

# Secular America: Why Religion Still Matters in Shaping the Debate

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## Introduction

In 2012, Colorado bakery shop owner Jack Phillips refused a wedding cake to a homosexual couple, Charlie Craig and David Mullins, on the grounds that his Christian beliefs prevented the endorsement of same-sex marriage. The couple filed a complaint with the Colorado Civil Rights Commission, which found Masterpiece Cakeshop in violation of state anti-discrimination laws. Phillips appealed the commission's decision, asserting that his First Amendment free speech protection afforded him the right to deny service. In *Craig v. Masterpiece Cakeshop, Inc.* (2015), the Colorado Court of Appeals acknowledged Phillips's personal religious freedom, but affirmed his violation of the Colorado Anti-Discrimination Act (CADA):

It is a discriminatory practice and unlawful for a person, directly or indirectly, to refuse, withhold from, or deny to an individual or a group, because of . . . sexual orientation . . . the full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations of a place of public accommodation. Colorado Revised Statutes, Section 24-34-601(2)(a)

Quoting the U.S. Supreme Court, the state court recognized that “when ‘speech’ and ‘non-speech’ elements are combined in the same course of conduct,” such as Phillips’s personal religious protections and his representation as a business owner, “a sufficiently important governmental interest in regulating the *non-speech* element can justify incidental limitations on First Amendment freedoms” (*Craig* 2015, para.56, quoting *U.S. v. O’Brien*, 391 U.S. 367 (1968), emphasis added). Masterpiece was found culpable of discrimination by the court and ordered to adjust company policy to ensure CADA compliance. Similar cases have ruled in favor of complainants, forcing businesses to pay hefty fines or be barred from further operation.

Strong differences between the religious right and secular left have brought about contentious political discord over many contemporary issues. While scholars agree on certain sociopolitical norms, they remain divided over issues affecting free

speech and religious liberty. So what does this all mean to the average citizen in an increasingly secular America? In order to identify the effects of religion on the current political debate, this study first explores the First Amendment Establishment Clause, church and state separation, and secular tolerance in the American justice system.

Overall, this study will answer the following research question: How do people's religious beliefs influence their political attitudes? Statistical measurement of survey data and public opinion polls will be gathered from the 2008 National Opinion Research Center (NORC) General Social Survey (GSS).

## Literature Review

Political and legal scholars today differ in their interpretations of the U.S. Constitution, including countless Supreme Court decisions removing the essence of faith and religion from public institutions. The debate centers on the idea of "separation of church and state," a phrase that does not appear as such in the First Amendment. Rather, the so-called Establishment Clause of the First Amendment states that "Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." One document repeatedly referenced in this matter is Thomas Jefferson's letter to the Danbury Baptist Association in 1802, in which Jefferson uses the metaphor "wall of separation." However, not until 1878 did the U.S. Supreme Court rule in *Reynolds v. United States* that Jefferson's wall "may be accepted almost as an authoritative declaration of the scope and effect of the [first] amendment" (*Reynolds* 1878, 164). Arguments among scholars tend to collect around interpretation of the Establishment Clause, which will be the focal point of this review.

The following review analyzes the effects of religion, both on traditional societal values and contemporary political issues. The scholars referenced in this review are either professors of political science or subject matter experts in various fields of religious and secular study. This analysis explores perspectives on church and state separation and dissenting Supreme Court interpretations of the Establishment Clause.

### Church and State

In a landmark thesis by a secularist scholar, Robert Boston—director of communications for Americans United for Separation of Church and State—states that America's separation principle "[strives] for a meaningful balance between the rights of the believer and the responsibilities of the state" (Boston 2010, 15). He further argues that "ratification of the U.S. Constitution marked the first time any nation had dared to put a formal distance between [church and state]" in matters of religious freedom (Boston 2010, 33). According to some historians, though, Boston's statement is only partially accurate, since it was early Christians who fought to separate "pagan identification of religion and political power" in ancient Rome (Wiker 2013, 42).

