

Article

Religiosity and Misanthropy across the Racial and Ethnic Divide

Rubia R. Valente *  and Ryan A. Smith 

Austin W. Marx School of Public and International Affairs, Baruch College, CUNY, 1 Bernard Baruch Way,
Box C-305, New York, NY 10010, USA

* Correspondence: rubia.valente@baruch.cuny.edu

Abstract: The systematic study of misanthropy, the lack of trust in humanity, has proliferated over the last 30 years. One prominent line of research details racial and ethnic disparities in levels of misanthropy, but pays little attention to the role of religiosity, while another focuses attention on religiosity and its impact on levels of misanthropy, with only scant attention to the role of race and ethnicity. Little attempt has been made to synthesize these two strands of literature to address an important unanswered question: Does the association between religiosity and misanthropy vary by racial and ethnic group? To answer this question, we pooled data from the General Social Survey (GSS, 2000–2018). Among other things, we find stark racial differences between Blacks and Whites in terms of the effect of religiosity on misanthropy. Blacks and Latinos who attend religious services weekly (social religiosity) have significantly higher levels of misanthropy than others, while Whites who attend weekly services are less likely to be misanthropic. An important takeaway is that service attendance (a type of social capital) is associated with feelings of misanthropy for all groups (albeit in opposite directions for Blacks and Latinos versus Whites), rather than personal acts of prayer (individual religiosity). When it comes to misanthropy, we conclude that religion works differently for minorities compared with Whites. We discuss the implications of our findings for future research.

Keywords: misanthropy; trust; religion; race; ethnicity



Citation: Valente, Rubia R., and Ryan A. Smith. 2023. Religiosity and Misanthropy across the Racial and Ethnic Divide. *Religions* 14: 393. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14030393>

Academic Editor: Aje Carlbom

Received: 31 December 2022

Revised: 6 March 2023

Accepted: 10 March 2023

Published: 15 March 2023



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Misanthropy develops when one puts complete trust in somebody, thinking the person to be absolutely true, sound, and reliable, only to later discover that the person is deceitful, untrustworthy and fake. And when this happens to someone often . . . they end up . . . hating everyone.

—Attributed to Socrates in Plato's *Phaedo*

1. Introduction

The systematic study of misanthropy, the lack of trust in humanity, has proliferated over the last three decades. Scholars generally agree that feelings of misanthropy have increased in recent years in the United States (Heimer 2001; Paxton 1999; Putnam 2000) and in other countries (Berggren and Bjørnskov 2011; Melgar et al. 2013; Smith 1997). Two prominent tracks of misanthropy research populate the literature.¹ One track features a debate on whether Blacks and Hispanics² are more misanthropic, that is, less trusting, than Whites. A convincing body of research suggests that Blacks are more misanthropic than Whites (Brehm and Rahn 1997; Coverdill et al. 2011; Hughes and Thomas 1998; Smith 1997, 2010; Stets and Fares 2019; Taylor et al. 2007; Wilkes 2011), but at least one study disagrees (Simpson et al. 2007). Far fewer examinations include Latinos, but those that do include them report that Latinos are less trusting than Whites (Stets and Fares 2019; Taylor et al. 2007). While important, these findings scarcely consider the role that religiosity might play in racial and ethnic differences in misanthropy.

A second track examines the effects of religiosity on trust. These studies have produced decidedly mixed results owing to the use of different datasets and the divergent

manner in which religiosity and trust are conceptualized and subsequently measured. Some studies reveal a negative relationship between religiosity and trust (Berggren and Bjørnskov 2011; Dilmaghani 2017; Helliwell and Putnam 2004; Schoenfeld 1978), others show a positive relationship between the two (Bègue 2002; Smidt 1999; Trauttmüller 2009; Valente and Okulicz-Kozaryn 2021; Wilkes 2011), and still other studies reveal no statistical relationship at all between religiosity and trust (Alesina and La Ferrara 2002; Bjørnskov 2007; Welch et al. 2007). More nuanced studies report a positive relationship between social religiosity (church attendance) and trust (Smidt 1999; Trauttmüller 2009; Valente and Okulicz-Kozaryn 2021), while individual religiosity (praying alone) appears to decrease trust in others (Helliwell and Putnam 2004).

As important as this research is, an exploration that seeks to address the extent to which the effects of religiosity on misanthropy (lack of trust) vary by race and ethnicity is long overdue. The chief purpose of this article is to provide such an analysis. We use data from the General Social Surveys (2000–2018), a nationally representative database replete with the most extensive measures of misanthropy, race, ethnicity, and religiosity in the United States, to address a previously unanswered question: Are there ethnoracial differences in the effect of social religiosity (frequency of church attendance) and individual religiosity (frequency of prayer) on misanthropy (lack of trust in humanity)? We find that the effect of religiosity on misanthropy is very prescribed in that Whites who attend church every week (social religiosity) are less misanthropic (more trusting) than others. In fact, the more frequently Whites attend church, the less misanthropic they become. The opposite is the case for Blacks and Latinos; those who attend church every week still have higher levels of misanthropy than others, and increases in church frequency do not significantly reduce misanthropy for these two groups. An important takeaway is that engaging in private prayer (individual religiosity), no matter the frequency, has very little effect on people's evaluation of human nature. Thus, social religiosity, in the form of service attendance (a type of social capital), is more important in shaping feelings of misanthropy (albeit in opposite directions for racial and ethnic groups) than individual acts of prayer.

We begin with a brief review of the race/ethnicity and misanthropy literature, followed by a discussion of the misanthropy and religiosity literature. Drawing on prior research and theory, we then develop testable hypotheses about race and ethnic variation in the effects of religiosity on misanthropy. A systematic test of our hypotheses is followed by a discussion of how our findings contribute to prior literature, the limitations of the study, and several suggestions for future research.

2. Background and Literature Review

2.1. Race, Ethnicity, and Misanthropy

While the last three decades have witnessed a flurry of empirical studies seeking to understand the relationship between ethnic diversity and social trust, widespread consensus regarding the nature of the relationship is still elusive. Two major questions remain unsettled: Does ethnic diversity erode social trust? And, are Blacks and Latinos less trusting than Whites?

2.2. Does Ethnic Diversity Erode Social Trust?

In one of the most comprehensive examinations to date of the relationship between ethnic diversity and trust, Dinesen et al. (2020, p. 441) ask, "Does ethnic diversity erode social trust?" They conclude, after a thorough "narrative review and meta-analysis of 1001 estimates across 87 studies", that it does. In particular, the authors find that social trust tends to be lower in more ethnically diverse social contexts. The authors review several theories that purport to account for the negative relationship between ethnicity and social trust. Chief among them is their own "exposure theory", which asserts that "the mere exposure to people of different ethnic backgrounds erodes social trust" (Dinesen et al. 2020, p. 444). They also point to classic theories of group threat and realistic group conflict to explain the negative relationship between ethnicity and social trust. Both theories feature group

competition for material and symbolic resources (Blumer 1958; Blalock 1967) as sources of majority/minority group conflict. More controversial is Putnam's (2007) "constrict theory", which Dinesen et al. qualify as "the most daring and wide-ranging" (p. 444) of the bunch. Putnam asserts that regardless of the targeted ethnic group, ethnic diversity erodes social trust because it leads to social isolation. Beyond a comprehensive review of the dominant literature, Dinesen et al.'s (2020) major contribution is their empirical test of Putnam's theory. The authors compare the effects of diversity on multiple types of trust (e.g., trust in neighbors, in-group trust, generalized trust, out-group trust), and find a negative relationship for all four types; however, the strength of the relationship varies across trust types. For example, the relationship is strongest when trust is examined at the level of neighborhoods, weakens to intermediate levels when examining in-group trust and generalized social trust, and is weakest when observing out-group trust (p. 461). Despite the strong evidence their study reveals about the negative relationship between ethnic diversity and trust—a finding that, on the face of it, appears consistent with Putnam's theory—Dinesen et al. caution against the "apocalyptic claims" often extrapolated from Putnam's work "regarding the severe threat of ethnic diversity for social trust in contemporary societies" (p. 461).³

Wilkes's (2011) analysis of General Social Survey data (1972–2008) found a decline in trust among Whites over the 36-year period examined, but the trend for Blacks was more ambiguous. The reason for the decline in trust among Whites, Wilkes notes, is that older, more trusting generations are being replaced by younger, more cynical generations. Arneil (2010) argues that the decline in trust is not related to increases in demographic diversity per se, but rather to the "politics of diversity" in the form of White reaction to civil rights gains, which led to the neutering of social policies that were designed to facilitate equal opportunity policies in the areas of education and employment (e.g., affirmative action).

Changes in the national political landscape can also affect social trust. The 2008 election of Barack Obama as the first Black president and his reelection in 2012 disturbed a hornet's nest of White resentment in the United States. Some would argue that the manifestation of these patterns corresponded with the 2016 election of Donald Trump, who was widely seen as the antidote to Barack Obama (Inwood 2019). Donald Trump will be remembered for running on an explicitly anti-immigrant platform fueled by a vocal religious right and nationalist agenda that was decidedly antiminority and explicitly pro-White. According to *Newsweek's* analysis of FBI data (Villarreal 2020), hate crimes increased by 20% during Trump's presidency. In the 6 January 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol following Joe Biden's electoral victory, we see what can happen when large swaths of people lose trust in American institutions and, by extension, their fellow human beings.

