

## **Does Homeschooling or Private Schooling Promote Political Intolerance? Evidence From a Christian University**

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*Political tolerance is the willingness to extend civil liberties to people who hold views with which one disagrees. Some have claimed that private schooling and homeschooling are institutions that propagate political intolerance by fostering separatism and an unwillingness to consider alternative viewpoints. I empirically test this claim by measuring the political tolerance levels of undergraduate students attending an evangelical Christian university. Using ordinary least squares regression analysis, I find that for these students, greater exposure to private schooling instead of traditional public schooling is not associated with any more or less political tolerance, and greater exposure to homeschooling is associated with more political tolerance.*

**KEYWORDS** *homeschooling, private schooling, political tolerance*

Since the inception of the American primary and secondary public school system in the 19th century, one of its aims has been to prepare children to be healthy participants in civil society. Accomplishing this aim requires inculcating several civic virtues into children. One of these virtues is political tolerance, defined as the willingness to extend basic civil liberties to political or social groups that hold views with which one disagrees.

The public school system instructs the vast majority of American children, but many children receive formal schooling through other means. For instance, the U.S. Department of Education estimates that 4.5 million students attended private schools during the 2011–2012 school year, 80% of

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whom attended private schools with a religious orientation (Broughman & Swaim, 2013). During the same time period, 1.8 million children were home-schooled, according to other data from the U.S. Department of Education. Though this figure only represents 3.4% of the school-age population, trends indicate that the number of homeschooled children continues to rapidly expand (Noel, Stark, Redford, & Zuckerberg, 2013).

Yet some political theorists and pundits have questioned whether private schooling, especially if it is religious in nature, and homeschooling are institutions that are capable of inculcating political tolerance as well as other virtues necessary for healthy civic life in a liberal democracy. Both religious private schooling and homeschooling have been viewed as institutions that propagate political intolerance by fostering separatism, religious fundamentalism, and an unwillingness to consider alternative worldviews or values (Apple, 2005; Balmer, 2006; Boston, 2011; Ross, 2010; Yurakco, 2008).

Critics of religious private schooling and homeschooling further contend that the traditional public school system has the comparative advantage in teaching children to be politically tolerant. These critics reason that a traditional public school takes all students and consequently exposes each of its students to different ideas and other people who come from a diverse set of backgrounds. Such exposure then creates opportunities for students to learn to be more open minded, prepared for democratic life, cooperative with those who hold different perspectives than they do, and enabled to overcome any prejudices that their parents may possess (Gutmann, 1987; Reich, 2005; West, 2009). Indeed, the founders of the U.S. public school system argued that providing all students with a common schooling experience would temper the religious fanaticism that threatens to fracture civil society (Glenn, 1988).

These claims regarding the impact of public schools, private schools, and homeschooling on political tolerance are theoretically plausible, but do they comport with the empirical evidence? This study tests these claims by analyzing the political tolerance levels of students who attend a private, evangelical Christian university (henceforth, referred to as “the university” to maintain anonymity) but have varying primary and secondary schooling backgrounds. In particular, I seek to answer the following research question: Are children who attended traditional public schools more politically tolerant than children who were homeschooled or attended private schools? The aim is to paint a descriptive picture of the relationship between schooling background and political tolerance. The results will bring empirical evidence to bear upon the claim that public schools are more effective than private schools and homeschooling at instilling political tolerance into students. Without such an investigation, we are left with generalizations and articles of faith about the nature of public schools, private schools, and homeschooling and their respective effects on political tolerance.

The remainder of this article is divided into four sections. What follows in the first section is a review of the previous research findings regarding educational background and political tolerance. Second, I describe the data set and methods that I use in this study. I present the results in the third section and conclude with a discussion of those results in the final section.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Private Schooling and Political Tolerance

#### OBSERVATIONAL EVIDENCE

Contrary to the widespread belief that public schools have the comparative advantage in instilling the virtue of political tolerance in children, empirical studies have generally concluded that children who attend private schools are at least as politically tolerant as children who attend public schools (Wolf, 2005). Several nationally representative studies provide evidence for this point. For instance, in a national survey of 3,400 Latinos, Greene, Giammo, and Mellow (1999) find that adults who have received some private schooling for their primary and secondary education are more politically tolerant than those who have only received traditional public schooling. Elsewhere, the National Household Education Survey (NHES) conducted by the U.S. Department of Education reveals that children who attend Catholic and secular private schools are more politically tolerant than children who attend public schools (Belfield, 2004; Campbell, 2002a).

