestive demographic patterns – based on religious affiliation, race, and the intersection of race and gender – highlight the possibility that aspects of the prison ministry vignette have higher cultural salience or resonance (McDonnell, Bail, and Tavory 2017) for some study participants based on their social location. This salience or resonance is triggered or perhaps even amplified in the course of interaction within the focus group context.

Ambivalence and Shifts in Position

Although the foregoing analysis has addressed the substance and relative frequency of study participants' pro and con positions on the prison ministry program and the question of church-state violation, it should be noted that many participants expressed considerable ambivalence about the program and about whether it violated church-state separation. (Recall that about a third of the participants who voiced a position on the program expressed ambivalence; nearly one in five who articulated a position on church-state violation voiced uncertainty, and a substantial minority refrained from making any statement on this point.) For example, Sally was an Evangelical Christian in one of the Boston focus groups. In response to a question about whether the program violates church-state separation, Sally stated:

> I agree that it could be a problem because there is an incentive to do it, I was thinking that earlier, but it is strictly, I mean it will be voluntary, so if you choose to do it that's on you; I don't think that it really is a violation of anybody's Constitutional law, what I know of the Constitution. But I think if it's voluntary it's totally fine and I think the end question should be as long as it is multi-faith, we can do multi-faith and someone chooses to go into what they want, I would really support it. But I think the end question is whether or not it does work because although it might be faith-based, if someone goes into it voluntary knowing this and they come out better, that's what you're really aiming to do is rehabilitate people …

Sally is clearly grappling with several issues as she struggles to take a firm position on whether the proposed program is acceptable. Factors that are in play for her include the voluntary nature of the program, options for people of alternative faiths, and evidence that the program works. Sally ends up in a position of ambivalence, but even people who did eventually come down on one side or the other on these matters sometimes verbalized considerable uncertainty or mixed feelings on the way to their final position.

In one sense, such expressions of ambivalence are perhaps unsurprising, because the issue of government support for faith-based prison ministries is not necessarily one that most people would have given a lot of thought to prior to participating in the focus group. We intentionally chose issues on which people were unlikely to have strong, entrenched opinions going into the groups. But one might expect people to arrive at firm opinions after listening to discussion and debate of the issues for an hour or more. Study participants see the issue as complex, multi-faceted, and challenging; they often express that they feel they would need more information to reach a final decision pro or con. In our view, the fact that so many remained ambivalent is strong evidence that church-state separation, at least with regard to government funding of faith-based social services, is not a flashpoint in a culture war at the level of ordinary citizens.

Our data also indicate that the focus group discussions typically did not cause people to change their minds about whether the prison ministry program deserves support. We identified clear shifts in position in nine cases, or roughly 10% of the sample, spread across six different focus groups. All of these groups featured robust discussion of the proposed program and the question of church-state separation. In some cases, we are able to identify why people changed their mind, based on statements made toward the end of the focus group or in a post-interview. In these cases, study participants attributed their opinion change to the focus group experience. In particular, participants mentioned arguments or considerations they had not thought about prior to the group, and/or they referenced the religious diversity of the group members sensitizing them to other perspectives. For example, Lena (the non-denominational Christian in a Houston focus group) initially called the prison ministry program a "good idea." In her post-interview, however, Lena shared:

> I changed my mind because I think I never thought about government intervention. Because as we talked about that, I was involved in a prison ministry but that's what it was, it was ministry funded by the church. So, it did make me think a bit and think about government position and also of course being at that table, you were at that table with an agnostic and an atheist, getting their viewpoint kind of helped open my mind a little bit and open my eyes …

Dave, who identifies with multiple religions, began his Boston focus group with a favorable opinion of the proposed program, but toward the end of his group he specifically identified a fellow group member whose comments had caused him to change his mind, convincing him that the program did violate church-state separation. The experiences of participants like Lena and Dave illustrate the value of conceiving of people's opinions on social issues as emergent through processes of group interaction, rather than as stable properties of atomized individuals (Merton, Fiske, and Kendall 1956; Perrin and Olick 2011; see also Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003 on the role of group dynamics in opinion formation). Indeed, even study participants who did not change their minds often cited the experience of the focus group as

giving them a richer, more nuanced understanding of the issue and a greater appreciation for the views of those on the opposite side of the issue.

Although the proportion with a clear change of position is relatively low, it is interesting to note that the direction of change was the same in all cases, with study participants shifting from support of the prison ministry program to ambivalence or outright opposition. We can only speculate about why opinion shifts occurred in only one direction. The pattern does suggest that those who initially had a favorable impression of the program had not considered some of the complicating factors, such as how the program might be coercive or exclusionary, or why it might violate separation of church and state. These factors may have been fleshed out in the focus group discussions in ways that made them more compelling. Or, these opinion shifts may have reflected abandonment of an unpopular position in one's focus group, effectively a result of peer pressure. In fact, in five of the six focus groups with any opinion change, only one or no participants supported the program by the end of the discussion. Ambivalence or opposition may have been a more socially comfortable position to hold in these groups.