2.3. Are Blacks and Latinos Less Trusting (More Misanthropic) Than Whites?

If there is relative consensus at all in the literature regarding the relationship between race/ethnicity and trust, it has to be the finding that Blacks are more misanthropic (less trusting) than Whites. This finding dominates some of the earlier investigations into the matter (Alesina and La Ferrara 2000; Brehm and Rahn 1997; Hughes and Thomas 1998; Patterson 1999; Putnam 2000; Smith 1997; Uslaner 2002), but also more recent treatments (Coverdill et al. 2011; Evangelist 2022; Smith 2010; Stets and Fares 2019; Taylor et al. 2007; Wilkes 2011).⁴ To be sure, research on the differences in misanthropy between Latinos and Whites is quite scarce. What little we know supports a Latino/White gap in misanthropy, but the effect may very well be a function of group differences in social class. In a study based on a single year (2000) of data from the National Election Study, Kiecolt et al. (2006) found that Latino/White differences in generalized trust disappear once controls for education are taken into account.

Other studies based on multiple measures of trust (generalized trust, trust in neighbors, and trust in police) support the conclusion that both Blacks and Latinos have lower levels of trust than Whites. For example, in a study by Evangelist (2022) based on data from Chicago,

the Latino/White gap in generalized trust (e.g., trust of most people) narrowed from 33% (without controls) to 8.2% once controls for key indicators were taken into account. By contrast, the Black/White gap in generalized trust reduced from 40% to 26% with controls (p. 1120). Further, the Latino/White gap in trust in neighbors reduced to zero after controls, while the Latino/White gap in trust in police narrowed from 9% without controls to 6% with controls. By contrast, Black/White gaps in particularized trust (neighbors) and institutional trust (police) remained in the double digits, despite controls for numerous confounders. In sum, the net Black/White gap in trust remains wide across different measures of trust, but the Latino/White gap narrows or disappears once social class and other key measures are statistically controlled (Kiecolt et al. 2006).

As important as this research is, it tends to be limited due to a focus on earlier time periods, or because the data does not include sufficient samples of Latinos, or because the research is based on a single year of data. One of our contributions centers on the fact that we use recent data that stretches across an 18-year time period (2000–2018), with a sizable enough sample of Latinos to sustain meaningful statistical comparisons with Blacks and Whites.

2.4. Explanations for Why Blacks and Latinos Are Less Trusting (More Misanthropic) Than Whites

Theories that seek to explain why ethnoracial minorities may be more misanthropic than Whites abound. Smith's (2010) comprehensive review of the matter features discrimination, neighborhood location, and ethnoracial socialization as potential causes. The proposition that discrimination, both historical and contemporary forms, causes Blacks and Latinos to be more misanthropic than Whites has resonated recently (Douds and Wu 2018; Evangelist 2022; Nunnally 2012; Wilkes and Wu 2019). The discrimination explanation argues that Blacks have experienced discrimination stretching back to over 400 years of slavery and another 100 years of Jim Crow segregation, as well as contemporary forms of discriminatory treatment, as documented in studies of labor markets, housing, education, and the legal system, to name just a few social domains (Charles 2003; Kirschenman and Neckerman 1991; Moss and Tilly 2001; Pager and Shepherd 2008; Pager et al. 2009; Western 2006). In one of the few empirical tests of the discrimination hypothesis, Evangelist (2022) found that discrimination "contributed only modestly to Black/White and Hispanic/White differences in trust" (p. 1110). Interestingly, Evangelist also reported that the perception of unfair treatment among Whites was most damaging to their levels of generalized trust when compared to perceptions of unfair treatment among Blacks and Latinos.

Another theory that may explain Black/White and Latino/White differences in misanthropy include ethnoracial disparities in neighborhood location. This argument contends that minorities who are concentrated in densely populated areas of poverty and crime are likely to be more misanthropic than their counterparts in other residential locations (Smith 2010). Buttressing the importance of neighborhood context as an explanation for racial differences in misanthropy, Ross et al. (2001) showed how Black/White disparities in trust evaporate once indicators of neighborhood quality are controlled.

Ethnoracial socialization may also account for comparatively higher levels of misanthropy among ethnoracial minorities. This argument suggests that minority parents who convey messages to their children about how to conduct themselves in public, especially in predominantly White institutional settings and when encountering order maintenance agents of the state, such as police officers assigned to protect and maintain White institutional dominance, may engender heightened distrust in their offspring (Brunson and Weitzer 2011; Evangelist 2022; Hughes 2003; Nunnally 2012; Smith 2010).

Thus, when considering both the empirical research and theoretical propositions discussed above, it is reasonable to expect Blacks to exhibit higher levels of misanthropy than Whites, and Hispanics to exhibit higher levels of misanthropy than Whites.

2.5. Religion and Misanthropy

What is the association between religion and misanthropy? The answer to this question is complex mainly because it depends on multiple factors, including how religiosity is measured (the distinction between social and individual religiosity), and whether religiosity is defined by religious denomination (e.g., Catholic, Protestant) or religious affiliation (e.g., Christian, Muslim, Jewish). The nature of the association also depends on how trust or lack of trust is conceptualized and measured (e.g., generalized trust, particularized trust, misanthropy, etc.). Given these multiple contingencies, it comes as no surprise to learn that the extant literature has produced mixed results both across and within studies. While such complexity makes it difficult to organize the literature, there is some logic to grouping studies based on whether the association between religion and misanthropy (or lack of trust) is positive, negative, or statistically unrelated (see [Berggren and Bjørnskov 2011](#)).

2.5.1. Positive Association

On the one hand, there are theoretical and empirical reasons to expect that religion may have a positive effect on trust. As a general principle, most major religions encourage adherents to treat others as they themselves would like to be treated. [Berggren and Bjørnskov \(2011, pp. 461–62\)](#) observe that the “do unto others as you would have them do unto you” dictum is present in one form or another in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. [Smith \(1997\)](#) theorized that given its social nature, church attendance should reduce misanthropy. Whether this or other principles that inform how adherents ought to treat their fellow human beings actually translate into trusting others is an unsettled question.

However, there are some empirical findings that are consistent with the idea that religion has a positive effect on trust. [Dilmaghani \(2017\)](#) found that a high level of religious commitment positively correlates with trust among Protestants in Canada. [Brañas-Garza et al. \(2009\)](#) discovered the same correlation among Catholics in Latin America, while other research reports that Protestantism has a positive effect in cross-sectional studies ([Uslaner 2002](#)) and studies based on individual-level data ([Trauttmüller 2009](#)). Other studies note that affiliation with more liberal Christian denominations is associated with more trust ([Daniels and Von Der Ruhr 2010](#)), as does belonging to a mainline denomination ([Berggren and Bjørnskov 2009; Orbell et al. 1992; Smidt 1999; Trauttmüller 2009; Welch et al. 2004, 2007; Veenstra 2002](#)). When it comes to the distinction between social and individual religiosity, there is substantial evidence that social religiosity in the form of service attendance and church membership increases trust ([Bègue 2002; Smidt 1999; Trauttmüller 2009; Veenstra 2002; Welch et al. 2004](#)). Finally, the positive association between religion and some constructs of trust also extends to Hinduism and Buddhism ([Bjørnskov 2007](#)).

2.5.2. Negative Association

On the other hand, there are theoretical and empirical reasons to expect religion to have a negative effect on trust. Scholars have employed social psychological theories to explain the relationship. Chief among them are theories that distinguish in-group favoritism from out-group derogation ([Byrne 1971; McPherson et al. 2001; Tajfel and Turner 1982; Tajfel et al. 1971](#)). Simply put, religious organizations and the people who adhere to their tenets are members of the in-group, while nonmembers comprise the out-group. Thus, it is conceivable that in-group members would have more trust in people who subscribe to their religious beliefs than out-group members who do not ([Sosis 2005](#)).

Another factor that could account for a negative relationship between religion and trust is the content of the religious messaging that adherents are exposed to on a weekly basis. In this context, [Smith \(1997\)](#) theorized that “fundamentalist beliefs, which emphasize the sinful nature of humans and a stern and authoritarian God” (p. 183) should increase misanthropy. Similarly, religious sermons and programs that have a social justice orientation, such as that born out of the American Civil Rights Movement, could increase misanthropy toward institutions, systems, or people deemed antagonistic to the cause of freedom, justice, and equality.⁵

Finally, beyond the messaging found in sermons and programs, basic religious teachings emanating from religious texts could also increase misanthropy. To explore this idea, we conducted a mixed-methods content analysis of the online Bible website Biblegateway.com. Using the New King James Version of the Bible, we inserted the keyword “trust” in the search field. Two questions guided our inquiry: (1) How often does the word “trust” (or some version of the word) appear in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, and more to the point, (2) What is the literary context that surrounds each appearance of the word “trust” in the Bible? For the latter question, our goal was to search for major themes that represent the context in which trust appears in the Bible.⁶ Our search revealed that the term “trust” appears in the New King James Version of the Bible 186 times. Specifically, “trust” appears in the Old Testament 159 times—much more frequently than in the New Testament, where it appears 27 times. We unearthed several major themes that are consistent with the theory that for the most part, adherents are instructed to put their trust in God and less so in humankind, material things, or other people.