Although the NHES data also demonstrate that children who attend religious, non-Catholic private schools are *less* politically tolerant than public-school children, this result is contrasted by several other studies that find students who attend evangelical-Christian schools exhibit as much if not more political tolerance than their counterparts who attend public schools (Godwin, Ausbrooks, & Martinez, 2001; Wolf, Greene, Kleitz, & Thalhammer, 2001). However, Godwin, Godwin, and Martinez-Ebers (2004) find mixed results for students in fundamentalist Christian high schools. Among 10th graders, students at the fundamentalist school were less politically tolerant than their public-school counterparts, but the difference becomes statistically insignificant when controlling for various background characteristics. On the other hand, 12th graders at the fundamentalist school exhibited greater political tolerance than the 12th graders in public schools.

Notably, Godwin and colleagues (2004) also found that 10th-graders in the fundamentalist school more strongly disliked groups that advocated for more homosexual and women's rights.<sup>1</sup> This result, however, is not indicative of political tolerance. To reiterate, political tolerance is defined as the willingness to extend civil liberties to groups who hold views with which one disagrees. As Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus (1982) and Thiessen (2001)

have argued, one can dislike particular groups and disapprove of their beliefs but still tolerate them.

#### EXPERIMENTAL EVIDENCE

Studies of private-school vouchers bring an additional body of evidence to bear upon the ability of public and private schools to instill political tolerance in their respective students. Because the vouchers are randomly awarded by lottery, these studies are able to utilize an experimental design to determine the causal effects of attending a private school. Outcomes of students who have applied for and been awarded a voucher to attend a private school (the treatment group) are compared with students who have applied for but not been awarded a voucher (the control group). These studies report that voucher students are at least as politically tolerant as those who did not receive a voucher (Campbell, 2002b; Howell, Peterson, Wolf, & Campbell, 2002; Wolf, Peterson, & West, 2001). These experimental studies allow one to infer that greater political tolerance among private-school students is caused by private schooling instead of other factors that may have influenced these students to select into private schools absent a lottery.

Overall, the empirical evidence demonstrates that the belief that private schools instill illiberal and intolerant attitudes is mistaken. Rather, private schools are as able and, in several cases, more effective than public schools at inculcating political tolerance in students. Nonetheless, the issue remains salient today. Critics of school choice programs, for example, still worry that religious private schools will engage in religious indoctrination, teaching students extreme views and fostering closed-mindedness (Tabachnick, 2011; Wing, 2012).

#### Homeschooling and Political Tolerance

On the other hand, little empirical inquiry has been conducted regarding the political tolerance levels of homeschooled children. In a rich, narrative study of six conservative Christian homeschooling families, Kunzman (2009) asked parents whether they would approve of government regulations to restrict other homeschooling parents from teaching religious views or other ideologies with which they disagreed. In each case, the parents generally disapproved of such regulations, despite their convictions against those opposing religions or ideologies. Kunzman further observed that homeschooled children were more politically tolerant than their parents. But because the study only focused on homeschooling families, it contains no comparisons of political tolerance between homeschooled children and children who attend public or private schools.

Other studies of homeschooling have investigated other civic outcomes besides political tolerance. In one analysis, Smith and Sikkink (1999) use

the 1996 NHES data set and find that parents of homeschooled children are more involved in civic activities (e.g., voting, attending public meetings, volunteering for community service, or contacting their public officials) than parents of public-school children. Elsewhere, a survey of over 7,000 adults in the United States who were homeschooled as children demonstrates that they are more involved in their communities and engaged in civic affairs than other U.S. adults (Ray, 2004). Summarizing the research on homeschooling and civic engagement and participation, Medlin (2000) writes:

Home-schooled children are taking part in the daily routines of their communities. They are certainly not isolated; in fact, they associated with—and feel close to—all sorts of people. . . . They may be more socially mature and have better leadership skills than other children as well. And they appear to be functioning effectively as members of adult society. (p. 119)

This conclusion is consistent with Medlin's (2013) more recent review of the homeschooling research and contradicts the theory that homeschooling diminishes a child's sense of civic engagement and participation (Apple, 2005; Lubienski, 2000; Reich, 2002).

