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Introduction

Through this survey project, it is my intention to analyze the intersection of an individual's religiosity and their tendency to support or oppose governmental programs and Trump's political platform. From my personal experience and the information I have attained in my life, the more religious a person is, the more apt they are to hold conservative ideologies. Based on this information, it is safe to assume that the support for liberal-leaning programs would be considerably lower than their non-religious counterparts. However, based on my understanding of religion—specifically the Christian faith—an essential pillar is treating those around you with a love that reflects the love Jesus gives to his followers. Therefore, it should follow that federally funded programs would have an outpouring of support from this population considering they, generally, work to provide assistance to those in a low socio-economic range. This conflicting dichotomy is what encouraged me to study these two topics in conjunction with one another from a sample population at EIU. I am hoping that by evaluating the results of this survey I can gain a finer understanding of the way that religious people affect and are effected by governmental policies.

To better understand the results of this survey, it is essential to gain background information on both federally funded programs and religion in America. Rawlings explains that medical graduates who relied on federally funded programs were more likely to set up their practice in socioeconomically disenfranchised areas compared to their traditional counterparts (1988, 102). This illuminates the idea that when care is shown to people, they have an inclination to continue on that consideration and selflessness to others. Additionally, a more recent study evaluated the influence that federally funded programs have on adolescents who are either pregnant, parents, or both. The findings show that when teenagers were exposed to valuable and applicable information regarding contraception and the corresponding risks, those same teenagers were more likely to utilize “effective contraception; increased use of regular child care; and [exhibited] short-term decreases in repeated pregnancy” (Kan, et al., 2012, 5). From this, it can be estimated that the more resources that are offered to people—especially at risk young people—the higher the chance that they will apply that information to their lives in a positive manner. Moreover, Olson discusses the vital role that culture plays in regard to understanding the relationship that exists between religion and politics, and that while this is an essential attribute, it is quite difficult to objectively define (2011, 641). Culture is a distinctive set of attributes surrounding a particular population—geographically, ethnically, sexually, as well as other distinctive factors—therefore it can be challenging to encapsulate the general ideologies and opinions of religious individuals in the United States. This, coupled with the notion that society is ever-changing, makes it challenging to draw universally applicable developments in this particular field of study. These analyses illustrate the idea that defining religion and its relationship to culture and society is not an idea that is black and white.

Therefore, understanding religion and policy will be more about finding averages and generalizations and less about drawing permanent conclusions about those communities.

Methods

In order to analyze if and how one's religiosity impacts their support or opposition for governmental programs and orders, I have cross tabulated several policies based questions from the student survey. Initially, I have determined the party identification of religious participants versus their non-religious counterparts; which set up a foundation regarding political affiliation. Next, I examined the intersection of identifying with a religion and supporting or opposing policies on President Trump's agenda. These particular questions can be telling because it will be able to give me an idea about their perceived approval of the current political administration. More specifically on policy, I have taken a closer look at whether religious identifying individuals believe abortion should be legal, legal under certain circumstances, or illegal. Following this, I ran a report on the support or opposition that religiously-affiliated individuals have towards very specific, modern policies such as defending DREAMERS, building a wall on the southern border, and limitations on rights for the LGBTQ+ community. These results, coupled with the previous analyses, will be able to give me a better understanding of the ways religion impacts EIU students.

After examining these questions and their appropriate results, it became clear to me that there are still some gaps in my desired narrative. If I had the opportunity to revise this survey, I would like to add a question that implored the degree to which the church should be integrated with the state. I believe that this would be able to add another, arguably more

telling, degree of information about religion and politics. Slade suggests that the more involved government becomes in the lives of Americans, “it gains powerful new levers for exercising control over people of faith” which can be an abuse of power (2017, 18-27). Therefore, it can be gathered that some people—specifically those with a religious preference—would prefer an integration of government and religion.

I argue that the cross examination of religion and government programs and policies exists under the “importance model” as described by Clawson and Oxley (2017, 98). This model suggests that important concepts are weighed more heavily in the minds of voters based on their interpretations of laws and political issues. It is imperative to understand that what is viewed as an important concept varies from person to person and therefore sampling may not provide an accurate conclusion for these subjects. Considering opinions are inherently subjective, views held by those of religious faith vary depending on bias from church, biblical interpretations, and family socialization.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The results of the survey indicated that significantly more religious EIU students identify with the republican party over the democratic party. In fact, 42.5% of religious-identifying individuals identify with the republican party while only 6.4% of non-religious students identify with the republican party. 29.2% of religious students and 55.7% of non-religious students identify with the democratic party. Originally, I was going to focus only on the republican and democratic parties in my analysis of party identification, however, the percentage of independent college students was too high to be dismissed. A notable 23.2% of religious students and 29.1% of non-religious students politically identify as independents. I argue that

these percentages are so high for several reasons. Initially, many young people choose not to identify with a political party because of the high levels of polarization exhibited in modern politics (Neely, 2004). Secondly, it is important to understand that identifying as an independent does not give clarity to the specific policy opinions these students may possess; therefore, there can only be assumptions about the potential politics of a person or a group. In future research, it would serve to outline several independent parties such as the Green Party and the Libertarian Party. This would give direction, which would assist in further understanding the results of the survey.