For example, the majority of the 186 instances of the word “trust” in the New King James Version of the Bible refer to trusting in God or Christ/Jesus (55%). Noteworthy examples of this major theme, include: “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him” (Job 13:15) and “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding (Proverbs 3:5). Other themes were far less frequent and mainly framed in the context of the folly of trusting in things (17%), such as idols or riches (e.g., “They shall be turned back, they shall be greatly ashamed, who trust in carved images, who say to the molded images, ‘You are our gods’” [Isaiah 42:17] and “Here is the man *who* did not make God his strength, but trusted in the abundance of his riches, *and* strengthened himself in his wickedness” [Psalm 52:7]). A final theme that registered in the double digits (15%) pertained to the perils of trusting in other people: “Thus says the LORD: Cursed *is* the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the LORD” (Jeremiah 17:5) or “Do not trust in a friend; do not put your confidence in a companion” (Micah 7:5). The upshot of this exercise is straightforward; when it comes to trust, the primary text of the Christian Bible largely errs on the side of imploring adherents to mainly trust in God and not people and things. Thus, if anything, Biblical teaching is not inconsistent with misanthropy.⁷

Beyond this exercise, the broader empirical literature lends further credence to the notion that religion influences trust negatively. In a cross-national study of 109 countries, Berggren and Bjørnskov (2011) discovered a robust negative relationship between religiosity and trust. Similarly, Dilmaghani (2017) found that a high level of religious commitment negatively correlated with trust in a sample of Catholics in Canada, and Berggren and Jordahl (2006) reported that religiosity and religious fractionalization lower trust. Belonging to a hierarchical religious institution likewise appears to have a negative impact on trust (Bjørnskov 2007; La Porta et al. 1996; Zak and Knack 2001). Moreover, differences in denominational affiliation also matter as membership in more conservative Christian denominations is associated with lower trust (Daniels and Von Der Ruhr 2010; Smidt 1999). In fact, Hempel et al. (2012) used a comprehensive approach to model theological conservatism (e.g., personal convictions towards the Bible, beliefs in the existence of hell, the need for a born-again experience to be saved) as opposed to using a single-item measurement or denominational affiliation. They found robust support that conservative affiliation and theology bear negative associations with generalized trust. Moreover, contrary to Smith’s (1997) assertion, Schoenfeld (1978) also found that adherents who had a high level of church attendance (social religiosity) were less likely to trust others (see also Hoffman 2013), as were adherents who belonged to more fundamentalist churches. Similarly, Helliwell and Putnam (2004) showed that individual religiosity, as defined by one’s belief in a higher being, decreases trust. Finally, a few studies found either no statistically significant effect of religious affiliation on trust (Alesina and La Ferrara 2002; Bjørnskov 2007; Welch et al. 2007), or a faint curvilinear relationship net of controls (Smidt 1999).⁸

2.6. Race, Ethnicity, Religiosity, and Misanthropy

Religiosity is seldom treated as a focal predictor in studies seeking to account for ethnoracial differences in misanthropy. Instead, when considered at all, religiosity is offered as a control variable (Stets and Fares 2019; Wilkes 2011), with little or no attempt to explore how multiple dimensions of religiosity (e.g., social versus individual religiosity) might shed additional light on the association between race/ethnicity and misanthropy. Wilkes (2011), controlling for “religious attendance (days per year)” in models predicting generalized trust, found small but positive main effects for both Whites and Blacks, but when predicting people’s trust in others and whether they perceive others as helpful and fair, the coefficients for both groups were zero. Stets and Fares (2019) reported that Blacks had higher mean levels (4.53) of religious attendance than Whites (3.14) and Hispanics (4.14), but religious attendance did not register as a statistically significant main effect in models predicting trust. Stets and Fares’s structural equation models, which control for possible group differences in several factors, provided the strongest evidence that relative to Whites, Blacks and Hispanics “report less trust” (p. 9). However, neither Wilkes (2011) nor Stets and Fares (2019) treat religiosity as a focal predictor of generalized trust or, for that matter, its constituent items: trust, helpful, and fair. Thus, in an effort to fill these gaps, we expect: the greater the level of religiosity among Blacks, the higher the level of misanthropy they will exhibit, *and* the greater the level of religiosity among Hispanics, the higher the level of misanthropy they will exhibit.

In contrast, Whites continue to dominate Blacks and Hispanics along major indicators of social status related to feelings of trust, including but not limited to educational attainment, occupational status, income, wealth acquisition, political power, and health outcomes. Thus, although Christian Blacks, Whites, and Hispanics share the same Biblical text and God, we theorize that the relatively higher social, political, and economic status of Whites likely mitigates their feelings of misanthropy. Moreover, sermonic message content and social context may also matter. For example, it is reasonable to assume that some of the content and emphases of sermons in predominantly White churches likely differs from that of Black and Latino churches. In predominantly Black or Latino churches, both implicit and explicit messages of social justice may drive feelings of misanthropy. Such themes are likely to be absent in predominantly White churches. Thus, due to Whites’ relatively higher social, economic, and political status, coupled with the absence of social justice themes tied to their religious experiences, it is reasonable to expect that: the greater the level of religiosity among Whites, the lower the level of misanthropy they will exhibit.

Finally, while prior research suggests that the effect of religiosity on misanthropy should vary by race and ethnicity, we are unaware of any attempts to test this proposition empirically. Thus, our final set of hypotheses are framed around the expectation that: the effects of religiosity on misanthropy will vary between Blacks and Whites, net of controls, *and* the effects of religiosity on misanthropy will vary between Latinos and Whites, net of controls.

To summarize, we make several contributions to the literature. First, we marry the race and misanthropy literature with that of the religiosity and misanthropy literature by examining racial and ethnic variation in the association between religion and misanthropy. Second, while prior research shows that social and individual religiosity are not only positively correlated, but also produce opposite effects on trust and misanthropy (Helliwell and Putnam 2004; Smith 1997; Valente and Okulicz-Kozaryn 2021), whether these relationships hold across racial and ethnic groups is an empirical question that has yet to be answered. Third, to our knowledge, prior research that examines racial and ethnic differences in misanthropy pay either scant attention to the role of religiosity or no attention at all. We feature two measures of religiosity as focal predictors of misanthropy: frequency of service attendance and frequency of prayer. Finally, most of what we know about racial and ethnic differences in misanthropy feature Black/White comparisons and exclude Latinos, a major oversight given that Latinos now constitute the largest minority group in the United States

and their experiences may or may not differ from other groups. Thus, we include Latinos in our analyses in an attempt to fill this gap in the literature.

The empirical research and theoretical propositions discussed above lead us to the following formal hypotheses. We expect:

H_{1a}. Blacks will exhibit higher levels of misanthropy than Whites.

H_{1b}. Hispanics will exhibit higher levels of misanthropy than Whites.

H_{2a}. The greater the level of religiosity among Blacks, the higher the level of misanthropy they will exhibit.

H_{2b}. The greater the level of religiosity among Hispanics, the higher the level of misanthropy they will exhibit.

H_{2c}. The greater the level of religiosity among Whites, the lower the level of misanthropy they will exhibit.

H_{3a}. The effects of religiosity on misanthropy will vary between Blacks and Whites, net of controls.

H_{3b}. The effects of religiosity on misanthropy will vary between Latinos and Whites, net of controls.

3. Data and Methods

To test our hypotheses, we use data from the U.S. General Social Survey (GSS) with a focus on the years 2000–2018. The GSS is a biennial, cross-sectional, nationally representative survey. The unit of analysis is at the individual level and data are collected in face-to-face, in-person interviews (Davis et al. 2007). The full dataset contains 30,730 observations pooled over 2000–2018, but the sample size varies depending on the variables used and missing data. All variables were recoded in such a way that a higher value means more.

3.1. Dependent Variable

Misanthropy and Its Constituent Parts

Misanthropy is our main outcome of interest. Following Smith (1997), we measured misanthropy by creating an index of three measures drawn from the GSS: *trust*, *fair*, and *helpful*. The question to measure trust asked, “Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?”⁹ Possible responses were 1 = “cannot trust”, 2 = “depends”, and 3 = “can trust”. The question to measure fair asked, “Do you think most people would try to take advantage of you if they got a chance, or would they try to be fair?” Possible responses were 1 = “take advantage”, 2 = “depends”, and 3 = “fair”. The question to measure helpful asked, “Would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful, or that they are mostly just looking out for themselves?” Possible responses were 1 = “look out for self”, 2 = “depends”, and 3 = “helpful”. We used factor analysis with varimax rotation to produce an index, and we reversed it so that it measures misanthropy. Cronbach’s alpha is 0.67.