Although none of these studies specifically compare the political tolerance levels of children with different schooling backgrounds, they may help to form theories. For instance, it is not unreasonable to expect that those who are more community minded tend to form more associations with others from different cultural backgrounds or hold different viewpoints, even without attending public schools. Thus, an increase in community mindedness may be associated with an increase in political tolerance, a conclusion with some empirical support (Cigler & Joslyn, 2002). However, greater community mindedness does not necessarily lead to exposure to a greater diversity of groups as many individuals may have rich associations but only with others who are like them. Putnam (2000) differentiates between *bonding* and *bridging* social capital. The former helps to "reinforce exclusive identities and homogenous groups"; the latter is "outward looking," helping individuals to establish relationships with others "across diverse social cleavages" and to form heterogeneous group associations (p. 22). So given limited research evidence that homeschooled students are more community minded than other students, it is sensible to predict that homeschooled students will also be more politically tolerant while recognizing that it is equally reasonable to suspect that home schooling will be less politically tolerant. More empirical work linking community mindedness and political tolerance would be helpful.

A second reason to suspect that homeschooled students are more politically tolerant is related to the degree of self-actualization that they have experienced. Sullivan and colleagues (1982) theorized and empirically

verified that individuals who have a stronger sense of their personal identity tend to exhibit more political tolerance. [Greene \(2005\)](#) explains:

A Catholic (for example) who is secure in his own identity as a Catholic will find it easier to accept that others are not Catholic, and thus to accept their right not to be Catholic, whereas a Catholic who is not secure in his own Catholicness may seek to prove (to others and himself) that he really is Catholic by denigrating non-Catholics and refusing to respect their rights. (p. 194)

Individuals who are less secure in their identity tend to feel more threatened when their views are challenged. Hence, they wish to control or even quell these threats and ultimately are more uncompromising in their actions and outlook. Because homeschooling is a highly personalized educational arrangement and usually constitutes holistically introducing students to a particular worldview and way of life, homeschooled students typically attain a higher degree of self-actualization ([Medlin, 2013](#); [Sheffer, 1997](#)). Consequently, homeschooled students may be more politically tolerant than those who attend a traditional public school. In fact, traditional public schools may be an institution that stunts self-actualization for some of its students because it threatens those students' sense of self by endorsing a worldview that clashes with the one held by those students ([Kunzman, 2010](#)).

Indeed, data from the U.S. Department of Education show that parents most often choose to homeschool their children because they “desire to provide religious or moral instruction” ([Planty et al., 2009](#), p. 14). Critics of homeschooling charge that this desire is precisely the problem: Instilling a single worldview into children causes them to be more narrow minded and intolerant. However, other empirical work suggests that this may not be the case; rather, religious values are consistent with values necessary for a liberal democracy. For instance, [Eisenstein \(2006\)](#) has documented that Christians largely agree that the principles of their faith require them to be tolerant of others who hold views with which they disagree. Thus, homeschooling that places an emphasis on religious and moral instruction may actually help to foster political tolerance. At the very least, Christian families engaging in homeschooling for religious and moral reasons may value others' right to religious freedom and exhibit more tolerance simply because they recognize that their ability to homeschool is founded upon that same right.

## CONTRIBUTION OF THIS PRESENT STUDY

Homeschooling is a controversial public policy issue and the subject of spirited debate. In particular, there are reasons to believe that homeschooling

may lead to greater political tolerance or diminish it, yet there are no empirical studies testing these reasons (Ray, 2013). This present study is intended to begin filling this gap in the literature about homeschooling as well as to add to the empirical literature that compares the political tolerance levels of students who attend private and public schools—an issue that until recently has less often been empirically investigated.

