

Religious Influence on Political Ideology

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Abstract:

The purpose of this research paper is to study and investigate the influence religious ties have on our ideological way of thinking. Ultimately I aim to discover if there is a trend in certain religious practices with the way in which our ideological and political opinions develop over time. This study was conducted on 131 anonymous survey participants who were asked questions regarding: party identification, religious background, current events, and demographics. Though my findings were somewhat inconclusive there is a slight trend present that supports my hypothesis.

Introduction

The topic I am most interested in within the Political Science field is that of religion and politics. Majoring in Political Science and minoring in Religious Studies has piqued my interest in this topic even further; more specifically, how religion influences individual ideological identification. I was raised in a very religious household with strong conservative political views, but my personal political views were shaped in an unsuspecting way. Originally I assumed that my parents were smarter than I was at the time and accepted their opinions on most all matters as my own including religion and politics. It was not until high school that a very influential teacher urged my fellow students and me to research and question our own belief systems whatever they may be. Outside of a few like-minded friends, my rural Texas hometown consisted of political views derived directly from how individuals were raised. I have since converted to a completely different sect of my original religion and hold extremely left-leaning political views. This was a complete shock to a large portion of the community because I rarely shy away from sharing my convictions. It seems to be a common pattern that people tend to follow their parent's examples of voting preferences; however, this is not always the case. I am interested in exactly what factors are most important in evolving the American voters' political beliefs. These challenges arise as a result of the varying principles associated with a person's different views and how those views influence understandings of what they believe at the individual level. Likewise, It is difficult to pinpoint exactly what aspects of your ideology were formed as a result of your religion. I did complete a survey in a previous course to gain more insight on what factors individuals believe most heavily influence their political opinions. This brought many different results and answers, and I would love to delve further into this topic and have the opportunity to specify which aspects of religious systems change our outlook on things that are not directly related to religion, specifically political ideology.

Topic and Research Question

With all of these factors in mind, it must be asked: how do we come to believe what we believe and how much direct influence does religion have on our political ideology? These ideas and convictions begin as early as our developmental stages by way of our parental figures and continue to evolve with the experiences of our daily lives. Likewise, it can often be considered just as commonly that individuals pursue their own ideals apart from their environmental upbringing and form extremely dissimilar political opinions from those of their parents. My main desire is to evaluate where these deviations from followership occur with respect to the parental figures of an individual. I aim to find what factors hold the most influence in developing our political ideologies. My main goal in this research is to focus on the religious aspect of decision making and how our religious beliefs or potential non-beliefs impact our ideology. As a general research topic, I aim to explore the fluidity and variance of how individuals arrive at the conclusion of their specific political belief systems. From my personal experiences of political exposure as part of high school curricula, my classmates and I found ourselves defending our belief systems so much so that it felt as if our own morality depended on it. At this point in time, it would be an accurate assumption that young high school students likely have little insight on political ideologies. These beliefs were so vigorously inherent to many students, and it is due this that I aim to evaluate each developmental stage of political identification. With this scope in mind, how can it be that such politically and religiously motivated debates arise even at the developing stages of our individualized thought processes?

The broad topic I am most interested in looking into is how people come to develop their individual ideological belief systems over their lifespan. This is a subject I have long been curious about which stems from my personal experience and observations. It seems that from a young age many children express very passionate ideas regarding politics, which is odd considering their lack of sourcing for information and life experience. This leads me to believe that there is a connection between developing an ideology with the opinions of parents and the religious institutions they choose to raise

children in, if any. At a certain point ideological beliefs appear to be inherent rather than learned carrying as much strength as one's morality. I aim to find out just how something you would think to be a general opinion is expressed to be permanently ingrained in one's personhood. I am curious to know just why some develop contradictory beliefs to those they were raised in while others conform to the opinions and teachings of their parents. I suspect institutionalized religion to be a key factor in shaping the public's political belief systems.

One can only predict that in a largely conservative, rural town the driving forces behind such passionate ideological stances must be attributed to the beliefs of their parents and religious views. It seems that these religious values tend to evolve or are emphasized as we see with the evangelical backing of Donald Trump. This question leads me to look at numerous other factors that influence political opinions; however, it seems that religion may be considered the majority leader and driving force for a vast group of people behind any political decision. In many cases, these decisions can be considered extremist, and I want to understand more of what individuals believe the basis for their decisions to be. Of course, as we get older we gain more experience and our outlook on certain aspects of life may change, but overall it seems to be the trend that political ideology typically remains unaltered across time. There must be some driving force behind this consistency and dedication because now more than ever we see political passion fueled by religious beliefs within our system. Some of these political and religious beliefs fall on the spectrum as extremist, and it is due this that I am pursuant of how religion shapes political opinions. My aim is to uncover what I believe to be the driving force behind our political views over time by asking, "How does religion influence political ideology?"