Discussion

The contributions of this paper are twofold. First, we make an empirical contribution by fleshing out the perspective of ordinary citizens on a significant culture-wars issue, the separation of church and state. Our findings suggest that the views of ordinary Americans are not highly polarized on this issue, or at least on the specific issue of government support of faith-based social services. Although we do find opposing perspectives, which are rooted in the application of differing moral frameworks, we also find considerable ambivalence among many respondents in the middle. These findings suggest that the culture wars narrative oversimplifies the perspectives of ordinary citizens, but the findings also indicate that individual moral considerations do influence political position-taking. Second, building on these empirical findings, our analysis holds relevance for policy-makers insofar as our findings suggest that people are not deeply polarized on this issue at the grassroots level. Many participants were ambivalent, and many people who opposed the proposed program evinced a strong interest in making adjustments to the program that would allow delivery of needed services while protecting church-state separation. These findings suggest this is not an intractable issue reflecting deep political divisions in the U.S., but instead one where meaningful compromise may well be achievable.

Our findings provide insight into how ordinary Americans think and talk about the separation of church and state. The focus group and interview discourse centers on a few key issues: government endorsement of a single religious viewpoint, coercion to participate in a particular religion, and unfairness of treating people differently based on their faith. In addition to debating these substantive points, focus group participants also made varying assessments of the importance of church-state separation, with some viewing it as critically important and others seeing it as a legalistic ideal that can be sacrificed to accomplish other important goals. We do not claim that the discourse generated by the prison ministry vignette illustrates *all* of the ways ordinary citizens might talk about church-state separation, but it provides a starting place for further investigation into lay understandings of this sometimes-controversial issue.

Our findings do not reflect the existence of a hotly-contested culture war among ordinary Americans over the separation of church and state. Clearly there is a diversity of views about the proposed prison ministry program and whether it violates church-state separation, and some participants did express themselves forcefully on one side or the other. But a sizable proportion of the sample expressed ambivalence and uncertainty about the proposed program and the question of church-state violation. These study participants appear to occupy what Hunter (1991) called a "vast middle ground," a terrain of ambivalence or disengagement between the ideologically-charged extremes of the liberal-conservative (or progressive-orthodox) polarity. Even some of the participants who did take a position against the program or who saw a church-state violation might best be described as residing in the middle ground, as they often expressed an interest in options to modify the proposed program in ways that would make it more fair, less coercive, or legal. This willingness or eagerness to find a compromise position is not consistent with the idea of principled culture warriors who hold firm to their position at any cost. If elites are hotly debating the proper relationship between church and state, their discourses appear to have had limited influence on how ordinary Americans think and talk about the issue of government support for faith-based services.

Although they do not point to an all-out culture war, our data do suggest that differing positions on the prison ministry program and on church-state separation are associated with the application of different moral frameworks to the vignette. People who spoke in favor of the prison ministry program most often explained their position with reference to the effectiveness of the program and the need to reduce recidivism. This rationale reflects a moral framework of care insofar as speakers are justifying their support by reference to the fact that prisoners need help and the proposed program is a way to get them effective help. Sometimes speakers citing program effectiveness also had in mind the broader benefit to society, but many speakers did specifically link the effectiveness argument to the prisoners themselves. The moral framework of care is especially clear when speakers state some version of the argument that the program is worthwhile as long as it helps *any* prisoners. It is also evident in some participants' stated willingness to violate the legal principle of church-state separation in order to help those in need.

Opponents of the program express justice-related concerns about coercion, fairness and legality. They object that the program coerces prisoners into joining, and that the program is unfair insofar as it excludes prisoners who cannot or will not join. Opponents of the program also frequently assert their judgment that the program violates the separation of church and state as a justification for their position. Taken together, all of these reasons for opposing the program – its coercive nature, its unfairness, and its illegality – reflect a moral framework of justice.

The competing moral frameworks of justice and care reflect the fact that different participants view the same proposed program quite differently. Participants focused on justice concerns see coercion where participants focused on care see a voluntary opportunity. Participants focused on justice see unfair exclusion where participants focused on care judge that it is better to help at least some needy people than to withhold help from all in the name of fairness. And participants focused on justice see church-state separation and legality as decisive principles where participants focused on care sometimes endorse a pragmatism that elevates the goal of effective care above legalistic considerations. In our view, the moral frameworks of justice and care are elements in the cultural repertoires of

the study participants, principles that can be invoked to justify one's position on the issue under consideration. These elements of participants' cultural repertoires may prove particularly useful for constructing *post hoc* rationales for positions that were arrived at through the automatic cognition of moral intuition.