Scholars have also become increasingly interested in comparing students across all schooling types (i.e., public school, religious and nonreligious private schools, and homeschooling). Data to conduct such inquiry have been rare but are becoming more widely available. The National Study on Youth and Religion, for example, is a nationally-representative, longitudinal survey of adolescents that has generated numerous research opportunities, including an investigation into the influence of school type on student religiosity (Uecker, 2008). Similarly, the Cardus Education Survey enables researchers to examine academic, spiritual, and cultural outcomes of U.S. and Canadian adults who have attended different types of schools (Van Pelt, Sikkink, Pennings, & Seel, 2012). In this present study, I follow these efforts to make comparisons across school types by analyzing political tolerance outcomes—a related outcome but one not yet investigated using the two aforementioned data sets—for undergraduate students with diverse schooling experiences. The data and the methods used in this study are the topics of the next section.

## DATA AND METHODS

### Measuring Political Tolerance

An individual's level of political tolerance is measured by a widely-used instrument developed by Sullivan and colleagues (1982), who have also shown the instrument to possess a high degree of validity and reliability. The instrument, called the *content-controlled political tolerance scale*, consists of two parts. In the first part, the political tolerance scale provides the respondent with a list of popular social and political groups, such as Republicans, gay-rights activists, or fundamentalist Christians. The respondent is asked to select the group with beliefs that he opposes the most; this group is called his *least-liked group*. If there is an unlisted group that the respondent opposes even more, he is given the option to write down the name of that group.

The second part of the political tolerance scale measures the respondent's willingness to extend basic civil liberties to members of his least-liked group. The respondent is presented with a series of statements about his least-liked group and is asked to indicate his level of agreement with those statements. For instance, one statement proposes, "Members of your [least-liked group] should be allowed to make a public speech." The respondent then selects one of five answer choices in reply to that statement: strongly



disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, or strongly agree. Agreeing would be the more tolerant answer for this specific statement, whereas disagreeing may be considered more tolerant for other reverse-coded questions. The responses to each statement are coded and combined to create an overall measure of political tolerance for the respondent.

## Study Sample

The study sample consists of 304 out of the approximately 4,000 undergraduates at the university—a private, Christian university in the western United States. I collected data using a survey with the content-controlled political tolerance scale and several questions asking about the study participants' demographic and ideological background characteristics. Study participants also indicated the type of school (i.e., traditional public school, private school, homeschool) that they attended for each year throughout their 13 years of primary and secondary education. A stratified sampling method was used to create a representative sample of the university's student body. Specifically, because all students either (a) live in one of the many campus dormitories or (b) live off-campus and commute, the student population was stratified by place of residence. The university's administrative office provided data detailing the number of students who lived in each dormitory and the number of students who commuted. The research team then randomly sampled students within each stratum, administering the surveys face-to-face. The data that the research team collected were ultimately weighted by strata to make the study sample reflective of the student population at the university. Descriptive statistics of the sample are displayed in [Table 1](#).

There are three reasons why the university's student body provides a useful population to explore this study's research question. First, the university was founded upon and continues to operate according to a more fundamentalist Christian tradition. In fact, one of its missions is to provide a biblically-based education, and all undergraduate students must agree to a doctrinal statement in order to apply for admission and regularly attend chapels throughout the school week. At minimum, describing the political tolerance levels of students who selected into this type of university will be valuable, especially because critics of private schooling and homeschooling contend that students who have greater exposure to religiously conservative environments do not learn to tolerate alternative viewpoints. Indeed, the students at the university who attended private schools or were homeschooled for their primary or secondary education likely did so for religious or moral reasons.

Second, students at the university have experienced different amounts of public schooling, private schooling, or homeschooling. Not only have many students received their formal education in only one of the three



**TABLE 1** Sample Statistics

	Percent
Gender	
Female	60.86
Male	39.14
Age	20.21 <sup>a</sup>
Year in School	
Freshman	22.11
Sophomore	27.39
Junior	27.06
Senior	20.46
Fifth-year or more	2.97
Major	
Humanities	31.91
Life Sciences	24.01
Business	10.20
Social Sciences	8.22
Education	10.53
Technical Sciences or Engineering	12.50
Undeclared	2.63
Racial or Ethnic Background	
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0.66
Asian or Pacific Islander	20.93
Black	1.00
Hispanic or Latino	12.96
White	60.80
Mixed-Race	3.65
Years of Homeschooling <sup>b</sup>	
0 years (No homeschooling)	78.95
1–6 years	8.56
7–12 years	7.57
13 years (Only homeschooling)	4.93
Years of Private Schooling <sup>b</sup>	
0 years (No private schooling)	50.00
1–6 years	24.67
7–12 years	15.46
13 years (Only private schooling)	9.87
Years of Public Schooling <sup>b</sup>	
0 years (No public schooling)	21.05
1–6 years	18.08
7–12 years	20.07
13 years (Only public schooling)	40.79

*Note.*  $N = 304$ .