Literature Review

In 'The Righteous Mind' Haidt provides a wealth of insight for ideas I have used to develop my own theory regarding religious influence on political ideology. Haidt goes as far as to say that people's moral judgments can be considered to be our intuition that is effortless and without reason. This is referred to as "the elephant", which is the part of our minds separate from "the rider". The elephant is comprised of our initial emotions and quick judgments used in our everyday lives. The rider is the controlled part of the human brain cognition that is used for logical and critical thinking, which is where our rationale comes into play. When determining political judgments the human mind automatically defers to the elephant to rely on our own intuition. According to Haidt since intuitions come first if there is no reason to change this belief then we do not. I am curious as to how these intuitions develop and it is my theory that this answer can be found in the teachings of our moral upbringing. I also share in Haidt's ideas on why it is important to gain further understanding of this topic with his explanation on why good people are often faced with such a strong divide when it comes to religion and politics. (Haidt, 2013)

'Predisposed: Liberals, Conservatives and the Biology of Political Differences' by John Hibbing, Kevin Smith, and John Alford (2013) aids in outlining the complexity of not only the differences in political opinion, but how exactly people can come to reach their own beliefs is due partly to our biological makeup. Outside of our conscious thought there is another element of this issue that does not involve upbringing or various life experiences. This explains that there may not any amount of teaching, explanation or reasoning to help one side understand the other considering that the issue may just come down to the fact that our opponent simply sees and experiences the world differently. Rather than attempting to enlighten one side or the other it would be more beneficial to understand our differences and allow us to respect our presumed biological and ideological makeup. (Hibbing, Smith, & Alford, 2013)

'Partisan Hearts and Minds' draws the conclusion that the development and transition of our religious beliefs along with our political beliefs are very similar. Contrary to my theory the authors suggest that individuals develop their own partisan identities in early adulthood rather than early childhood. Like religion, our political preferences either strongly persist or might have slight changes over time though this was not the case for myself. This book will be helpful to my research in

understanding those who had a different experience than me in essentially maintaining their religious and ideological values throughout their lives. (Green, Palmquist, & Schickler, 2002)

Ebersole (1960) outlines in 'Religion and Politics' exactly how involved religious groups are in politics regardless of the framers' intent to keep church and state separated. This article gives a great background of the history of religious groups involvement in our political system. It is very interesting to me that this country was founded on rebelling against a government controlled by religion and today we seem to be slowly moving toward exactly what the founding fathers rebelled against though this is very unlikely thanks to the Protestant movement. This journal states that on most social issues the policy of the church tends to be more liberal than the attitudes of the parishioners. I would definitely agree with this statement in that the core beliefs of the church tend to lean left while the church-goers beliefs do not. It was explained that though we no longer have strictly religion centered political parties in America, we do see elements of the remains of these movements of anti-Catholic and anti-Jewish waves. I found it interesting and true from experience that among the Christian faith, Catholics are the most unified though divided in their voting preferences. On the other hand, I expect extreme divided Protestants to be more unified in their voting patterns. This article reaffirms that, "there is some indication of a relation between religious affiliation and party affiliation..." (Ebersole, 1960) I found the many studies listed in this article regarding voting patterns of Catholics and Protestants very interesting. This seems to support that Catholics are more Democratic and while initial preferences of Protestants seemed to have Democratic leanings, this did not show up in their voting patterns as they voted largely Republican. Even further, American Jews who were originally Republican are now overwhelmingly Democratic. This offers an explanation to my question in stating, "Without consciously voting as Catholics or Jews, people tend to vote like others who have had similar experiences and like the people with whom they associate most intimately." (Ebersole, 1960) Though these are common patterns there is not enough data to study the influence on Presidential elections considering there have been no Jewish and few Catholic presidential candidates. (Ebersole, 1960)