David Barton, a conservative political activist and published Christian scholar, disagrees with Boston's assertions in his own thesis, arguing that "Anglican theological doctrine [in 1768] completely embodied orthodox Christian tenets to which Jefferson swore his allegiance" (Barton 2012). Some scholars, however, are not convinced by Barton's claims either, stating that "leaders of Christian conservatism... resemble the shock troops of other ideological movements, right and left-wing, that have periodically

enlivened American political life” (Wald and Corey 2000, 6). The growing dissent among various scholars of religion and politics is indicative of a more pronounced division of popular opinion. Only through understanding and acceptance of multiple viewpoints on church and state interaction may one acquire deeper insight into the current political state of affairs.

### **The Establishment Clause**

Congress and the federal government are forbidden by the First Amendment’s Establishment Clause “from both promoting one religion over others, and also restricting an individual’s religious liberty” (Cornell 2015). Moreover, the clause protects the free exercise of religion, meaning people may engage in certain religious practices with limited government interference. This is an important aspect of American life, affecting the fundamental makeup of families and communities across the country. Further, the influence of religion in shaping political attitudes plays a significant role in forming domestic legislation. Unchecked, this may produce far reaching consequences for both present and future generations of citizens.

The U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Engel v. Vitale* involves a textbook example of church and state interaction that prompted clarification of the Establishment Clause. In 1962, the U.S. Supreme Court found the New York State Board of Regents in violation of the Establishment Clause for instituting voluntary recitation of the “Regents’ Prayer” during morning school sessions: “Almighty God, we acknowledge our dependence upon Thee, and beg Thy blessings upon us, our teachers, and our country” (*Engel* 1962, 422, quoting New York State Board of Education). In a 6 to 1 decision for the plaintiff, the Court concluded that the prayer violated the Establishment Clause, since it was composed and endorsed by government officials to further prescribed religious beliefs (*Engel* 1962, 430). The lone vote against the court’s decision was Justice Stewart, who argued that the mention of God was found in the Supreme Court invocation, in the national motto, and on American currencies, none of which had caused permanent harm to the people (*Engel* 1962, 440 fn5). The case set a powerful precedent for how future courts would address matters of religious free speech.

### **Conclusion**

A unified government, with flexible constitutional language, was necessary to preserve religious liberties while ensuring the U.S. would not become corruptible as a nation. In more recent times, however, secularist groups have sought to remove biblically-derived elements of society, pitting conservative and religious camps together against the rest of secularized America. The result is an ideologically divided nation, with misinterpreted laws of biblical origin, unbecoming to the secularized legal system. Such efforts attempt to address fundamental differences among people, but ultimately enforce the status quo among prevailing political attitudes.

### **Methodology**

In this methodology section, several dependent and independent variables are listed and operationally defined. The methods of data collection are individual and

quantitative from a primary source, the NORC GSS file in MicroCase 2008 (LeRoy 2009). Cross-tabulation method is utilized, and independent and dependent variables clearly identified in tabular format. A measure of association test among variables is conducted using Cramer's V, coupled with a test of statistical significance (*P*) value to show precise degree of relationship. The analysis of this data attempts to answer the following important research question: How do people's religious beliefs influence their political attitudes? To obtain a better understanding of the effects of religion on the political debate, the concept of religion must first be established.

### **Concepts and Variables**

Religion will be defined as "belief in a relation to a Supreme Being involving duties superior to those arising from any human relation, but [not including] essentially political, sociological, or philosophical views or a merely personal moral code" (*U.S. v. Seeger* 1965, 165, quoting the Universal Military Training and Service Act, 50 U.S.C.App. section 456(j)(1958)). The independent variable for this research is the respondent's religion and is comprised of five categories: liberal Protestants, conservative Protestants, Catholics, Jews, and none (non-religious). This is a nominal variable without direction (e.g., name, gender). The six dependent variables used to measure political attitudes are abortion (for any reason), special hiring treatment for women, the death penalty, euthanasia, welfare spending, and assistance to the poor. These are ordinal variables with direction (e.g., more than, less than, favor, oppose, or ranking). For purposes of establishing religious context for this study, the conservative Protestant identification will be isolated from the dependent category pool and tested against the independent variable of religion. The first concepts to be defined are the dependent variables:

1. 180) ABORT ANY. This ordinal variable is based on a woman's right to an abortion for any reason, within the range of no or yes.
2. 250) HIRE WOMEN. This ordinal variable is based on the question of whether employers should make special efforts to hire and promote qualified women, within the range of no or yes.
3. 106) EXECUTE? This ordinal variable is based on the respondent's position on the death penalty for persons convicted of murder, within the range of oppose or favor.
4. 192) EUTHANASIA. This ordinal variable is based on the question of whether doctors should be legally allowed to end a patient's life at the family's request, within the range of yes or no.
5. 74) WELFARE \$. This ordinal variable is based on the respondent's position on welfare spending, within the range of too little, right (enough), or too much.
6. 85) WELFARE \$2. This ordinal variable is based on the respondent's position on assistance to the poor, within the range of too little, enough, or too much.

The next concept to be defined is the independent variable, which is expected to affect the dependent variables listed above. This particular variable is most relevant to the

research:

114) RELIGION. This nominal variable is based on the respondent's religion, within the range of liberal Protestant, conservative Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, or none.

## **Hypotheses**

### Hypothesis 1. More non-religious people support abortion than do conservative Protestants.

Abortion is one of the leading issues separating conservative and secular camps on fundamental ideology and First Amendment religious liberty. According to a recent study, over 55% of the U.S. adult population supports a woman's legal right to abortion (Pew Research Center 2015). This disparity is also witnessed on issues of morality, with over 49% of Americans saying abortion is inherently wrong, compared to 25% of the religiously unaffiliated (Pew Research Center 2015). These numbers reflect the general population's opinions, which influence many issues from domestic religious practice to political decision-making and party affiliation. More importantly, the political stance on abortion has a direct impact on funding to certain public institutions with respect to "right to life" issues, as explored in greater depth in the findings and analysis portion of this research.

### Hypothesis 2. More conservative Protestants support special hiring treatment for women than do non-religious people.

The gender pay gap remains an ongoing source of debate in American politics. Many employers have adjusted workplace culture to account for various inequalities and discriminatory practices historically rooted in patriarchal religious social structures. These effects have been exacerbated by political interest groups attempting to divide gender across religious and secular lines (Bushfield and Hassall 2014). The economic disparities related to class and gender will also be greatly contested among current presidential candidates of varying religious and social backgrounds.

### Hypothesis 3. More conservative Protestants support the death penalty than do non-religious people.

The death penalty remains a widely contested issue in political circles. Conservatives have historically supported capital punishment in greater numbers than liberals but are now divided between dissenting religious groups who believe punishment for high crimes should be left to the courts to decide (Berg 2000). The death penalty is a serious moral and religious issue affecting countless citizens seeking justice in an increasingly secularized state.

### Hypothesis 4. More non-religious people support euthanasia than do conservative Protestants.

The question of whether the state should allow physician-assisted suicide, or euthanasia, has stirred up much controversy in recent times, particularly in regards to First Amendment protections for both the patients and physicians. Some doctors view

euthanasia as assisted self-murder, and subsume their patient-care responsibilities to their personal religious or moral beliefs (Boudreau 2011). This issue has created schisms in the medical community as to whether government should be involved in matters affecting primary patient care. Religious right groups continue to lobby on behalf of medical practitioners on issues involving euthanasia, citing both First Amendment free speech protections and liberties prescribed in the Declaration of Independence.<sup>1</sup>

Hypothesis 5. Conservative Protestants are less likely to support welfare spending than are non-religious people.

Welfare spending is a highly contested issue among political parties at the present. While conservatives are historically against welfare spending, they continue to face challenges in an ever-growing socialized state. Morality stereotypes play a large part in determining political stance on welfare, particularly when blame is assigned for lack of support on key entitlement programs (Graham, Nosek, and Haidt 2012). Secularists are not necessarily in support of welfare spending either, as survey data from this research will later show in the findings and analysis section.

Hypothesis 6. Conservative Protestants are less likely to support assistance to the poor than are non-religious people.

This question differs slightly from the previous hypothesis, focusing on “assistance to the poor” rather than welfare. Government support for the poor as well as other disenfranchised citizens—veterans, displaced workers, and the elderly—is a major socioeconomic issue debated heavily in modern politics. Moreover, societies are judged by how well they care for the lowest of their members. This is also where political stance tends to deviate most from the traditional status quo, as discussed later in this study.

