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### Religion and Politics: The Influence of Religious Affiliation and Beliefs on Political Participation

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# Religion and Politics

## The Influence of Religious Affiliation and Beliefs on Political Participation

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### Introduction

#### A Review of the Literature Religion and Politics

Combining these two areas of study and examining the level at which an individual is religiously associated could lead to how an individual is inclined to vote in an election. As Thomma put it, if you want to know for which party an individual will vote for just observe what they do during the previous weekend (Thomma 2003). This alludes to Thomma's findings that if an individual regularly attends religious services they are likely to vote Republican by a 2-1 margin and if an individual never goes they will vote Democratic by a 2-1 margin (Thomma 2003). There has been a great deal of research done on this topic that the more religiously affiliated an individual is the more likely they are to support the Republican party. This area of research points to a gap in voter participation known as the God gap. Originally named the Attendance Gap afterwards named the Religion Gap and then later retitled the God Gap to be more appealing to the public (Olsen and Green 1). The term God Gap is used to describe the gap between regular attendees to religious services/events and those who don't regularly attend. In an article written by John Green titled, Gauging the God Gap, what was found was that in the 2004 National Election Pool(NEP) there was a 28 percent difference in republican and democratic votes when looking at who reported attending worship more than once a week (Green 434). Also conveyed in the 2004 National Survey of Religion and Politics (NSRP) there was a 39 percentage gap between those that reported attending worship more than once a week (Green 435). In the 2004 National Election Study(NES) there was a 12 percent gap between those that reported attending worship more than once a week (Green 435). This type of data collected is significant in showing that there is a positive relationship between all data taken from these surveys to exemplify that there is a gap between the results found. Further described in another article, evangelicals(churchgoers) are more likely to vote republican in communities where more people do not affiliate with a religion. These individuals are commonly referred to as "secularists" which is a difficult term to define because political campaigns do not target this demographic explicitly and are not a part of campaign coalitions. The way Campbell defines secularism is the absence of religious affiliation, an individual that reports they have never attended religious services apart from weddings, baptisms, and funerals and also indicated that the individual does not think of themselves as part of any church or religious denomination (Campbell 6). David Campbell provides evidence that supports the idea that white educated individuals are more likely to vote conservative because they feel threatened by the minority groups (Campbell 8). Campbell also implies that culture, religion and moral values are key factors in attempting to understanding presidential elections and the manner in which an individual is likely to vote.

Over the past three decades, evangelical (protestants) have shifted from low levels to high levels of republicanism compared to Catholics who had initially encompassed high levels of democratic identification now are shifting to low levels of democratic identification (Brooks and Manza 5). Evangelical Christians have undergone a political realignment becoming one of the most loyal of the Republican party constituencies meanwhile, Catholics have been transformed from a stalwart contingent of the democrats new deal coalition to a true swing constituency (Olsen and Green 3). Multiple articles point to this

### Introduction cont.

shift of Republicans becoming more Republican and Democrats becoming less democratic but still supporting the ideals of the Democratic party. This may be in part due to the strength in moral values being enhanced over the decades. As seen in the 2004 election, just over a third of the weekly attendees said that "moral values" were the most important motivation for their vote more than twice the number of "moral values" voters among less frequent attendees (Olson and Green 4). Moral values have a strong connection between individuals and the political party that they align themselves with. An individual will agree more with the party that they feel aligns more with their own personal moral values. Another study found that churchgoers were less apt to vote for a Democratic candidate than those of frequent churchgoers especially those that were more highly educated (Orum 15). More specifically this was during the 1968 presidential race with George Wallace being a Democratic candidate that more educated churchgoers were less likely to support. Conclusively the republican coalitions depend heavily on evangelical protestants, latter-day saints, and traditionalist from major religious communities (Guth et al 17). On the other hand, democrat coalitions depend heavily on religious minorities and secular citizens with the majority of their support being from religious modernists and centrists (Guth et al 17).

### Hypotheses and Methods

**H1: The higher the importance of religion is to an individual the more likely they are to politically participate.**

**H2: Religious belief causes an individual to associate voting as a duty rather than a choice.**

**H3: An individual is more inclined to vote Republican when the individual has attended religious services.**

This study examines data from the 2016 American National Election Survey (ANES) Time Series in order to evaluate if religious affiliation and beliefs have an impact on political participation. Looking at the present data within this survey I focus on the relationship that more religious affiliation may lead to more political participation. With the utilization of frequencies and correlation tests using SPSS, I intend to determine whether or not my hypotheses are correct.

All data was gathered through the use of the 2016 ANES Time Series then tested by the statistic analytical program SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Frequencies and correlation tests were used to test my hypotheses.

### Results

#### Hypothesis 1

		POST: SUMMARY - DID R VOTE IN 2016	PRE: IS RELIGION IMPORTANT PART OF R LIFE
POST: SUMMARY - DID R VOTE IN 2016	Pearson Correlation	1	-.025
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.154
	N	3331	3314
PRE: IS RELIGION IMPORTANT PART OF R LIFE	Pearson Correlation	-.025	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.154	
	N	3314	4243

Table 1 shows a correlation graph of a summary of if participants voted in 2016 and if religion is an important part of R(participant's) life. As seen there is no significance between these two variables from the p-value = .154.

#### Hypothesis 2

		PRE: RELIGION PROVIDES GUIDANCE IN DAY-TO-DAY LIVING	PRE: SUMMARY - VOTING AS DUTY OR CHOICE
PRE: RELIGION PROVIDES GUIDANCE IN DAY-TO-DAY LIVING	Pearson Correlation	1	-.092**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	2769	2763
PRE: SUMMARY - VOTING AS DUTY OR CHOICE	Pearson Correlation	-.092**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	2763	4254

Table 2 shows a correlation graph of religion providing guidance in day-to-day living and a summary of voting as a duty or choice. As seen there is significance with the p-value = .000 between these two variables and there being a weak Pearson correlation of -.092\*\*.

#### Hypothesis 3

		PRE: EVER ATTEND CHURCH OR RELIGIOUS SERVICES	PRE: SUMMARY - PARTY ID
PRE: EVER ATTEND CHURCH OR RELIGIOUS SERVICES	Pearson Correlation	1	-.155**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	4251	4233
PRE: SUMMARY - PARTY ID	Pearson Correlation	-.155**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	4233	4247

Table 3 shows a correlation graph of participants ever attending a church or religious service and a summary of party identification. As seen there is significance with the p-value = .000 between these two variables and a slight Pearson correlation of -.155\*\*.

### Conclusions

The results for hypothesis 1 do not support the hypothesis because there is no significant correlation between the two variables of the participant assigning importance to religion in their life and if the participant voted in 2016.

The results for hypothesis 2 show that there is a significant correlation between if an individual views religion as providing guidance in day-to-day living and if the individual views voting as a duty or choice. This is shown by the significance value being .000. Now looking at the Pearson correlation value of -.092 this is considered as a weak to slight correlation.

The results for hypothesis 3 show that there is a significant correlation between an individual ever attending church or religious service and their political party identification. This is shown by the significance value being .000. Evaluating the Pearson correlation there is a value of -.155 which is viewed as a slight correlation.

These findings help support that there is a correlation between an individual looking towards religion as guidance in their day-to-day life and the individual assigning voting as their duty or choice alongside if an individual has ever attended church or a religious service correlates with their political party identification. Overall there is a correlation between the way an individual views religion and their political participation. However, there are many factors that play a huge role in voting. Religion is not the only component that individuals calculate into how there are going to vote in the coming government election.

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