'Religion and Politics' by Gordon Graham (1983) was very intriguing in that it seems in today's American political climate evangelicals are pushing for integrating religion and politics though there would be and there is outrage when anyone of Middle Eastern descent or Islamic faith appear in American politics. "The question for most of them is not whether religion ought to be involved in politics but only how far Christianity ought to be." (Graham, 1983) This article will benefit my research in bringing in elements of Middle Eastern religions including Islam and Hinduism. This seems to draw the conclusion that other countries are of the belief that laws should be based on their own religious beliefs, which is Present in America but not necessarily to the extent we see in other countries. Graham also warns about the danger of allowing religion to have too much influence on political systems explaining that, "It is not the content of Islam or Hinduism but the fact that these are religious faiths which make them unsatisfactory bases for the terms of political association." (Graham, 1983) He then makes the argument for the involvement of religion in our political system. This will help in addressing both sides of the argument and points out that even though people may be forced to follow the rules of a regulated society this does not necessarily make them any more religious if the intent behind following the rules is to only stay out of trouble with the government. (Graham, 1983)

'Five ways religion can influence political beliefs' outlines five ways religious beliefs can influence political opinions. These include: when people convert from their initial religion and change their beliefs, people who begin with no religious affiliation who convert into one and change their political beliefs, people who have no religious conversion but maintain their parent's religion and apply those beliefs to political opinions, people who are actively religious but let religious beliefs have no effect on political views, and people who let their religion rule their political beliefs or lead them to reject politics altogether. Though this has little to say about the specifics regarding religion and its connection to politics it does suggest that our religious backgrounds have an effect on how we view politics. This is

helpful in explaining the many avenues people may take when navigating their political and religious beliefs. (DiDonato, 2013)

'Explained: Evangelicals, the religious right and Trump' outlines the origins of the "religious right", which I think could be argued to be the most religiously motivated extreme group of voters. It seems that this group began through televangelism, which continues to have great influence today with Franklin Graham, Pat Robertson and Joel Osteen. Though technically there is no longer strictly religiously driven political parties this article suggests that the religious right's aim is to take control of the Republican party making it the religious rights party. This points out the irony of Trump's many moral discrepancies that the religious right does not seem to bat an eye at seeming to have an unwavering loyalty to the republican party regardless of what moral standards they claim to have. (Kohls, 2018) On the contrary, they double down in Trump's defense making this movement much more dangerous than most may realize. Though this is helpful information I would love to uncover what about their religion specifically leads the "religious right" to such extreme views.

This article will be very helpful in what I must control for in my research. This lists family, gender, religion, race and ethnicity, and region as key factors that influence and shape political attitudes. This article suggests that we tend to follow our parents' views when developing political opinions. Something that I am interested in looking into is the claim that the more politically active your family is the more likely we are to hold the same beliefs. Gender has heavy influence on voting habits especially in regards to women in that the Democratic party holds more beliefs in support of women's rights issues. Next, religious influence studies further showed that Catholics usually lean more liberal on economic issues than the "religious right". Our ethnic identity also has tremendous impact on who we vote for. African Americans are known to be strongly Democratic but I was unaware of the difference among Latinos in that Cuban Americans tend to vote Republican while Mexican Americans usually vote Democratic. Another large factor in political identity lies in geography. It seems that most on the coasts are more liberal than those in the middle of the country. Our country is no longer as black and white as it used to be with the "solid south". Obviously looking further into this factor would reveal more information especially regarding rural and urban regions. ("What Factors Shape Political Attitudes?", n.d.)

'Factors Influencing Student Political Opinion' provides a focus on college students, which could also be another interesting factor in developing political ideology. It seems to be a trend that college students develop more liberal ideas over time and education. A straw poll was taken along with a questionnaire to determine their political preferences and factors that may influence their choice. Students were more strongly Republican leaning when unit-family voting where the father consistently supported Republican presidential candidates. On the other hand those brought up in more Democratic families tend to be more flexible in their beliefs. This book explains results concluded on several other areas of politics showing the variation among students. (Young, Kimball & Douglas, 1938)