### **Data Presentation and Statistics**

A test of statistical significance has been implemented to determine whether the relationships between the dependent variables and the independent variable are significant or occurred due to a routine sampling error. The significance standard used for these statistics is less than or equal to a *P* value of .05 ( $p = \leq .05$ ). The guidelines for determining strength of relationship are either weak or strong, and are based on those found in LeRoy (2009, 194). The measure of association between ordinal and nominal variables is interpreted using Cramer’s *V* measurement. In Cramer’s *V*, if the absolute value of the ordinal measure of association is less than .1, it is considered too weak to be useful; between .10 and .19 is weak; between .20 and .29 is moderate; and .30 and above is considered strong. A contingency table is generated from the variable data output using cross tabulation methods. Columns and rows vary as dependent variables change. Row 1 correlates to “Religion,” with respondents’ religious affiliation displayed in the cells directly below, intersecting with the dependent variables described

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<sup>1</sup> “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

to the left. The numbers in parentheses represent the number of cases—i.e., respondents surveyed—in each category, with the percentage of respondents displayed directly above. Missing cases are excluded from the results, and remaining values recalculated for overall totals.

The methods used in this study will aid in interpreting whether the hypotheses are supported or not. The aim of this research is to measure the effects of religion on political attitudes while contributing to the broader discussion surrounding First Amendment religious liberty. This study is not only vital to researchers and academics alike, but also to many concerned citizens trying to understand the influence religion has on contemporary issues.

### Findings and Analysis

In this section, the hypotheses are tested using cross tabulation method. The data output and contingency tables coincide with the numeric results of the hypotheses listed in the methodology section. In addition to the data findings, the implications of the results are discussed to establish research context. These metrics will assist in ascertaining how people’s religious beliefs influence their political attitudes.

#### Religion and Abortion

Table 1 cross-tabulates the independent variable of religion with the dependent variable of abortion (for any reason). The hypothesis states, “More non-religious people support abortion than do conservative Protestants.” The top of the table reflects the independent variable, religion, with its five categories listed directly under. On the left side are the answers, NO or YES, beside the label, “Support Abortion for Any Reason.”

**Table 1: More non-religious people support abortion than conservative Protestants.**

		Religion					TOTAL
		Lib. Prot.	Con. Prot.	Catholic	Jewish	None	
Support Abortion for Any Reason	NO	7%	30%	16%	1%	6%	60%
	(153)	(673)	(360)	(13)	(129)	(1328)	
Support Abortion for Any Reason	YES	7%	11%	10%	1%	11%	40%
	(156)	(259)	(232)	(20)	(253)	(920)	
Support Abortion for Any Reason	TOTALS	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	(309)	(932)	(592)	(33)	(382)	(2248)	
Source: 2008 National Opinion Research Center (NORC) General Social Survey (GSS)							
Nominal Statistics			Cramer's V = 0.286		Probability = 0.000		

*\*Hypothesis is supported*

As Table 1 indicates, the hypothesis was supported with a Cramer's V of 0.286. It is also statistically significant with a *P* value of 0.000, indicating there is a 0% chance this relationship occurred by accident. Over 30% of conservative Protestants opposed abortion, compared to a minor 6% of non-religious respondents. However, equal percentages in favor of abortion—11%—were found among conservative Protestants and non-religious respondents alike. This is an important finding, since mainstream opinion would suggest greater disparities between conservative religious and secular attitudes regarding abortion, for any reason. Perhaps recent technological advancements in science and medicine can account for this dramatic shift in traditional values. However, nothing more can be inferred from this data without further inquiry.

### Religion and Special Hiring Treatment for Women

Table 2 reflects the results of the hypothesis, "More conservative Protestants support special hiring treatment for women than do non-religious people." The independent variable of religion remains the same, and the dependent variable "Special Hiring Treatment for Women" asks whether employers should impose favorable hiring conditions for women.