3.2. Focal Predictors

3.2.1. Race/Ethnicity

We use the variable *race* from the GSS, which is drawn from the question, “What race do you consider yourself?”, together with the variable for *Hispanic or Latino* to create dummy variables indicating respondents who claimed to be White or Black, but not Hispanic.¹⁰ Most studies that investigate racial and ethnic differences in misanthropy are restricted to samples of Blacks and Whites only, excluding analyses of Latinos. This is problematic given that Latinos now constitute the largest minority group in the United States. We fill this gap in the literature by including Latinos alongside our analysis of Black and White disparities in the effects of religiosity on levels of misanthropy.

In 2000, a new variable was introduced in the GSS based on responses to the question, “Are you Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino/Latina?” Prior to 2000, data limitations forced researchers to rely on the GSS variable *ethnic* to create a sample of Hispanics by com-

binning respondents who self-designated their origin status as Mexico, Spain, Puerto Rico, and/or “other” Spanish—a composite containing persons from Central and South America (Greeley 1994; Hunt 1999). However, the GSS variable *ethnic* is more representative of the countries where respondents’ ancestors originated from and included only respondents who identified with a single ethnic origin. Thus, we rely on the more recent and accurate measurement of Latino in the GSS by using the variable *Hispanic* instead of *ethnic*.¹¹ Using *Hispanic*, we recoded the variable *race* in the GSS and created a *Latino* variable which includes only respondents who claimed to be Hispanic (N = 3549), irrespective of race (e.g., Whites, Blacks, and others).¹² All descriptive statistics are reported in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics, GSS 2000–2018.

	Obs	Total Mean	Black	White	Latino	Min.	Max.
Dependent variables							
Misanthropy index	14,142	2.065 (0.749)	2.385 (0.646)	1.950 (0.752)	2.345 (0.657)	1	3.041
Trust	14,765	1.712 (0.929)	1.363 (0.741)	1.839 (0.958)	1.395 (0.766)	1	3
Helpful	14,266	1.623 (0.639)	1.746 (0.623)	1.572 (0.642)	1.768 (0.600)	1	3
Fair	14,221	2.109 (0.951)	1.737 (0.919)	2.23 (0.932)	1.876 (0.942)	1	3
Focal predictors							
Frequency of service attendance	25,442	3.517 (2.78)	4.37 (2.67)	3.324 (2.79)	3.61 (2.68)	0	8
Frequency of prayer	19,845	3.236 (1.729)	4.0 (1.313)	3.061 (1.782)	3.313 (1.609)	0	5
Control variables							
Real income in \$1986, millions	22,743	0.034 (0.034)	0.022 (0.023)	0.038 (0.036)	0.025 (0.027)	0.0002	0.1551
Marital status	25,615	0.461 (0.498)	0.273 (0.446)	0.502 (0.500)	0.446 (0.497)	0	1
Age	25,546	47.77 (17.44)	44.49 (16.23)	49.73 (17.65)	40.19 (14.79)	18	89
Age ²	25,546	2586.47 (1794.8)	2242.96 (1596.56)	2785.04 (1850.37)	1833.66 (1381.42)	324	7921
Education	25,577	13.464 (3.025)	12.95 (2.75)	13.85 (2.827)	11.80 (3.74)	0	20
Gender (male)	25,633	0.445 (0.497)	0.385 (0.487)	0.457 (0.498)	0.450 (0.498)	0	1
U.S. nativity	24,136	0.899 (0.302)	0.919 (0.273)	0.955 (0.207)	0.535 (0.499)	0	1
Urbanicity	25,633	0.890 (0.312)	0.922 (0.268)	0.870 (0.336)	0.969 (0.173)	0	1
Conservative	21,948	0.342 (0.474)	0.242 (0.429)	0.371 (0.483)	0.289 (0.453)	0	1
Liberal	21,948	0.273 (0.445)	0.316 (0.465)	0.261 (0.439)	0.292 (0.455)	0	1
Unemployed	25,617	0.040 (0.195)	0.064 (0.244)	0.032 (0.177)	0.053 (0.224)	0	1
Occupation prestige	24,470	43.63 (13.16)	40.46 (12.39)	44.94 (13.20)	39.45 (12.22)	16	80
Region (South)	25,633	0.381 (0.486)	0.589 (0.492)	0.341 (0.474)	0.360 (0.480)	0	1
Year of survey	25,633	2008.502 (5.76)	2008.78 (5.87)	2008.23 (5.73)	2009.74 (5.57)	2000	2018

Table 1. Cont.

	Obs	Total Mean	Black	White	Latino	Min.	Max.
Religious Tradition							
Mainline Protestant	25,633	0.146 (0.353)	0.078 (0.268)	0.182 (0.385)	0.021 (0.143)	0	1
Black Protestant	25,633	0.197 (0.398)	0.506 (0.500)	0.159 (0.366)	0.041 (0.199)	0	1
Evangelical Protestant	25,633	0.251 (0.433)	0.469 (0.499)	0.229 (0.420)	0.109 (0.311)	0	1
Catholic	25,493	0.237 (0.425)	0.061 (0.240)	0.216 (0.411)	0.584 (0.493)	0	1
Theological Conservatism							
Fundamentalist	24,641	2.031 (0.774)	1.639 (0.7972)	2.11 (0.779)	2.04 (0.553)	1	3
Bible	20,553	2.125 (0.722)	2.440 (0.683)	2.044 (0.710)	2.21 (0.725)	1	3

3.2.2. Focal Predictors: Two Dimensions of Religiosity

Religiosity is a latent variable that cannot be directly observed. Thus, scholars have measured religiosity in numerous ways. While some researchers focus on denominational membership (Addai et al. 2013; Alesina and La Ferrara 2000), others have measured the importance of religion in a respondent's daily life (Berggren and Bjørnskov 2011). For our purposes, we use two indicators drawn from the GSS: frequency of service attendance (social religiosity) and frequency of prayer (individual religiosity) (Schwadel 2011; Valente and Okulicz-Kozaryn 2021; Wilkes 2011).¹³ Social religiosity (belonging) is measured in this study with the variable *attend* via the question, "How often do you attend religious services?" Responses ranged from 0 = "never" to 8 = "more than once a week".¹⁴ Individual religiosity (believing) is measured with the variable *pray* via the question, "About how often do you pray?" Responses ranged from 0 = "never" to 5 = "several times a day".

3.2.3. Controls

Drawing on prior research (Welch et al. 2007), we control for indicators of social class such as education, income, and occupational prestige, based on the premise that social class lowers misanthropy (Melgar et al. 2013) and may account for Latino/White differences in misanthropy (Kiecolt et al. 2006). We also control for age and age-squared because research shows that age has a positive effect on multiple measures of religiosity, including service attendance (Schwadel 2010) and prayer (Schwadel 2011). Marital status and gender are controlled because married people exhibit less misanthropy than their nonmarried counterparts, while men tend to be more misanthropic than women (Melgar et al. 2013). U.S. nativity and political affiliation are also considered mainly because of their potential impact on misanthropy. To ensure that the effects we uncover are not due to specific denominations or religious traditions, we include controls for religious tradition,¹⁵ as well as feelings towards the Bible¹⁶ (Steensland et al. 2000; Hempel et al. 2012), and we conduct robustness checks for individual denominations. We also control for employment status, given its role in contributing to feelings of misanthropy (Melgar et al. 2013). Since data were pooled across an 18-year period, we include dummy variables for year. Because of the regional heterogeneity of the United States, the relationship between religiosity and misanthropy is likely to vary by ethnoracial identity depending on where respondents reside. Thus, we control for both urban status and region.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive Statistics: Mean Racial and Ethnic Differences in Key Variables

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for all variables. Blacks (2.385) and Latinos (2.345) have higher mean levels of misanthropy than their White (1.950) counterparts.

When the question turns to whether “most people can be trusted”, Whites (1.839) register higher levels of trust than both Blacks (1.363) and Latinos (1.395). Moreover, while Whites (2.230) are more likely than Blacks (1.737) and Latinos (1.876) to report that most people would try to be fair “if they got the chance”, our data show that Blacks (1.746) and Latinos (1.768) are more likely than Whites (1.572) to endorse the belief that “most of the time, people try to be helpful”. The latter finding contrasts with that of Wilkes (2011), who reported, based on earlier years of GSS data (1972–2008), that White respondents (52%) were more likely than Black respondents (32%) to agree that most people try to be helpful (see p. 1600).

Regarding religiosity, our focal predictors for later multivariate models reveal that Blacks (4.370) are more likely to attend religious services (social religiosity) than Latinos (3.61) and Whites (3.324). In addition, Blacks (4.0) are more likely than their Latino (3.313) and White (3.061) counterparts to report that they pray (individual religiosity). Table 1 shows racial and ethnic differences in the distribution of the control variables used in our multivariate models below.