Theory

It is my preliminary theory that while our parental figures may introduce us to American politics, religion is the driving force behind our ingrained ideology and sustains these beliefs throughout our lives. It seems to be a common trend that our parents political ideologies are imprinted on us at a young age; however, I do not believe that our parents' opinions are enough to sustain such strong views over time. I predict that if we are brought up in a religion that teaches us to be open minded and empowers us to develop independent thought while simultaneously encouraging us to be sympathetic towards others this will lead to more liberal or moderate ideological beliefs. On the other hand, if people are brought up in very rigid religious system that is well-known to be politically active, I would expect them to side with more conservative ideological beliefs. Religions such as Judaism and Catholicism would likely fall under religions who express more empathy for people. Observations lead me to infer that these two religious

organizations tend to be more liberal with regard to social issues and more centrist or indifferent on economic issues with the main priority being focused on the overall well-being of people resulting in the support of more liberal or moderate political candidates. Inversely, in known evangelical Protestant denominations such as southern Baptist or Pentecostal where followers are adamantly more conservative regarding both social and economic issues, it is expected for them to be strong conservative supporters. I think this theory would best explain my own personal experiences considering I grew up in an overwhelmingly Protestant, southern Baptist community where the churches were clear about their political stance. Religions who operate based on fear tie in with the conservative method of legislating based on fear and reluctance to change. This helps explain the depth of our ideological beliefs when these rigid religious and political views are consistently repeated from early childhood development to stages of young adulthood. Of course, it is no surprise as to why we can have such strong ideological opinions even when we have done little research on politics itself. I can remember religion being a main topic of discussion during these debates, and, for the most part, arguments seemed irrational. I think this could be related to Haidt's suggestion that people do not use reason. The only reason used is sought out to defend and project personal convictions rather than using rational logic to discern the truth. It is my theory that there are, in fact, underlying intuitions connected with morality that motivates ideological views. Our views are in fact partly derived from our morality, which is in part self constructed while partly constructed by moral institutions like the church. It is the concept of morality that inhibits us from making conscious decisions in regards to people's political beliefs.

It is my theory that while there could potentially be an infinite list of factors that could potentially influence our ideology, religion introduces the bedrock of our core belief systems including those involving politics. Often it is parents who introduce their children to political issues; however, if they are religiously active, then this is the driving force behind our ideological beliefs becoming ingrained within our own identity. Though it may be common for people to inherit ideology from our parents it is not likely that these are impactful enough to sustain a belief system unlike that of an institution with knowledge regarding our fate in the afterlife. I suspect that religions supporting individual thought and openness to new ideas will not directly influence opinions, but will conversely allow followers to form an opinion based on critical thinking regarding what is supported by their religious beliefs. This thought process would likely lead to more liberal or moderate political beliefs. Additionally, church dogma that centralizes around social issues will likely result in more liberal followers. On the other end of the spectrum, churches who intertwine church and state will heavily compel its followers to be of the same belief system. Those involved in this system will generally be more motivated by fear rather than the process of independent thought and will likely develop more conservative ideological beliefs as a result of this.

I expect Judaism and Catholicism to commonly express more empathy for people and focus on social issues. Personal experiences with these two religious organizations lead me to believe that these will tend to be more liberal with social issues and moderate or left leaning on the overall political spectrum with less concern for economic issues. Contradictory to these, evangelical Protestant denominations are known to lean right with some branches being highly involved in politics and taking a much more rigid approach to social issues than that of the Catholic and Jewish population. If brought up in one of these institutions, the ideals of these religions are consistently engrained, which would explain such polarizing outcomes and differences in development. It is my theory that it is the religious institutions that are connected with our understanding of morality, which motivates ideological views. Haidt discusses that our moral judgments can be considered to be as extreme as our intuition in being effortless and without reason. He classifies this as "the elephant", which is made up of our initial emotions and judgements used daily in our reactions. "The rider" separate from "the elephant" is controlled and used for logical and critical thinking as a part of the human brain cognition. When presented with a political judgment we automatically defer to the elephant to rely on our moral judgments

and intuition. Haidt explains that since these institutions come first and are so deeply ingrained that if we have no reason to doubt or change our beliefs then we do not. Looking to core religious dogma of Catholicism, Protestantism, and Judaism I have determined which are more likely to have liberal or conservative leanings. I expect those active in Protestant denominations allow religion and the views of their church to shape their ideology while Catholic and Jewish members are less likely to receive direction from religious leaders in which candidates to vote for in various elections in order to comply with religious standards. I am cautious of including the Islamic faith in this sample considering the much smaller number of participants available as Judaism and Christianity are much more prevalent in the United States; however, I believe this to be a necessary inclusion and may present some surprising results. I am interested to review the results of those practicing Islam as I would expect this to be a more liberal leaning group of voters though Islam as a whole is generally considered to be a very conservative faith. This can be tested by doing a broad, anonymous survey of the population to determine religious connections with voting patterns.