<sup>a</sup>Denotes a sample average; all other numbers are percentages.

<sup>b</sup>Students were asked to indicate whether they received private schooling, public schooling, or homeschooling for each of their 13 years of primary and secondary education; for purposes of brevity, figures presented in the table are aggregated into the four categories (a) no years, (b) 1–6 years, (c) 7–12 years, and (d) 13 years.

schooling sectors but also many others have received their formal education in more than one of these sectors. For instance, some students attended public primary schools but then attended private secondary schools. Others were homeschooled before attending public or private schools. This variation

enables me to answer the original research question by using ordinary least squares regression analysis to estimate the relationship between amount of schooling in a particular school sector and political tolerance. It is rare to conduct such an analysis because of the difficulty in finding populations that include substantial proportions of homeschooled students while being easily accessible for data collection.

Third, though the students differ in schooling background, they have all self-selected to attend the university. Thus, they are similar on many observable and unobservable characteristics (e.g., religiosity, academic achievement) that may have led to this selection. This homogeneity naturally acts as a way to control for many background characteristics, helping to isolate the explanatory power of schooling background on political tolerance. Of course, the sample is not perfectly homogenous, so I still control for various observable background characteristics in my empirical model when possible.

## Empirical Model and Analyses

In particular, I estimate the following model:

$$y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 H_i + \beta_2 P_i + \beta_3 \mathbf{X}_i + \mu_i,$$

where  $y_i$  is the political tolerance score for student  $i$  and  $\mathbf{X}_i$  is a vector of variables that control for ideological and demographic background characteristics;  $\mu_i$  is the error term.  $P_i$  and  $H_i$  are the variables of interest and are equal to the number of years of private schooling and homeschooling that student  $i$  received, respectively. As mentioned earlier, I weighted the observations by sampling strata (the place of residence) in order to correct for any discrepancies between the study sample and the population of undergraduates at the university.

I also cluster my standard errors by sampling strata. Clustering is necessary because unobserved variation between students who live in the same place of residence may be correlated. For example, each residence hall community may develop its own distinct identity and eccentricities, which then influence all students who live there. Thus, students living in the same residence hall cannot be considered independent observations. Absent clustering, standard errors would typically be understated, consequently distorting the results by producing type I errors.

Note that years of public schooling is not included as a covariate. All students indicated the type of school they attended for each of the 13 years of primary and secondary schooling, so once the number of years of homeschooling and private schooling are determined, the number of years of public schooling is also determined. Thus, the estimate of  $\beta_1$  in the regression model is interpreted as the partial effect on political tolerance that results

from replacing one year of public schooling with one year of homeschooling. Likewise, the estimate of  $\beta_2$  is interpreted as the partial effect on political tolerance that results from replacing one year of public schooling with one year of private schooling. I present the results in the following section.

## RESULTS

### Survey Responses

Table 2 lists the least-liked group that study participants have selected as well as the proportion of them who have chosen that group. It is unsurprising that most study participants have chosen atheists, pro-choicers (people who support abortion), and gay-rights activists as their least-liked group, given that they attend an evangelical-Christian, and hence more religiously conservative, university.

But the choice of a least-liked group is not an indication of political tolerance. Measuring levels of political tolerance requires analyzing the study participants' willingness to extend various civil liberties to members of their least-liked group, whatever it might be. Table 3 lists the eight Likert-scale items aimed at capturing this willingness and shows how the study participants responded to each statement. For example, about half of the respondents strongly disagreed that the government should be able to tap the phones of their least-liked group.