4.2. Ethnoracial Trends in Misanthropy

We begin by looking at the change over time in misanthropy levels by ethnoracial group. As illustrated in Figure 1, in the United States, Whites have the lowest levels of misanthropy while Black and Latino respondents have the highest levels. The figure shows that around 2010, the misanthropy levels of Blacks and Latinos converged, and since then, negligible differences between the two groups remain. Interestingly, for Blacks and Latinos, the levels of misanthropy appear to vary in accordance with an economic downturn and three presidential election cycles. For example, Blacks and Latinos registered the highest levels of misanthropy in 2008, a year marked by an economic recession and the election of Barack Obama to the presidency. Immediately following Obama’s election, there was a precipitous decline in misanthropy among Blacks and Latinos, suggesting that both groups became more trusting of humanity during Obama’s first term (2008–2012).

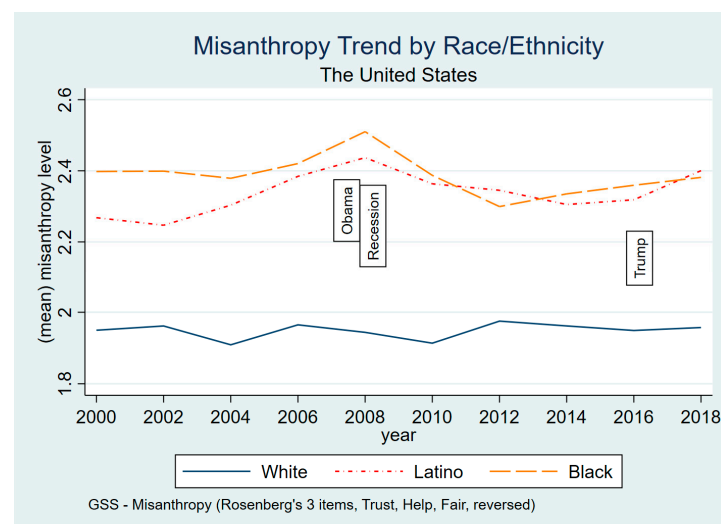


Figure 1. Misanthropy by ethnoracial identity in the United States, 2000–2018.

However, misanthropy levels of Blacks and Latinos steadily crept up once again following Obama’s re-election in 2012, and the pattern continued to trend upward leading up to and following the 2016 election of Donald Trump. By contrast, there is little evidence in Figure 1 to suggest that misanthropy levels among Whites are associated with economic forces or presidential elections.

Figure 2 presents misanthropy levels by frequency of service attendance for each racial and ethnic group. Misanthropy levels are noticeably lower for Whites, regardless of their

frequency of service attendance, and much higher for Blacks and Latinos. Importantly, there is a sharp decline in misanthropy levels among Whites as their frequency of service attendance increases.

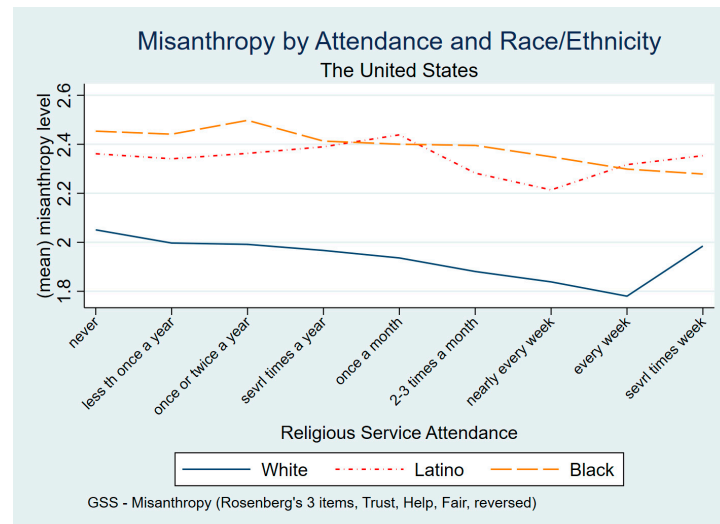


Figure 2. Misanthropy by frequency of religious service attendance and race/ethnicity.

In particular, Whites who attend religious services every week have negligible levels of misanthropy, particularly in comparison to Whites who attend services several times per week. Figure 2 also shows that relative to Whites, Blacks and Latinos continue to exhibit higher levels of misanthropy. While there is a slight decline in misanthropy levels among Blacks as service attendance increases, the opposite pattern is evident for Latinos in that their misanthropy levels rise as service attendance increases from nearly every week to every week and several times a week.

Our second measure of religiosity, prayer, also reveals striking racial and ethnic gaps in levels of misanthropy. However, as shown in Figure 3, in comparison to service attendance, the relatively flat curves for each racial and ethnic group suggest that prayer is much less related to misanthropy.

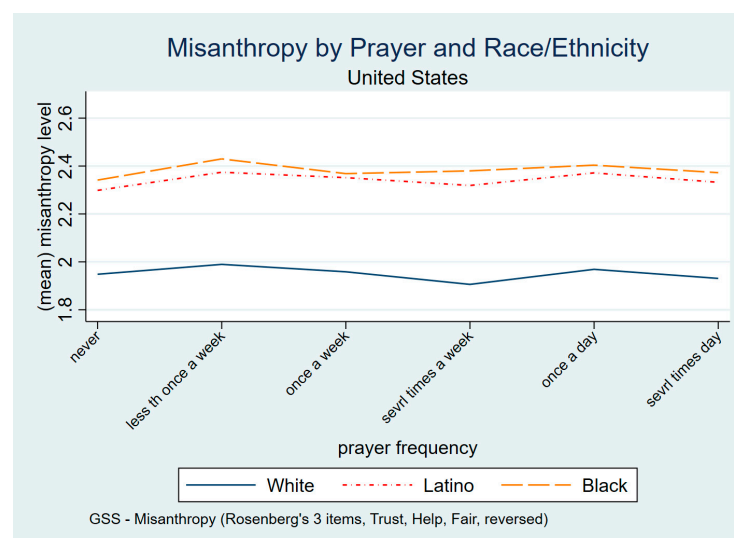


Figure 3. Misanthropy by frequency of prayer and race/ethnicity.

4.3. Multivariate Analysis: Net of Controls

The comparatively higher levels of misanthropy for Blacks and Latinos remain firmly intact even when we control for a host of factors that prior research suggests might account for ethnoracial differences in misanthropy. In Table 2, we begin with Model b1 as a baseline that includes our dummy variables for race and ethnicity, with Whites as the reference group and service attendance as our first focal predictor of religiosity. Model b1 confirms that both Blacks and Latinos have higher levels of misanthropy than Whites, net of social religiosity, as defined by frequency of service attendance.

Table 2. OLS Regression: Determinants of Misanthropy, Net of Controls. Beta (fully standardized) coefficients reported.

VARIABLES	b1	b2	b3
Ref: White			
Black	0.219 ***	0.214 ***	0.094 ***
Latino	0.178 ***	0.180 ***	0.067 ***
Attend	−0.095 ***	−0.116 ***	−0.082 ***
Pray		0.051 ***	0.011
Real income			−0.082 ***
Catholic			−0.008
Mainline Protestant			−0.044 ***
Black Protestant			0.054 ***
Evangelical Protestant			−0.025
Fundamentalist			−0.033
Bible			0.052 ***
Conservative			−0.005
Liberal			−0.044 ***
Married			−0.043 ***
Unemployed			0.010
Occ Prestige			−0.057 ***
Age			−0.185 ***
Age ²			−0.007
Education			−0.169 ***
Male			0.013
Born US			−0.006
Urban			−0.010
South			0.064 ***
Constant	***	***	***
R-Squared	0.0712	0.0733	0.1948
N	14,004	13,049	10,443

Note: Control measures are the same as those reported in Table 1. Robust aster in parentheses *** $p < 0.001$.

The main effect for service attendance (beta = −0.095, $p < 0.001$) is negative and statistically significant, suggesting that church attendance is associated with lower levels of misanthropy. A similar pattern is observed in Model b2, where we add controls for individual religiosity (frequency of prayer), except that the coefficient is notably positive (beta = 0.051, $p < 0.001$) and statistically significant, indicating that an increase in the frequency of prayer is associated with higher levels of misanthropy. Thus, as reported in prior research, social religiosity and individual religiosity have opposite effects on misanthropy (Valente and Okulicz-Kozaryn 2021). Model b3 in Table 2 presents our formal tests of Hypothesis 1a (Blacks exhibit higher levels of misanthropy than Whites) and Hypothesis 2a (Latinos exhibit higher levels of misanthropy than Whites), given that the model takes into account the full array of statistical controls. Both hypotheses are confirmed. Relative to Whites, Blacks (beta = 0.094, $p < 0.001$) and Latinos (beta = 0.067, $p < 0.001$) have higher levels of misanthropy, net of all control measures. Although attending church (social religiosity) has a negative and statistically significant relationship to misanthropy, praying (individual religiosity) is not significant. Table 2 also reveals that misanthropy is

negatively associated with income, religious denomination, political views, marital status, occupational prestige, and education. However, misanthropy is positively associated with living in the U.S. South.