Further discussion of political parties comes from the general approval and disapproval of the political parties—specifically the republican and democratic parties. There was a statistically significant difference between the approval/disapproval of parties with respect to a student's religiosity. 38.47% of religious students and 62.57% of non-religious students either approve or strongly approve of the democratic party. Furthermore, 58.54% of religious students and 37.42% of non-religious students disapprove of the democratic party. In regard to the republican party, there is a more drastic difference of approval between religious and non-religious students. 48.79% of religious students compared to only 12.88% of non-religious students approve of the republican party. Moreover, 51.2% of religious and a whopping 87.12% of non-religious students disapprove of the republican party. There is a closer percentage of approvals and disapprovals, respectively, among religious students in comparison to their non-religious counterparts. I believe that this is especially telling given the current political climate and the proximity to the politically unprecedented 2016 election. I would argue that in a "typical" political climate, there would be a closer ratio in regard to general approval and

disapproval of the two main political parties. However, when accounting for religiosity and the concept of conservatism, it is essential to examine these findings through a stratified lens.

Going into this survey project, I wanted to specifically examine current policies affecting our nation. Initially, nearly 40% of religious students either approve or strongly approve of the proposed travel ban, compared to a measly 9.4% of non-religious students. This dichotomy was not necessarily shocking to me; however, I was somewhat disheartened to see that there was such a high percentage of EIU students who support this policy.

Moving towards domestic safety, the recent reintroduction of transgender people in the military has sparked a host of controversy from both political parties. Under the scope of religiosity, there was approximately 7% less approval of allowing transgender individuals to serve in the military than there was for the travel ban for religious students. Similarly, there was a 2% increase in support for transgender individuals from EIU students without a religious preference. I argue that that there is less support for this specific policy because many citizens—specifically religious and conservative citizens—view gender as strictly binary; this thought process produces a certain level of confusion and ignorance. Therefore, this confusion manifests in disapproval.

When President Donald Trump pulled out of the Paris Climate Agreement, many liberal citizens openly opposed this decision, given the fact that the United States is the only country to not currently be in agreement with the reality of climate change. Given this controversy, slightly less religious students agree that pulling out of the agreement was a good option with an approximate approval rate of 28%.

One of the most controversial issues that tend to divide political parties (due in part to religion) is that of the legalities of abortion. 74% of religious students believe that abortion should be legal in all cases or in cases of rape and incest, whereas 98.9% of non-religious students believe that abortion should be legal in these same cases. While it is progressive that the majority of individuals believe that abortion should be legal at least in some cases, it cannot be ignored the way these percentages are divided up. Only 32% of religious people believe that abortion should be legal in all cases compared to 79% of non-religious people. Moreover, over one-quarter of religious students believe that abortion should be illegal in all cases including that of rape and incest. These distinctions may have a possibly detrimental impact on women's public policy.

DISCUSSION

The intersection between religion and politics has always been a subject of great interest to me given the constitutional separation of church and state and the modern discussion of how that line gets drawn. Understanding the way college aged students understand and react to political policies is critical to predicting the possible future of politics in America. Regarding the travel ban, banning transgender individuals from serving in the military, pulling out of the Paris Climate Agreement, and abortion legalities, I was not particularly shocked with the results. However, as a liberal political scientist, it was quite discouraging to see the disapproval of scientifically based policy inquiries rampant on my own campus.

Limitations of my study manifest themselves in a lack of appropriate questions that could possibly lead to more clarity in the results. For example, one of the most prominent

disparities was in regard to religious people identifying as politically independent. This is quite ambiguous because it can mean a whole host of things such as a) not preferring to identify as democrat or republican, b) identifying as libertarian, or c) identifying with the green party. This ambiguity would help to distinguish between policy preferences; therefore, there would be less gray space in this analysis.

Furthermore, a question that inquiries about the impact each respondent's religion has on each policy question could be potentially counterproductive to obtaining adequate results; yet, if each respondent answered these follow up questions, it would be a helpful tool to determining directly how religion impacts politics. While there is a constitutional separation of church and state, it is ignorant to claim that religion has zero effect on politics. Going forward, I would want to survey religious EIU students to ask them open-ended questions regarding their personal experiences with religion and politics.

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