In the terminology of Moral Foundations Theory, the conflicting responses to the proposed program and to the church-state issue primarily reflect the competing moral foundations of care/harm on the one hand and fairness/cheating and liberty/oppression on the other. MFT asserts that liberals and conservatives often clash on political questions when liberals emphasize the morality of care, fairness and/or liberty and conservatives invoke additional moral foundations such as loyalty, authority, and/or sanctity. The current case does not fit such a pattern, because it features conflict over moral foundations (care, fairness and liberty) that are embraced by both liberals and conservatives (although liberals are sometimes described as placing greater emphasis on these foundations). The fact that the conflict over church-state separation plays out on moral terrain shared by liberals and conservatives suggests that the liberal-conservative polarity has limited value for making sense of this example.[3]

The limitations of the liberal-conservative polarity become even clearer when we consider the demographic patterns suggested by our data. The one demographic pattern that emerges most clearly concerns religious affiliation. Study participants with no religious affiliation appear more likely to oppose the prison ministry program and to perceive a violation of the separation of church and state, compared to participants with any religious affiliation (liberal, conservative, or other). The culture wars thesis predicts that religious liberals will join with secular people on the strict separationist side of the church-state issue, whereas religious conservatives take the opposing position of accommodationism (Hunter 1991). But in our data the study participants with any religious affiliation look more like each other than like the non-religious study participants, suggesting that religious affiliation more than liberalism/conservatism may be an influential factor in how people perceive and discuss the church-state separation issue. This finding is consistent with some work on moral foundations indicating that the patterns of moral foundations among people on the religious left may bear closer resemblance to the patterns of religious conservatives than to those of non-religious liberals (Haidt, Graham, and Joseph 2009). It seems plausible that religious affiliation would be particularly salient for ways of thinking and talking about church-state separation, given that religion is central to that issue. Still, we should emphasize that these are differences in degree rather than in kind, because many religious participants joined the non-religious in opposing the program and/or perceiving a church-state violation. The most we can say is that study participants with a religious affiliation have a weaker tendency to oppose the program or perceive church-state violation compared to study participants with no religious affiliation.

We also noted substantive differences in the way people discuss church-state separation linked to race and gender. We found that white participants were more likely to frame the issue of government funding of the prison program as being about taxpayer dollars, and we suggested that this language of taxes and taxpayers might indicate a greater sense of ownership, or expectation of responsiveness, vis-à-vis the government. We also found that the intersection of race and gender might be important for understanding pragmatic approaches to church-state separation. Specifically, it appeared that nonwhite men were especially likely to articulate the view that church-state concerns should be set aside in

order to meet the urgent need to help prisoners. Nonwhite men may be more highly attuned to the cost and injustice of the U.S. system of mass incarceration, given that nonwhite men are disproportionately trapped in that system. These race and gender patterns alert us to the ways that study participants' social location may impact how they perceive and frame the issue of church-state separation.

Although our study uses different methods of data collection and focuses on a single political issue, its findings are broadly consistent with quantitative analyses of the influence of morality on politics that find the liberal-conservative polarity insufficient to capture the full diversity of perspectives in the American electorate. Our findings are also generally consistent with the polling data showing that many Americans value the separation of church and state but many are also open to the idea of government support of faith-based social services, especially if those services can be delivered in a non-coercive manner that does not prioritize a specific religious message. Study participants' discourse, taken as a whole, reflects a nuanced consideration of the issues at stake in the question of church-state separation. Although some individuals did take a hard line on the issue – expressing what Hunter (1991) calls the strict separationist position – most who opposed the proposed program were interested in figuring out another way to accomplish the program's purpose of helping prisoners and reducing recidivism.

The focus group discussions did not change many minds. There were only nine cases in which people clearly changed their view on the proposed program. This finding is consistent with a key claim of Moral Foundations Theory, that people decide their position on issues based on moral intuitions and then use rational deliberation to come up with *post hoc* explanations for that position. The social intuitionist model of MFT holds that people rarely change their minds, but when they do it is most likely to happen as the result of interactions with other people (Haidt 2012:79). Our focus groups would appear to be the kind of setting that would allow deliberative thought to prevail over initial impulses. Under such conditions, some people do appear to rethink the position they reach based on moral intuitions, but even in a setting geared to this kind of interactive reflection, outright changes of position are perhaps not common.