The last item in Table 3, "I feel that [the least-liked group] is dangerous," is not intended to capture political tolerance and hence is not included in the derivation of the political tolerance measure. Rather, that question is a measure of perceived threat. Studies have shown perceived threat is an important determinant of political tolerance, so it is included as an independent covariate in the regression models to distinguish its effect on political tolerance from the effects of other predictors of political tolerance (Eisenstein, 2006; Greene, Mellow, & Giammo, 1999; Sullivan et al., 1982; Wolf Greene, Kleitz, & Thalhammer, 2001).

**TABLE 2** Least-Liked Group Selection

Group	Percentage
Atheists	36.18
Pro-choicers (people who support abortion)	29.61
Gay-rights activists	12.83
Muslims	7.24
Conservative Christians	6.25
Democrats	2.96
Other	1.65
Pro-lifers (people who oppose abortion)	1.64
Republicans	1.64

**TABLE 3** Responses on the Tolerance Scale

Likert-Scale Items	Response (Percentages)				
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
The government should be able to tap the phones of [the least-liked group].	49.34	32.57	14.47	2.63	0.99
Members of [the least-liked group] should be allowed to teach in public schools.	7.26	12.21	20.79	36.30	23.43
Members of [the least-liked group] should be allowed to make a public speech.	3.62	7.57	15.46	42.43	30.92
Members of [the least-liked group] should be able to run for president or other elected office.	7.95	14.24	17.88	33.11	26.82
Members of [the least-liked group] should be able to hold public demonstrations or rallies.	5.2	14.14	22.37	33.55	24.01
Books that are written by members of the [the least-liked group] should be banned from the public library.	40.40	34.11	14.57	8.61	2.32
I would allow members of [the least-liked group] to live in my neighborhood.	0.66	4.98	8.97	43.19	42.19
[The least-liked group] should be outlawed.	40.53	26.58	15.95	9.97	7.97
I feel that [the least-liked group] is dangerous.	19.41	22.70	21.71	24.67	11.51

*Note.* *N* = 304. Scale comprised of the first 8 items. Cronbach's alpha = 0.87.

**TABLE 4** Relative Frequency Table of Political Tolerance Levels

Score	Frequency (%)
−2.00 to −1.50	0.0
−1.51 to −1.00	2.0
−1.01 to −0.50	4.6
−0.49 to 0.00	8.9
0.01 to 0.50	19.4
0.51 to 1.00	25.0
1.01 to 1.50	18.1
1.51 to 2.00	22.0

*Note.* Average political tolerance score = 0.860. Standard deviation of political tolerance scores = 0.790. Political tolerance scores are derived by coding responses to each Likert-scale item and averaging them. Political tolerance scores can possibly range from −2 to 2. Higher scores mean that the individual is more tolerant. *N* = 304.

I code responses on the eight Likert-scale items on a scale of −2 to 2, with the higher numbers indicating the more politically tolerant answer. I then average the responses to the statements to generate a continuous measure of each study participant's political tolerance level. As mentioned in Table 4, the average political tolerance level is 0.860 with a standard deviation of 0.790. Political tolerance levels also range from slightly less than −1 to 2.

## Results of Regression Analysis

[Table 5](#) displays the results from various specifications of the model that I use to estimate the relationship between political tolerance and educational background. The first column is a rudimentary specification in which political tolerance scores are regressed on years of homeschooling and years of private schooling without any demographic or ideological control variables. This specification suggests that replacing a year of public schooling with homeschooling is associated with an increase in political tolerance by about 0.04 scale points (about 5% of a standard deviation in political tolerance). This result is significant at the level of  $p < 0.01$ . On the other hand, replacing one year of public schooling with one year of private schooling is associated with a decrease in political tolerance by about 0.01 scale points, a result that is only marginally significant ( $p < 0.1$ ).

However, background demographic characteristics such as gender, race, or socioeconomic status have been shown to be important predictors of political tolerance (Campbell, 2002a; [Wolf, Greene, et al., 2001](#)). And even though the study sample consists of students at a conservative Christian university, political leanings and denominational affiliations may still vary. Because these demographic and ideological background characteristics are also predictors of political tolerance, it is essential to explicitly control for them in my analysis to avoid omitted variable bias ([Eisenstein, 2006](#); [Sullivan et al., 1982](#)).

