

A Paradox of Tolerance?

Research Report: SPAS-003 | July 25, 2020

Methodology

Data Source

- The Social and Political Attitudes Study (SPAS), a nationally representative sample that reflects the U.S. adult population in terms of educational attainment, ethnicity, gender, and household income.

Participants

- 439 adults from the original sample of 731 adults. The rest of the participants did not express highly intolerant or highly tolerant views. 439 adults fell into one of two groups:
 1. ***Most Intolerant***: Individuals that scored the highest on the political intolerance scale (i.e., strongly agreed). 68% male; 100 individuals; Mean Age = 44 years (range 18 to 80 years).
 2. ***Least Intolerant***: Individuals that scored the lowest on the political intolerance scale (i.e., strongly disagreed). 53% male; 339 individuals; Mean Age = 47 years (range 18 to 85 years).

Measures

1. ***Political Intolerance***: an average of four questions asking how irritated participants would be if a person with opposite political views was dating a member of their family, was their neighbor, co-worker, or local elected official. Higher scores indicate greater irritation.
2. ***Moral and Political Attitudes***: Participants were asked the extent to which they agree or disagree with the following statements:
 - “The United States government should provide financial support to people in other countries who are in need”
 - “The United States government should open its borders to all immigrants in need”
 - “The United States government should do more to provide opportunities for American citizens that are women and ethnic minorities”
 - “Political conflict between liberals and conservatives is a major threat to society”
- For technical (e.g., statistical) information not included in this document, view the supplemental page for this report.

Summary of Findings

1. The majority of people reported socially tolerant attitudes towards members with opposite political views.
2. The most intolerant group and least intolerant group did not differ from each other demographically (e.g., income, education, age) with one exception: the most intolerant group were somewhat more likely to be male.
3. The **most intolerant group** were more likely to **agree** that:
 - the U.S. government should provide financial support to people in other countries (Figure 1)
 - the U.S. government should open its borders to all immigrants in need (Figure 3)
 - political conflict is a major threat to society (Figure 4)
4. The most and least intolerant groups did not differ in their agreement that the U.S. government should do more for American citizens that are women and ethnic minorities (Figure 2).
5. What *might* these findings suggest?
 - One possibility is that this represents a “paradox of tolerance:” people most willing to extend aid to those in *other* societies are also most irritated by political disagreements with those living in *their own* society. Put differently, tolerance towards people in other societies may be related to intolerance towards political adversaries in one’s own society.
 - Have an interpretation of this you want to share? Email it to research@skeptic.com

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Figure 1

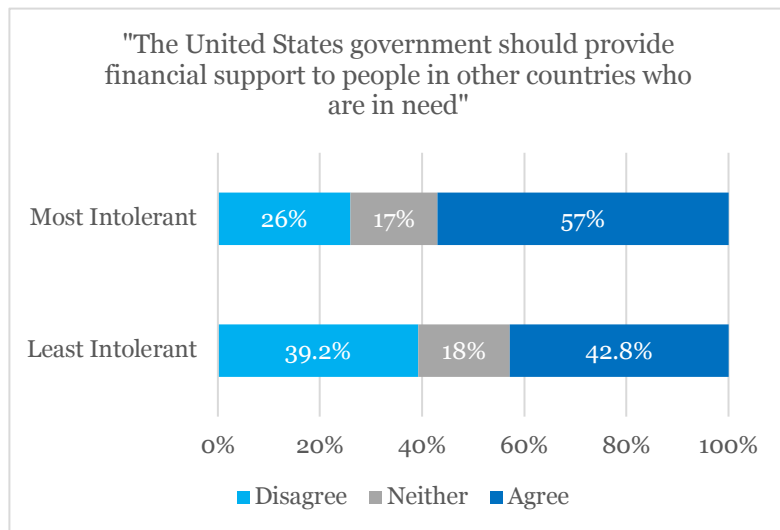


Figure 2

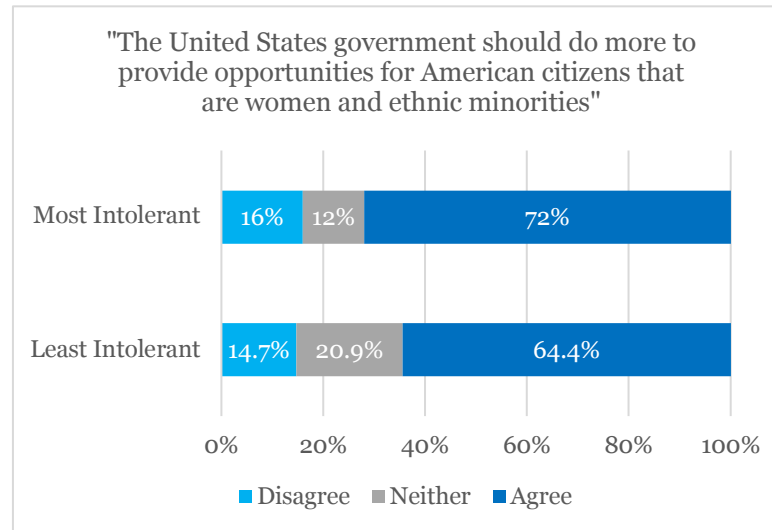


Figure 3

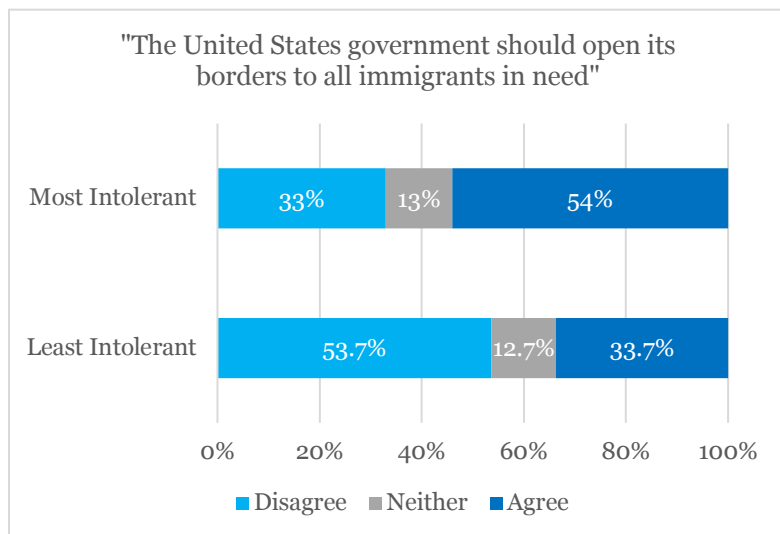


Figure 4