4.3.1. Trust, Helpful, and Fair

The individual factors that comprise our measure of misanthropy (trust, helpful, and fair), may provide more nuanced insight into racial and ethnic disparities (Wilkes 2011). Thus, for comparison purposes (without offering formal hypotheses), in Table 3, we replicate the analysis found in Table 2 (maintaining controls) by testing the expectations that relative to their White counterparts, Blacks and Latinos will exhibit lower levels of trust, and both groups will perceive people as less fair and less helpful, net of all statistical controls.

Table 3. OLS Regression: Effects of Service Attendance on Trust, Fair, and Helpful. (Whites as reference category). Beta (fully standardized) coefficients reported.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
VARIABLES	Trust	Fair	Helpful
Attend (ref: never)			
Less than once a year	0.023 *	0.012	−0.008
About once or twice a year	0.018	0.029 *	0.014
Several times a year	0.021	0.030 *	0.027 *
About once a month	0.024	0.046 ***	0.009
2–3 times a month	0.038 **	0.048 ***	0.037 **
Nearly every week	0.020	0.047 ***	0.029 *
Every week	0.101 ***	0.105 ***	0.061 ***
Several times a week	0.035 **	0.027	0.023
Race (ref: White)			
Black	−0.067 **	−0.058 *	−0.023
Latino	−0.011	−0.036	−0.047 *
Less than once a year*Black	0.001	−0.001	0.013
Less than once a year*Latino	−0.029 **	0.001	0.023 *
About once or twice a year*Black	−0.012	−0.012	−0.008
About once or twice a year*Latino	−0.020	−0.001	0.005
Several times a year*Black	0.002	−0.020	−0.002
Several times a year*Latino	−0.022 *	−0.007	−0.017
About once a month*Black	−0.002	−0.018	0.007
About once a month*Latino	−0.025 *	−0.016	0.004
2–3 times a month*Black	−0.018	−0.006	−0.015
2–3 times a month*Latino	−0.024 *	0.002	0.005
Nearly every week*Black	−0.003	−0.010	−0.012
Nearly every week*Latino	−0.005	0.006	0.012
Every week*Black	−0.037 **	−0.031	−0.028
Every week*Latino	−0.042 ***	−0.022	−0.014
Several times a week*Black	−0.004	0.004	0.006
Several times a week*Latino	−0.018	0.016	0.006
Observations	10,876	10,478	10,489
R-squared	0.164	0.134	0.085
Constant	***	***	***
Year dummies and controls	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note: Control measures are the same as those reported in Table 1. Robust aster in parentheses *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

While the results of this exercise confirm what we might expect, such evidence is limited to the measure of trust (Model 1), which is the opposite of misanthropy, and mainly for Hypothesis 2b. Model 1 in Table 3, which features, among other things, Latino/White comparisons related to service attendance, show significance for Latinos who attend religious service “less than once a year” (−0.029, $p < 0.01$), “several times a year” (−0.022, $p < 0.05$), “about once a month” (−0.025, $p < 0.05$), “2–3 times a month” (−0.024, $p < 0.05$), and “every week” (−0.042, $p < 0.001$). Model 3 shows that Latinos who attend service less

than once a year are more likely than their White counterparts to support the notion that “most of the time people try to be helpful” (0.023, $p < 0.05$).

Furthermore, in Model 1, there is some support for the notion that Blacks who attend church every week are less likely than Whites who attend church every week to endorse the idea that people can be trusted (-0.037 , $p < 0.01$).

4.3.2. Race, Ethnicity, Religiosity, and Misanthropy

Next, we examine whether the effects of two measures of religiosity on misanthropy vary by racial and ethnic group. Extrapolating from the prior literature, we hypothesized that the greater the levels of religiosity among Blacks (Hypothesis 2a) and Latinos (Hypothesis 2b), the higher the levels of misanthropy they will exhibit. Conversely, we expected greater levels of religiosity among Whites (Hypothesis 2c) to be associated with lower levels of misanthropy.¹⁷

To test these hypotheses, we generated additional models and tested for interaction effects between religiosity and ethnoracial identity. All hypotheses are confirmed, but only with our indicator of social religiosity (service attendance). These results, displayed in Table 4, reveal striking racial and ethnic differences and similarities not observed in prior research. With regard to similarities, most of the effect occurs among racial and ethnic groups who attend church every week, but concerning differences, the effect of the frequency of service attendance on misanthropy varies importantly between Blacks and Latinos relative to their White counterparts.

Table 4. OLS Regression: Effects of Service Attendance on Misanthropy by Race and Ethnicity. Beta (fully standardized) coefficients reported.

VARIABLES	White	Black	Latino
Attend (ref: never)			
Less than once a year	−0.015	−0.011	−0.013
About once or twice a year	0.005	−0.024 *	−0.021
Several times a year	0.006	−0.025 *	−0.027 *
About once a month	−0.007	−0.026 *	−0.029 **
2–3 times a month	−0.025	−0.049 ***	−0.038 ***
Nearly every week	−0.032	−0.043 ***	−0.033 **
Every week	−0.016	−0.100 ***	−0.093 ***
Several times a week	−0.039 *	−0.035 **	−0.035 **
White = 1	−0.067 **		
Less than once a year*White	0.003		
About once or twice a year*White	−0.028		
Several times a year*White	−0.033		
About once a month*White	−0.023		
2–3 times a month*White	−0.023		
Nearly every week*White	−0.008		
Every week*White	−0.086 ***		
Several times a week*White	0.002		
Black = 1		0.057 **	
Less than once a year*Black		−0.005	
About once or twice a year*Black		0.014	
Several times a year*Black		0.007	
About once a month*Black		0.002	
2–3 times a month*Black		0.014	
Nearly every week*Black		0.011	
Every week*Black		0.035 *	
Several times a week*Black		−0.003	
Latino = 1			0.032
Less than once a year*Latino			0.002
About once or twice a year*Latino			0.005
Several times a year*Latino			0.016

Table 4. Cont.

VARIABLES	White	Black	Latino
About once a month*Latino			0.013
2–3 times a month*Latino			0.000
Nearly every week*Latino			−0.010
Every week*Latino			0.026 *
Several times a week*Latino			−0.005
Observations	10,455	10,455	10,443
R-squared	0.197	0.193	0.190
Constant	***	***	***
Year dummies and controls	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note: Control measures are the same as those reported in Table 1. Robust aster in parentheses, *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

Two findings loom large. First, in support of Hypotheses 2a and 2b, the interaction terms in Table 4 show that Blacks (0.035, $p < 0.05$) and Latinos (0.026, $p < 0.05$) who attend church every week are more misanthropic than Whites who attend church every week. Second, and in direct contrast, there is strong support for Hypothesis 2c, as the interaction term in Table 4 suggests that Whites (−0.086, $p < 0.001$) who attend church every week are less misanthropic than others. To reiterate a key finding, social religiosity, in the form of church attendance, influences racial and ethnic groups who attend religious services every week in opposing ways.

Thus, even though racial and ethnic groups may share similar levels of religious commitment in the form of weekly service attendance, our results suggest that the experience has a profoundly different effect on their misanthropy levels; it is associated with less misanthropy among Whites and more misanthropy among Blacks and Latinos. We speculate as to why these patterns make sense in our discussion section below.

As a final test, we wanted to know whether the effect of service attendance on misanthropy varied by race and ethnic group. That is, we assess whether Whites and Blacks, and Whites and Latinos differ significantly in the effects of religiosity on misanthropy—a question that has not been addressed in the prior literature. We hypothesized that the relationship between religiosity and misanthropy should vary between Whites and Blacks (Hypothesis 3a) and Whites and Latinos (Hypothesis 3b), net of all statistical controls. Table 5 presents the results of our tests. We introduce interaction terms between “Black” and service attendance and “Latino” and service attendance. The interaction terms represent for Whites (the comparison group) the number that should be added to or subtracted from the main effect. The interactions in Table 5 demonstrate that race and ethnicity intersect with service attendance in a way that shapes levels of misanthropy in a manner consistent with Hypotheses 3a and 3b. In particular, the coefficients for the interaction of “every week” and “Black” is significant (coefficient: 0.179, $p < 0.01$), as is the coefficient for the interaction of “every week” and “Latinos” (coefficient: 0.186, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that the effect of attending service every week on misanthropy is −0.048 (coefficient: −0.227 + 0.179) for the Black/White comparison and −0.041 (coefficient: −0.227 + 0.186) for the Latino/White comparison. Thus, Blacks and Latinos who attend religious service every week still have higher levels of misanthropy than Whites who attend religious service every week. This is further illustrated in Figure 4, where we graph the interaction results. As the frequency of church attendance increases for Whites, we see a significant reduction in misanthropy levels, but not as much for Blacks and Latinos.

Table 5. OLS Regression: Racial and Ethnic Differences in the Effects of Service Attendance on Misanthropy, with Whites as Reference Group Coefficients and Beta (fully standardized) coefficients reported.