As shown in columns 2 and 3 of [Table 5](#), adding only the demographic variables or both the demographic and ideological variables substantively changes the results. The decrease in political tolerance that is associated with private schooling is no longer statistically significant, and the positive relationship between homeschooling and political tolerance remains robust to these additional control variables.

It is worthwhile to mention that coefficient estimates of the control variables generally point in the expected direction. For instance, students who come from racial or ethnic minority backgrounds exhibit less political tolerance relative to White students. This result is consistent with the theory that a greater sense of perceived threat—a sense more common to individuals from racial or ethnic minority backgrounds—is associated with less political tolerance. This theory also explains why coefficient estimates for males is positive and statistically significant. That is, males perceive less threat than females. The coefficient estimate for the variable capturing political ideology is not statistically different from zero but is positive as expected; those who hold a more liberal ideology are more politically tolerant. Likewise, individuals who voted in the most recent election, an indication of civic mindedness, are more politically tolerant than those who did not. Finally, 4th-year students who probably have experienced a greater degree of self-actualization exhibit more political tolerance relative to first-year students.

**TABLE 5** Regression Results

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable: Political Tolerance		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Years of homeschooling	0.040*** (0.009)	0.028*** (0.007)	0.026*** (0.008)
Years of private schooling	−0.010* (0.006)	−0.006 (0.010)	−0.006 (0.013)
Perceived threat	−0.205*** (0.033)	−0.213*** (0.023)	−0.219*** (0.028)
Demographic controls			
Male		0.204* (0.097)	0.186* (0.098)
Age		−0.0164 (0.042)	−0.0208 (0.042)
Year in school <sup>a</sup>			
2nd year		0.0502 (0.161)	0.0379 (0.156)
3rd year		−0.0385 (0.140)	−0.0277 (0.135)
4th year		0.331* (0.181)	0.336* (0.182)
5th year or more		−0.130 (0.217)	−0.113 (0.228)
Racial or ethnic background <sup>b</sup>			
American Indian or Alaskan Native		−0.179 (0.328)	−0.234 (0.320)
Asian or Pacific Islander		−0.294*** (0.096)	−0.271** (0.108)
Black or African American		−1.210 (0.740)	−1.208* (0.680)
Latino or non-White Hispanic		−0.249** (0.092)	−0.227** (0.077)
More than one race		−0.0250 (0.141)	−0.00730 (0.120)
Mother's educational attainment <sup>c</sup>			
High school graduate/GED		−0.337 (0.207)	−0.329* (0.178)
2-year college graduate		−0.692*** (0.173)	−0.676*** (0.172)
4-year college graduate		−0.607* (0.295)	−0.594** (0.250)
Master's degree		−0.327* (0.155)	−0.315** (0.141)
Doctoral or professional (MD, JD) Degree		−0.331* (0.181)	−0.318 (0.241)
Father's educational attainment <sup>c</sup>			
High school graduate/GED		0.0216 (0.248)	0.0292 (0.237)
2-year college graduate		0.206 (0.254)	0.226 (0.255)
4-year college graduate		0.154 (0.251)	0.177 (0.237)
Master's degree		0.406 (0.363)	0.417 (0.371)
Doctoral or professional (MD, JD) degree		0.0213 (0.338)	0.0481 (0.348)

(Continued)

**TABLE 5** (Continued)

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable: Political Tolerance		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Annual household income (\$) <sup>d</sup>			
25,000 to 49,999		0.128 (0.118)	0.121 (0.125)
50,000 to 74,999		0.270 (0.156)	0.268 (0.165)
75,000 to 99,999		0.0637 (0.182)	0.0806 (0.181)
100,000 to 149,000		0.269 (0.215)	0.272 (0.206)
Over 150,000		0.0691 (0.214)	0.0635 (0.216)
Two parent household		-0.160 (0.157)	-0.158 (0.150)
Ideological controls			
Evangelical denomination			0.0329 (0.201)
Religion influences behavior			0.0726 (0.106)
Ascribes to a liberal ideology			0.0340 (0.109)
Voted in last election			0.104 (0.0726)
Constant	0.802*** (0.0351)	1.419 (0.892)	0.982 (1.352)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.153	0.304	0.308

<sup>a</sup>Omitted category is first-year student.

