

## Americans and Religious Diversity

The United States is perhaps the most religiously diverse nation in the world. Due to immigration and lively religious competition, the United States has grown immensely in its religious diversity over the course of its history. How do Americans think and feel about religious diversity? On the one hand, religious freedom and diversity are in general highly valued by Americans. On the other, many Americans see the United States as a “Christian Nation” and feel threatened by growing religious diversity. Let’s use the Association of Religion Data Archives website to examine some empirical data on attitudes toward religious diversity and toward growing numbers of non-Christian Americans.

If you find yourself lost at any point, look to the instructions on the right.

Open your web browser and go to the homepage for the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA).

The Religion and Diversity Survey, conducted in 2002 and 2003, is a valuable resource for examining Americans’ attitudes about religious diversity. It is a nationally representative survey of almost 3,000 American adults. Search for the Religion and Diversity Survey from the ARDA homepage.

Let’s search for a variable that would allow us to look at Americans’ attitudes toward religious diversity. Search for the word “diversity” in the survey.

One of the variables that you should find is number 22, called “DIV\_GOOD.” It asks respondents whether they agree with the statement: “Religious diversity has been good for America.”

1. What percent of respondents “agree strongly” with this variable’s statement? What percent “agree somewhat”?

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2. As you can imagine, whether someone agrees with this statement might depend on things about that person’s background. What kind of variables or factors do you think might affect how someone would respond to this question?

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**Open your web browser.**

**Go to [www.thearda.com](http://www.thearda.com)**

**Type “Religion and Diversity” in the search field at the top of the website.**

**Select “Religion and Diversity Survey, 2002-2003”**

**Click on the “Search” tab.**

**Search for “diversity”.**

**Click on variable 22 “DIV\_GOOD.”**

Let's use the ARDA's online data analysis tool to look at some variables that could predict how someone would respond.

3. Does age make much of a difference? Are younger or older individuals more likely to believe that religious diversity is good?

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3. What about education? Why do you think education has the effect it does?

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4. Briefly describe any trends you find interesting with regard to gender, income, or race.

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5. As you can imagine, one's religious background has an impact on how he or she views religious diversity. Describe that impact. Which religious group is most likely to value religious diversity? Which is least likely?

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What kind of attitudes do Americans have toward religious minorities themselves, particularly toward non-Christians? Let's find a question on the survey that measures the extent to which Americans believe Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus somehow pose a threat to American society. Search for the word "threat" in the survey.

You should find variable number 141, called "THREAT". Note that "new groups" refer to Buddhists, Muslims and Hindus.

**Click on "Analyze results" below the question.**

**Click on the "Search" tab.**

**Search for "threat".**

**Click on variable 141 "THREAT."**

6. What percent of respondents “agree strongly” or “agree somewhat” that Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus are “a threat to our traditional values?”

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7. Before you click on “Analyze results” to see how respondents differ on their response to this question based on certain background characteristics, make a few predictions about what you expect to see. Remember, the variables include age, education, gender, income, race, and religion.

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8. Now look at the results. Were your hypotheses right? Which variables matter most? Which ones matter least? Why do you think this is the case?

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Now choose another variable from the survey to look at. Choose one that interests you and that you think sheds light on how Americans feel or think about religious diversity.

9. Which variable did you choose?

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10. Briefly summarize how respondents answered the survey question (what percent agreed or disagreed, said yes or no, etc.).

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**Click on “Analyze results” below the question.**

11. Use the online data analysis tool to dig a little deeper into your variable of interest. Which background characteristics seem to have the biggest impact on how respondents answered the question? Which have the smallest impact? Why do you think this is the case?

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**Click on “Analyze results” below the question.**