This study has provided an in-depth examination of how laypersons grapple with a hypothetical case involving the question of separation of church and state. We found that the opposing sides invoked competing moral frameworks in the discussion about whether to move ahead with government support for a faith-based prison ministry program. But the clash of moral perspectives did not conform closely to the orthodox-progressive conflict described by the culture wars thesis. Many study participants were ambivalent about the program and about whether it violated the separation of church and state, and the one clear demographic pattern that did emerge showed religious liberals tending to side with other religious people rather than with secular people on this particular issue. Moral Foundations Theory provides a useful language for describing the underlying moral intuitions that appear to motivate people's positions on this issue, although this case does not provide a clear example of the differing moral foundations of liberals and conservatives. Consistent with other recent work on the role of morality in American politics, we find that moral beliefs or intuitions infuse political positions in ways that are not fully captured by the liberal-conservative polarity.

We hope to see more qualitative studies that analyze the relationship of moral intuitions, moral frameworks and political views. The generalizability of our findings is limited by the nature of our sample and the fact that we are using a specific vignette to examine one specific dimension of political variation. We acknowledge that a different vignette

might have produced different insights concerning Americans' views on church-state separation. Our vignette stimulated discourse about government funding, coercion vs. voluntariness, and the privileging of a single religious viewpoint. Future qualitative research on church-state separation should examine whether other scenarios (e.g. religious content displayed on government property) evoke parallel discourses about these concerns or prompt different directions in talk about church and state. We also acknowledge the desirability of delineating the relationship between morality and politics with respect to other controversial issues. Qualitative investigations hold the promise of taking us beyond correlations between moral/religious characteristics and political views, providing greater insight in to *how* religion and morality matter for the ways people think and talk about social controversies.

The findings of our exploratory qualitative analysis highlight the possibilities for political compromise on church-state separation, or at least on the question of faith-based social services. Scratching beneath the surface of pro and con positions, we identify considerable ambivalence in how ordinary citizens think and talk about this issue, even among those who eventually take a clear position. Furthermore, many participants who opposed the proposed program due to concerns about church-state separation explicitly stated that they would support a revised version of the program that eliminated such concerns. We contend that this kind of nuance, with its policy-relevant implications, most clearly emerges from detailed qualitative exploration of the perspectives of ordinary citizens.

Notes

1. The purpose of the individual interviews was to gauge the impact of group deliberations on individual viewpoints; individuals were chosen for interviews at random. Specifically, we hoped that individual interviews would allow us to understand what features of group deliberation caused some participants to move beyond automatic cognition to deliberative cognition, including the possibility of changing their minds on the subject; we also asked for feedback on the group dynamics in the post-interviews.
2. Percentages are based on participants who received a code for prison ministry position (n = 81) and for church-state violation position (n = 57); missing cases were not included in the calculation of these percentages.
3. It is interesting to note that the care vs. justice opposition does not line up with the liberal/progressive vs. conservative/orthodox opposition in a way that is consistent with some other social issues. Hunter (1991) identifies those who take a hard line on church-state separation (the strict separationists) as progressives, whereas those who favor more government accommodation of religion are the orthodox. So, in this instance the moral framework of justice appears liberal and the moral framework of care conservative. But on other prominent issues such as the death penalty and provision of social welfare, one typically associates the progressives with care and the conservatives with justice concerns. We contend that this is further evidence that such moral frameworks are selectively deployed in a context-specific manner, and a liberal-conservative polarity is insufficient for categorizing the relationship between individual morality and political positions.

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Appendix. Prison Ministry Vignette

Your state's Department of Corrections is considering a contract with a faith-based prison ministry program operated by the Prison Fellowship Ministries. The contract would put in place a voluntary, 18-month residential rehabilitation program for eligible prisoners. The stated goal of the program is to transform prisoners' lives and reduce recidivism (return to criminal activity after release from prison). Program staff would select inmates for participation based on their potential for rehabilitation. The program would be housed in a prison wing that offers greater privacy and better facilities than the rest of the prison. The program would include a package of services required for prison release, more freedom of movement, more contact with family, and support at parole board hearings. The program would be run by staff and volunteers and would be highly structured, requiring participants to attend Bible study classes, Friday night revival meetings, and Sunday church services. Other program elements (e.g. substance abuse, anger management) would be delivered from an explicitly religious perspective.

Some citizens and prisoner groups object to the contract because they believe it violates the separation of church and state, or because it allows the state to deliver extra services to prisoners willing to participate in the program, or because they worry that not all religious beliefs will be accepted or supported by the program. Others argue in favor of the contract, pointing out that the program is completely voluntary, there is an urgent need to rehabilitate prisoners, and studies have shown that similar programs have worked in other states. You have been selected to serve on a citizen advisory panel to provide public input to the Department of Corrections on whether to go forward with the program contract. How do you think the panel should advise the state?