<sup>b</sup>Omitted category is "White."

<sup>c</sup>Omitted category is parent with less than a high school education.

<sup>d</sup>Omitted category is family with less than \$25,000 in annual household income.

\* $p < 0.10$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

In general, the direction of the coefficient estimates point to what previous studies have found and theory predicts, lending confidence to the validity of the analysis (Marcus, Sullivan, Theiss-Morse, & Wood, 1995; Sullivan et al., 1982; Wolf, Greene, et al., 2001).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study brings two contributions to the existing research on schooling and political tolerance. First, the finding that increased exposure to private schooling does not decrease political tolerance comports with and adds to the empirical evidence that students who attend private schools are at least as tolerant as students who attend public schools (Wolf, 2005). Second, this study adds new insight into the political tolerance outcomes



of homeschooled children—a topic that, to the best of my knowledge, has not been empirically investigated until now. Specifically, among a relatively homogenous group of undergraduates, all of whom attend an evangelical Christian university, those with more exposure to homeschooling relative to public schooling tend to be more politically tolerant.

Both of the results conflict with the belief that a common system of public schools is essential not only for all students but particularly for religiously conservative students to learn political tolerance. Instead of decreasing political tolerance among students who are more conservative in their religious beliefs, homeschooling is associated with greater political tolerance, and private schooling is not associated with any less tolerance. In other words, members of the very group for which public schooling is believed to be most essential for inculcating political tolerance (i.e., those who are more strongly committed to a particular worldview and value system) actually exhibit at least as much or more tolerance when they are exposed to less public schooling.

On the other hand, this study is unable to provide insight into how students at the university compare with others who do not attend the university. So it is unclear to what the extent the two conclusions that (a) homeschooled students exhibit greater political tolerance and (b) private-schooled students do not exhibit less political tolerance than public-school students are generalizable to other populations. More importantly, the findings of this study would be undermined by selection bias if the university disproportionately attracts particularly tolerant students who happen to have more years of homeschooling or private schooling while simultaneously attracting particularly intolerant students who happen to have more years of public schooling. Although it is not obvious that such selection is occurring, it will be useful to conduct similar analyses using different samples from other contexts to investigate the generalizability of this study's findings.

It is also important to note that this study is not sufficient to establish any causal relationships. It is unclear whether an increase in political tolerance is due to the exposure to homeschooling or because of selection: It is possible that unobservable factors that lead students to choose homeschooling may also lead students to be more politically tolerant. For example, those who ascribe to a more libertarian ideology may choose to exercise their liberties by schooling their children at home rather than in a public school. At the same time, those who ascribe to a more libertarian ideology may tend to recognize others' right to freedom of conscience and hence, be more politically tolerant (Kunzman, 2009). If true, a causal link between homeschooling and political tolerance cannot be established.

Two theories for why homeschooling may cause an increase in political tolerance were suggested earlier. First, students who are homeschooled may attain a greater degree of self-actualization because homeschooling is highly conducive to personalized instruction and enables students to be

taught a consistent worldview. Second, the religious values taught in a homeschooling environment as well as in many religious private schools are consistent with political tolerance and other values necessary for a liberal democracy. Verifying these theories requires showing that homeschooling (a) does indeed lead to a greater degree of self-actualization, which Sullivan and colleagues (1982) have shown to lead to greater political tolerance, and (b) is more conducive to inculcating religious values that are consistent with and help to develop political tolerance. Such additional investigation is outside the purview of this study but doing so in the future may help to better identify and understand the factors that lead to different levels of political tolerance for students with varying schooling backgrounds.

Until then, the results of this descriptive study remain valuable: Among a relatively homogenous group of students that have chosen to attend a religiously conservative, evangelical-Christian university, more exposure to private schooling is not associated with greater political intolerance as is commonly believed. And in this same context, more exposure to homeschooling is associated with greater political tolerance.

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### NOTE

1. Compared to 12th-grade public-school students, 12th graders at the fundamentalist school also exhibited greater dislike of groups advocating for more homosexual or women's rights. But after controlling for background characteristics, the difference became statistically indistinguishable.

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