Variables	OLS Coefficients (Misanthropy)	Beta (Misanthropy)
Attend (ref: never)		
Less than once a year	−0.033	−0.011
About once or twice a year	−0.057 *	−0.026 *
Several times a year	−0.076 *	−0.032 *
About once a month	−0.106 **	−0.035 **
2–3 times a month	−0.143 ***	−0.054 ***
Nearly every week	−0.146 ***	−0.041 ***
Every week	−0.227 ***	−0.115 ***
Several times a week	−0.107 **	−0.036 **
Race (ref: white)		
Black	0.139 **	0.064 **
Latino	0.097 *	0.042 *
Less than once a year*Black	−0.046	−0.005
Less than once a year*Latino	0.009	0.001
About once or twice a year*Black	0.085	0.014
About once or twice a year*Latino	0.039	0.007
Several times a year*Black	0.058	0.009
Several times a year*Latino	0.108	0.017
About once a month*Black	0.040	0.005
About once a month*Latino	0.110	0.015
2–3 times a month*Black	0.082	0.016
2–3 times a month*Latino	0.042	0.007
Nearly every week*Black	0.078	0.010
Nearly every week*Latino	−0.066	−0.007
Every week*Black	0.179 **	0.040 **
Every week*Latino	0.186 **	0.034 **
Several times a week*Black	−0.019	−0.003
Several times a week*Latino	−0.023	−0.003
Observations	10,443	10,443
R-squared	0.197	0.197
Constant	3.201 ***	***
Year dummies and controls	Yes	Yes

Note: Control measures are the same as those reported in Table 1. Robust aster in parentheses, *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

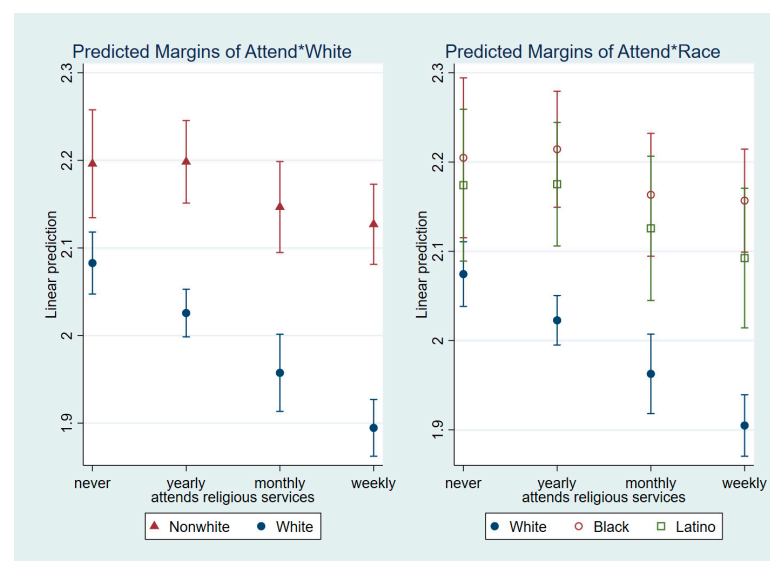


Figure 4. Predicted Margins of Interaction terms from full models: Misanthropy, 95% CI.

To confirm our results, we conducted several robustness tests, including treating service attendance as a continuous variable and collapsing service attendance into fewer categories. The results remained largely the same. We also ran additional models looking at the separate items (trust, helpful, fair) that comprise the misanthropy index, and the results largely confirm our hypotheses, but only with the indicator “trust”. Furthermore, we examined the association between individual religiosity (prayer frequency) and misanthropy to see if the results would vary by race and ethnicity. We did not find any significant interactions (results not shown).¹⁸

5. Discussion

Despite a surge in interest over the last 30 years in the systematic study of misanthropy, there has been surprisingly little attempt to empirically examine the extent to which the effects of religiosity on misanthropy vary by race and ethnicity. What little we know is limited due to a focus on earlier time periods, or because analyses focused on Black/White comparisons and excluded Latinos—the largest minority group in the United States—or because the research is based on a single year of data. Beyond the novel findings we report, our major contribution is that this study begins to fill these gaps by employing recent data that stretches across an 18-year time period (2000–2018), with sufficient samples sizes to sustain meaningful statistical comparisons between Blacks and Whites, and Latinos and Whites. Our findings both corroborate and significantly extend prior research in several ways.

First, beginning with our descriptive findings, our trend analysis shows that fluctuations in Black and Latino misanthropy levels appear to coincide with two social forces: the economic downturn of 2008 and changes in presidential administrations (Figure 1). While more research is needed to uncover how and why these factors are related, these findings provide additional insight into the relationship between race, partisanship, and political trust (see Wilkes’s 2011). Second, as with Valente and Okulicz-Kozaryn (2021), we find that service attendance (social religiosity) is more strongly associated with misanthropy than prayer (individual religiosity); however, we contribute to this literature by showing that the dominance of social religiosity over individual religiosity is inconsistent across racial and ethnic groups (Figures 2 and 3). Third, our multivariate analyses revealed strong support for the expectation that Blacks and Latinos exhibit higher levels of misanthropy than their White counterparts, net of important background factors. This finding is consistent with prior research (Alesina and La Ferrara 2000; Brehm and Rahn 1997; Coverdill et al. 2011; Evangelist 2022; Hughes and Thomas 1998; Patterson 1999; Putnam 2000; Smith 1997; Stets and Fares 2019; Taylor et al. 2007; Uslaner 2002; Wilkes 2011). Fourth, we disaggregated our composite measure of misanthropy to explore Wilkes’s (2011) contention that individualized measures (i.e., trust, helpful, and fair) may reveal what is obscured when generalized measures are used to uncover Black/White disparities. In this regard, we compared the results of our composite measure with that of our individual measures and found that most of the action is associated with the indicator “trust”, which yields essentially the mirror opposite of results relative to our measure of misanthropy. Fifth, we found important ethnoracial differences that highlighted the important role of weekly service attendance in that Blacks and Latinos who attended service every week tended to be more misanthropic than Whites who attended service every week.

Further analysis uncovered an even deeper ethnoracial contrast not observed in prior research: Blacks and Latinos who attended church every week were found to be *more* misanthropic than others, while Whites who attended service every week were *less* misanthropic than others. Recall that Schoenfeld’s (1978) research conducted over three decades ago also found that service attendance was associated with higher levels of misanthropy; however, the added nuance of including race and ethnicity in the inquiry significantly updates this important body of research. Additional analysis showed that increased church attendance does not diminish misanthropy levels among Blacks and Latinos as it does for Whites. While we leave it to future researchers to explain why the

effects for Blacks and Latinos differ from those of Whites on this matter, we can only speculate that rather than service attendance per se, the context and content of religious service attendance likely varies by the ethnoracial composition of predominantly Black, White, and Latino congregations. For example, religious services laced with social justice themes, such as might be found in Black and Latino churches, may increase levels of misanthropy relative to religious services where no such themes are present, such as in White churches. In this context, it stands to reason that sermons and church activities that emphasize the marginal social, economic, and political plight of many Black and Latino adherents may also foster an “us versus them” sentiment or, at the very least, a fundamental distrust of those outside the group—as misanthropy suggests. Although the social organization and religious-meaning system of predominantly Black churches are similar to White evangelical denominations, African Americans underscore distinct aspects and nuances of Christian doctrine, especially themes focused on freedom and the quest for justice (Steensland et al. 2000).¹⁹ Therefore, this could potentially offset any reduction in the misanthropy levels that frequent church attendance would have otherwise produced among Blacks and Latinos.

Our speculation on this point is rooted in our understanding of the historical record on the pivotal role of Black and Latino churches in their respective communities in the U.S. context. Scholars have described the Black church as a critical force in the freedom struggle and a bulwark against White oppression (McAdam 1999; Morris 1984). Even W.E.B. Du Bois, the father of Black religious history, often likened the Black condition to that of the Israelites under Pharaoh, a practice that, according to Blum (2007, p. 100), “invoked a tradition in black culture that linked disadvantaged blacks with God’s chosen people”.²⁰ More recently, Reverend Raphael Warnock, Senator from Georgia and Senior Pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, (former church of Martin Luther King, Jr.), also describes the Black church as an “oppositional witness in defense of freedom” and an “instrument of liberation” that separates it distinctly from the White church (Warnock 2020).

As with the Black church, Latino churches have been a place of refuge and sites of public action and advocacy for Latino congregants (Mulder et al. 2017). Djupe and Neiheisel (2012) argue that attachment to a church in a Latino community helps the member to tap into community networks (p. 349). This form of social capital provides an important resource that includes, among other things, access to information about how to deal with the trauma of immigration (Conde-Frazier and Lee 2015). Some studies show that Latinos who attend church regularly, regardless of their religious affiliation, are more likely to learn civic skills and actively engage in politics (Jones-Correa and Leal 2001; Lee et al. 2002). Valenzuela (2014), found that regular church attendance substantially moderates relationships between theoretical channels of religious influence and political and social identity among Latinos. As with Black churches, Latino churchgoers routinely receive socially relevant information via informal social ties, organized small groups, adult education classes, and personal testimonials—all of which can serve as fuel for political mobilization (e.g., Djupe and Gilbert 2009; Lee et al. 2002; Leighley 1996; McKenzie 2004; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Schwadel 2005; Warren 2001). During personal testimonials, for example, an undocumented congregant may “testify” as to how God delivered them from the police or immigration officers. These powerful narratives can offer solace and hope to others in similar circumstances while reinforcing a strong sense of community.