Hypotheses

I plan to test this theory that religion has a major impact on political ideology by identifying a trend among religious practices. One of my hypotheses is that those who practice Judaism and Catholicism will report voting patterns that favor more liberal candidates. I will test my hypothesis that Judaism and Catholicism develop beliefs that result in the election of more liberal candidates while certain Protestant denominations foster very conservative ideologies compelling their followers to elect higher rates of republican candidates. In examining core church doctrine and dogma I predict that Catholicism supports more liberal teachings with emphasis on social issues on poverty, equality, and charity. On the other hand, Protestantism stresses much less emphasis on social issues in the United States and place more concern on monetary value. Outside of the abortion debate Another hypothesis is that Protestant evangelicals much like the ones we saw adamantly supporting the Trump campaign will hold overwhelmingly more conservative ideologies.

Key Variables and Conceptualization

The two key variables I will be focusing on are the coexistence of political ideologies and religious beliefs. Based on my theory, our political ideologies are largely shaped by our religious beliefs that are typically the primary organization to which we put our faith in. For the sake of this research the dependent variable will be considered to be political ideology as I predict it to be strongly influenced by religious views and background. There are many other variables that I will need to control for because obviously there are many outside factors that have the potential to shape the way we think and view certain issues. I will definitely have to take these into consideration when observing a sample. Some other factors that can potentially have an impact on people's political opinions are geography, education, peer group, political activeness, and whether or not they are from rural or urban areas. In the grand scheme of things I do not think these other variables carry much weight in the initial development of people's political ideology, however, they may lead to some further insight or change of perspective in the future. This will pose some problems in isolating the sole importance of religious beliefs on one's ideology.

This research will centralize around the dependent variable, political ideology, as I expect there to be strong influence by the independent variable, religious views. Political ideology is often considered to be equivalent to party identification. However, what I am interested in is the ideology behind the political party, which allows for a much more in depth analysis of overall views. Ideology will allow me to view the inherent values and ideas that drive political outcomes along with the various views that are instilled by religious institutions. I am limiting religious views to those considered to be Abrahamic faiths, which include: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Abrahamic religions are those whose followers hold the prophet

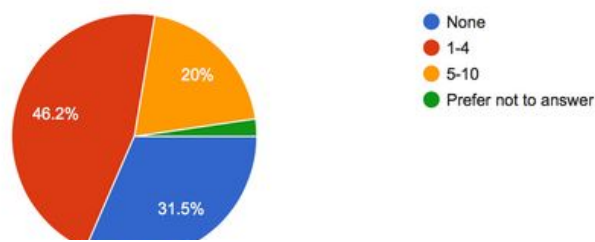
Abraham of high religious significance and spiritual development as all three religions stemmed from Abraham and his descendents. I am splitting Christianity up between Protestantism and Catholicism considering there are many more similarities between that of Judaism and Catholicism. This will provide for a better analysis in gathering data considering the extreme differences between Catholicism and various Protestant denominations. I may choose to individualize a few Protestant denominations to determine whether or not there are significant differences among the many denominations though I do not expect this to be the case and cannot place too much emphasis on this considering the excessive number of denominations within Protestantism. Other variables I will need to control for might include: geography, education, peer group, political activeness and if the participant is from a rural or urban town. Though I do not expect these control variables to carry much weight in the development of people's political ideology, there may be some influence contributed. I plan to measure these through a survey format with various questions determining where on the spectrum each participant's political beliefs are along with an intake of religious practice history and upbringing. Questions regarding religion may include weighting the importance of charity and fighting social injustices. Ideology will be more easily measured to determine whether one can be categorized as a "liberal", "conservative" or "moderate". This can be done by asking policy based questions and determining the importance of the issues proposed. I plan to measure ideology on a scale of various party platform viewpoints with answer choices reflecting both ends of the spectrum as well as some inbetween. Religious beliefs will be measured through a number of questions reflecting various differences among the religions being studied along with any other religious experiences and changes of practice participants have undergone. I think it will be easiest to I may run into complications in studying a participant who was brought up in one religion but later converted to another outside of their faith, though I do not expect this to happen often.