Thus, through these communal lessons about historical and contemporary forms of oppression and collective struggle—lessons that highlight the ongoing legacy of maltreatment at the hands of the majority (and the institutions controlled by the majority), it stands to reason that, relative to their White counterparts, members of minority groups might find it more difficult to discern the good will and positive intentions of the population at large. Thus, this could very well be one of the reasons why religious attendance is positively associated with misanthropy for minorities, but not for Whites.

An important limitation of our study helps to frame future research directions. Our use of cross-sectional data prevents us from drawing any strong causal inferences when

it comes to making sense of the underlying mechanisms that are generating the findings we have uncovered here. Suffice it to say that our findings point to the need for multiple types of analyses, including but not limited to in-depth interviews of congregants and ethnographic representations of the context of predominantly Black, Latino, and White churches, the services they provide to congregants, and the surrounding communities they serve. Additional light could also be shed on these issues via deep content/textual analyses of pastoral sermons that are heard weekly at predominantly Black, Latino, and White churches. Finally, our supplemental analyses (not shown) provide some evidence that at least among Whites, the oldest and youngest generations are driving the significant results we found. However, the sample sizes for Blacks and Latinos were not large enough to disaggregate samples into separate age groups. Once data are available, future studies could shed additional light on this promising line of inquiry.

6. Conclusions

Misanthropy is a natural reaction to persistent social, economic, and political marginalization. This study showed that the effect of religiosity on misanthropy varies by race and ethnicity in ways not previously known. When it comes to misanthropy, we conclude that religion works differently for minorities compared with Whites. Weekly service attendance is associated with enhanced feelings of misanthropy among Blacks and Latinos, but it may very well diminish misanthropic feelings among Whites. The prominence of service attendance (social religiosity) over individual religiosity (prayer) in association with ethnoracial differences in misanthropy (and its opposite, trust), is instructive for students of social capital and its relationship to the life chances of racial and ethnic groups. Outside of family networks, religious organizations have long constituted an important venue wherein social capital is nurtured and sustained. Such nurturance is likely to manifest in different ways (social justice orientation or not) depending on the social, economic, and political position of the group in question. Future researchers should endeavor to shed additional light on these issues. Going forward, any study that seeks a better understanding of the relationship between religiosity and misanthropy should take a deeper look at the ethnoracial identity of the subjects under study, and any future inquiries into the association between race, ethnicity, and misanthropy would do well to consider the role of religiosity.

Beyond the particulars we have discussed here, an aerial view of what we have uncovered leads us to an unpleasant conclusion: despite the successes of the Civil Rights Movement and the policies and laws it produced (e.g., affirmative action, Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act), and notwithstanding the past quarter century of diversity, equity, and inclusion policies and programs, our data show that Blacks and Latinos remain far more misanthropic than their White counterparts. Perhaps, even more disconcerting, is that instead of narrowing, both the Black–White gap and the Latino–White gap in misanthropy appear to have widened in recent years, largely because of slight increases in misanthropy among Blacks and Latinos.

Author Contributions: The authors contributed equally to this manuscript. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Data is available here: <https://gss.norc.umd.edu/Get-The-Data> (accessed on 10 October 2022).

Acknowledgments: We thank participants of the School of Public and International Affairs, Baruch College (CUNY), research seminar for helpful comments during our presentation of an earlier version of this paper. We are also grateful to the external reviewers of our paper who offered thoughtful suggestions and comments.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ Another important track addresses why trust levels vary across countries and states ([Berggren and Bjørnskov 2011](#); [Delhey and Newton 2005](#); [Uslaner and Brown 2005](#)).
- ² Although some Latinos might not be Hispanics (e.g., Brazilians), we use these terms interchangeably throughout this paper.
- ³ For critiques of Putnam's core thesis, see works by [Arneil \(2010\)](#) and [Kilson \(2009\)](#).
- ⁴ There is, however, some dissent on this issue. [Simpson et al. \(2007\)](#) argue that prior studies employ a "standard trust measure" that is ill-equipped to properly capture racial variation in trust. Using an experimental design with university students as participants (98 Whites, 49 Blacks), the authors found evidence in support of their hypothesis that "trusting behavior will be higher within race categories than between race categories" (p. 531). However, their results, based on students from a single university, is not representative of the U.S. population.
- ⁵ In this context, it is important to recall that the American Civil Rights Movement grew out of and was sustained by the Black church. Indeed, many of the Civil Rights Movement's high-profile leaders were pastors and preachers, including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Jesse Jackson, and later, Al Sharpton, to name a few. In addition, the foot soldiers of the movement were largely comprised of rank-and-file church congregants, but also students who came from religious households (see [Dickerson 2005](#); [Morris 2014](#); [Harvey 2016](#)).
- ⁶ We are aware that this procedure is a rudimentary approach to understanding the role of trust in the Bible, given that trust can be conveyed without actually using the word itself. However, the exercise does give us some insight into how Christians encounter the idea of trust in a biblical context.
- ⁷ It is important to highlight though that a central Christian tenet "to love others as we love ourselves," is incongruent with misanthropy.
- ⁸ In [Welch et al. \(2007\)](#), religiosity was measured by activity in religious congregations, belief in absolute morality, frequency of prayer, and belief in the sinfulness of human nature.
- ⁹ This generalized measure has been widely used in social science research in the U.S. and cross-nationally, but it is not without its limitations ([Delhey et al. 2011](#)). Chief among them relates to how broad a circle survey respondents imagine when responding to the prompt "most people." This is the so-called "radius of trust problem" ([Delhey et al. 2011](#); [Welch et al. 2007](#)). Like others, we are assuming that our measure of misanthropy conjures a wide radius of people in the minds of respondents mainly because, according to ([Delhey et al. 2011](#)), "the radius of most people" in rich countries like the United States and non-Asian countries, tend to be wider than that found in poorer countries and countries with a Confucian background.
- ¹⁰ The "other" category was not included in the analysis given its small sample size and the fact that it is impossible to know what racial categories comprise the variable (e.g., Asian, Native American, Middle Eastern). The final sample only included respondents who were White, Black, or Latino.
- ¹¹ For comparison purposes, we also conducted an analysis using the ethnic variable, and the results (not shown) were comparable.
- ¹² Even though "Hispanic" is an ethnicity and not a race, given the small number of respondents who claimed to be Hispanic and Black (N = 153), we decided to look at all Hispanics irrespective of whether they self-classified as White, Black, or other. Out of 3549 Hispanic, 50.92% claimed to be White, 4.31% to be Black, and 44.35% to be "other" (the majority of which are likely to be "mixed" or "brown").
- ¹³ Additional robustness tests examined belonging to a Christian denomination and found significant interactions for Blacks who are Lutherans, Hispanics who are Presbyterian, and other races who are Methodist and other denominations. However, the cell counts were too small to sustain meaningful analyses (e.g., fewer than 30 people who were Black and Lutheran). We also ran additional tests looking at religious organizations and belief in God, but the results failed to reach conventional levels of statistical significance.
- ¹⁴ Robustness tests were run treating attend as a continuous variable and the results were essentially the same.
- ¹⁵ Using [Steensland et al. \(2000\)](#) RELTRAD scheme, a set of dummy variables was created for Evangelical Protestant, Mainline Protestant, Black Protestant, and Catholic. Other robustness tests using just RELIG to create Protestant and Catholic dummy variables was also conducted and yield similar results.
- ¹⁶ Robustness tests were also run controlling for perceived religious affiliation strength (RELITEN) and the results were essentially the same.
- ¹⁷ As part of our supplemental analyses, we considered the individual elements that make up our composite measure of misanthropy, and tested the expectation that greater levels of religiosity among Blacks and Latinos will be associated with lower levels of trust in others, and a lower likelihood of viewing others as fair and helpful; and greater levels of religiosity among Whites will be associated with higher levels of trust in others and a greater likelihood of viewing others as fair and helpful.
- ¹⁸ Available upon request.
- ¹⁹ Belonging to a predominantly Black or predominantly Latino church could provide emotional and spiritual support for adherents amid daily struggles while simultaneously increasing misanthropy (aimed at the outside world) as a by-product. Unfortunately,

the current dataset doesn't allow us to explore this question directly, but we hope our research will inspire further inquiries into this important matter in the future.

- 20 As historian, sociologist, and commentator, Du Bois wrote extensively on the promise and perils of the black church. See *The Souls of Black Folk*, *The Negro Church*, *Dusk of Dawn*, and *The Philadelphia Negro* to name just a few sources. He is generally acknowledged to have been both supporter of the black church as a site for the social, political and economic elevation of blacks, but also a critic of the black church for not fully embracing its full potential as a force for social change (See Blum 2007; Savage 2000).

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