Collection of Data

Data was collected for this research by developing a thirty - two question, anonymous survey that was posted online. This was done in order to obtain a collection of voluntary, random participants to avoid a biased selection or unrepresentative pool of results. My survey was created through Google drive and posted publicly on Facebook where it was shared by numerous people allowing me to reach people all across the United States. Responses were received from various places including: Louisiana; New York; Mississippi; Florida; Oklahoma; Texas; Arkansas; Virginia; Tennessee; Oregon; New Mexico; Montana; Kansas; Georgia; District of Columbia; Colorado; Arizona and Alabama. I felt that this was the best strategy in order to reach an array of people not only limited to Oklahoma or the south. I am glad that I chose this route considering the diversity of responses I received, which provided for a more accurate collection of data and results. The survey questions consisted of various questions ranging from political views, religious background, social issues and demographics. Theses more in - depth questions were necessary in order to determine just how liberal or conservative a participant might be rather than simply going off of what they perceive themselves to be. It was crucial for me to determine each religious background and experiences outside of their given religion considering that our experiences play a large part in our developmental thinking. As the following pie chart shows - religion plays a significant role in the lives of the majority of my participants.

18. In the last month how many times have you attended church or synagogue?

130 responses



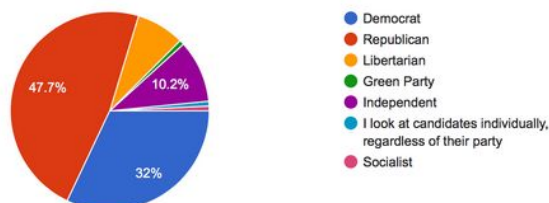
Results

I would consider the results I received to be inconclusive, though I do believe valuable information was gained. Out of 131 participants the results largely

consisted of Protestants at 71.6 percent, Catholics at 10 percent, Jews at 0.8 percent while the remainder were unaffiliated with Abrahamic religions. Unfortunately I was unable to gather any data on any individuals who practice the Islamic faith and only one participant was identified as Jewish. Overall I was happy with my results in receiving a variety of political input with 55.1 percent identifying with conservative ideology, 32.3 percent holding a liberal ideology, and 12.6 percent claiming a Libertarian ideology. When asked about their political party there were 47.7 percent who were Republican, 32 percent Democrat, 10.2 percent Independent and 7.8 percent Libertarian. It is difficult to assume the accuracy of these results while although Protestantism is the most populated religious practice in the United States, the numbers I received are not nearly proportional to the religious distribution of these three practices in the United States. I do not consider my hypotheses to be proven considering the unsatisfactory group of participants. One statistic I did not outline with expectations prior to receiving results was the Libertarian political platform. Of those who identified as Libertarian, 8 identified as Protestants while 1 practiced Catholicism. This was supportive of my theory and hypotheses in that Protestant doctrine is less concerned with social issues than Catholic dogma. This statistic provides an interesting take; however, I cannot assume that Protestantism produces more Libertarians because I am unable to determine if social issues or economic issues hold more importance with Libertarians. There were just three Catholics who identified as Independents with either liberal or libertarian ideological views while several Protestants identified at Independents, all claimed to have conservative ideologies. I do see a trend in the results, and I believe that if given a larger sample size of Catholic and Jewish participants, my hypotheses would be widely supported. The results I received show an overwhelming conservative base within Protestantism at 63 percent conservative and 26 percent liberal. While there was not a majority, the liberal population grew by 20 percent leaving Catholicism split fairly even at 46 percent liberal and 53 percent conservative. As previously stated there was only one participant who practiced Judaism and identified as conservative. A large majority of the participants answered that they have attended a church or synagogue on a semi - regular or regular basis with 46.2 percent attending one to four times in the past month and 20 percent visiting five to ten times in the last month. This determined a large majority of religious importance for the participants which further supports the importance and value religion holds in determining political ideology.

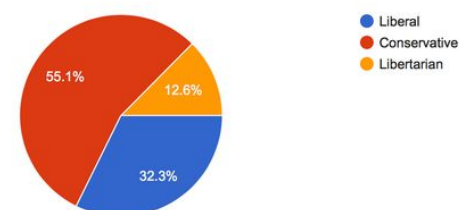
1. What political party do you most align with?

128 responses



3. What is your political ideology?

127 responses



Going into this research I expected to discover a correlation between liberalism and how often people have experienced religious practices outside of their own; however, I was not able to conclude anything from this question considering the overwhelming majority of people answered that they occasionally experienced other religious practices outside of their own practice. Almost all respondents answered that they participated in some form of political activity with their parents; most of which involved the discussion of current events. Unfortunately, this particular scenario is not beneficial for my results due to the increased likelihood of parents' projection of political opinions on their children during topics of conversation involving current events. This commonality suggests that parental projection has

the overwhelming potential to influence a child's political stance later in life; thus, making it difficult to discern the influence of religion once these views are developed. Contrarily, I was surprised to discover that only 16 participants evaluated their parents as Democrats with an overwhelming 78 sets of parents being Republicans. With such disproportion within this survey, further statistical analysis suggests that a potential outside factor has invoked influence on participants. While the ratio of Republican parents and Republican participants was pretty evenly proportional, the data suggests that approximately 16 parent sets of participants are democrats whereas 32 percent of the survey-goers evaluate themselves as being liberal. With such a significant increase to the amount of participants evaluating themselves as liberal, it is my belief that this influence is brought on by the outside presence of religion. Upon review of party identification strength based on voting and policy issues, it seems as though most conservatives are, in fact, moderate with regard to social issues. Interestingly enough, the majority of participants described themselves as currently living in cities considered to be urban and suburban with many holding the common misconception that larger cities tend to be far more left-leaning; however, this was not suggested by the data. Furthermore, when asked about general population demographics, over 60 percent of participants evaluated their hometown as being rural; a key characteristic that may be critical in the developmental stages of political thought. This particular trend sheds light on the fact that most of the survey participants consider themselves to be Republican. Another interesting trend that I found to be influential was the generational shift in ideology. Considering that the majority of survey participants are classified as millennials; there is notable potentiality for the occurrence of liberal progression with respect to younger generations as evidenced through the drastic difference in Democrat parents compared to liberal participants.

Conclusion

Though I have not received adequate data on all three religious faiths of my focus, I believe it can be concluded that Protestantism overwhelmingly consists of a majority conservative base. On the other hand, Catholicism shows a much more evenly divided makeup between liberals and conservatives with only a small majority identifying as conservatives. While the significance of this study may seem vague or without purpose, it is my personal transition and experience that showed me the importance to understand this pattern. It is not merely enough for us to have strong conviction of our belief system and political opinions; without knowing where our ideas come from and what influences them, we cannot have a complete understanding of ourselves and what internal biases we may possess unknowingly. As individuals of independent thought, we deserve to know how our upbringing within religious institutions has a direct influence on our thought processes. Full awareness of self along with how and where we receive information is the best possible outcome of this research project. Shedding light on religious institutions' influence of individualistic thought and political beliefs will only allow for more informed, critical thought. It seems that while the United States is supportive of the separation of church and state, religious institutions continue to have an influence on our core political ideologies. It made sense to me to choose this research topic given my background and transition through political parties and religious institutions. Given my experience, I felt that this topic could bring necessary insight to not only what we believe, but what potentially causes us to believe the way we do.

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Appendix

1. What political party do you most align with?
2. If you answered (Democrat, Republican, Libertarian or Green Party) to the extent that you are aware how strongly do you agree with your political party's platform?
3. What is your political ideology?
4. Which of the following best describes your voting frequency?
5. If you are a registered Democrat or Republican, how often do you vote for someone outside of your political party?
6. If you are a registered Democrat or Republican, how often do you vote in your political party's primaries?
7. What is your main source of news? (Be specific)
8. What activities did you engage in with your parents?
9. What political party does/did your mother align with?

10. What political party does/did your father align with?
11. What religious group do you belong to?
12. Which of the following best describes your satisfaction with the rights of same-sex couples in the U.S.?
13. If dissatisfied with the rights of same-sex couples in America, which of the following best describes your thoughts?
14. What best describes your thoughts on same-sex couples?
15. What are your views on the legality of abortion
16. Which best aligns with your view on the legalization of marijuana?
17. How would you describe the importance of religion in your daily life? (Gallup)
18. In the last month how many times have you attended church or synagogue?
19. Which of the following comes closest to your views about the extent to which religious beliefs should be reflected in the U.S. government?
20. Which of the following best describes your views on poverty in the U.S.?
21. Which of the following best describes your views on the main cause of poverty in the U.S.?
22. Which best describes your views on U.S. government involvement in reducing poverty?
23. What best describes your religious transition?
24. Which best describes your religious experience?
25. What best describes your attitude towards your own religion?
26. What is your age?
27. What is your sex?
28. What is your ethnicity?
29. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
30. What state do you reside in?
31. What best describes the town you currently reside in?

32. What best describes your hometown?