**Table 2: More conservative Protestants support special hiring treatment for women than non-religious people.**

		Religion					TOTAL
		Lib. Prot.	Con. Prot.	Catholic	Jewish	None	
Special Hiring Treatment for Women	AGREE	55%	68%	67%	57%	60%	64%
		(88)	(318)	(193)	(17)	(116)	(732)
	NEITHER	13%	8%	8%	15%	13%	10%
		(20)	(38)	(24)	(4)	(24)	(110)
	DISAGREE	32%	24%	25%	28%	27%	26%
		(51)	(113)	(72)	(8)	(52)	(296)
TOTALS	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
	(159)	(469)	(289)	(29)	(192)	(1138)	
Source: 2008 National Opinion Research Center (NORC) General Social Survey (GSS)							

Nominal Statistics	Cramer's V = 0.074	Probability = 0.126
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*\*Hypothesis is not supported*

As Table 2 indicates, the hypothesis is not supported, with a Cramer's V score of 0.074 and *P* value of 0.126—above the significance standard outlined in the methodology section of this study (<.05). Thus there is a weak statistical significance among the variables tested. Interestingly, in Table 2 nearly 68% of conservative



Protestants agree that women should receive special hiring treatment, as opposed to 55% of liberal Protestants (13 percentage points lower) and 60% of non-religious respondents (8 percentage points lower) who favored such policies. Had the results been statistically significant, these disparities would be a compelling find, since liberals are more often associated with redress of gender and social inequalities than are traditionally conservative parties. However, the data are not conclusive enough to support the hypothesis based on these projections alone.

### Religion and Death Penalty

Table 3 displays the results of the hypothesis, “More conservative Protestants support the death penalty than do non-religious people.” This subject remains a hot button issue among conservatives arguing for stronger penalties on high crimes and for combating secular tolerance in the American justice system. The survey question asks whether the respondent opposes or favors the death penalty for individuals convicted of murder.

**Table 3: More conservative Protestants support the death penalty than non-religious people.**

		Religion					TOTAL
		Lib. Prot.	Con. Prot.	Catholic	Jewish	None	
Support Death Penalty for Murder	OPPOSE	27%	29%	39%	39%	36%	33%
		(117)	(383)	(336)	(21)	(199)	(1056)
	FAVOR	73%	71%	61%	61%	64%	67%
		(318)	(942)	(531)	(34)	(359)	(2184)
	TOTALS	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
		(435)	(1325)	(867)	(55)	(558)	(3240)
Source: 2008 National Opinion Research Center (NORC) General Social Survey (GSS)							

Nominal Statistics	Cramer's V = 0.101	Probability = 0.000
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*\*Hypothesis is supported*

Table 3 indicates the hypothesis is supported, with a weak but statistically significant Cramer's V of 0.101 and P value of 0.000. The results show that more conservative Protestants (71%) favor the death penalty than do non-religious (64%) respondents. Interestingly, liberal Protestants reported the highest numbers at 73%, which deviates from traditional moral stereotypes. However, the results identify nearly three times as many conservative Protestants in favor (942), which may account for slightly lower percentages than other categories. The position taken by all respondents nonetheless demonstrates a major shift in traditional attitudes from decades prior.

## Religion and Euthanasia

Table 4 cross-tabulates the independent variable of religion with the dependent variable of euthanasia. The hypothesis states, “More non-religious people support euthanasia than do conservative Protestants.” This is another yes or no question, asking if a doctor should be legally allowed to end a patient’s life at the family’s request.

**Table 4: More non-religious people support euthanasia than conservative Protestants.**

		Religion					TOTAL
		Lib. Prot.	Con. Prot.	Catholic	Jewish	None	
Support for Euthanasia	YES	76%	55%	66%	73%	84%	67%
		(163)	(327)	(283)	(26)	(225)	(1024)
Support for Euthanasia	NO	24%	45%	34%	27%	16%	34%
		(51)	(268)	(147)	(10)	(42)	(518)
Support for Euthanasia	TOTALS	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
		(214)	(595)	(430)	(36)	(267)	(1542)
Source: 2008 National Opinion Research Center (NORC) General Social Survey (GSS)							
Nominal Statistics		Cramer's V = 0.233			Probability = 0.000		

*\*Hypothesis is supported*

As Table 4 indicates, the hypothesis is supported, with 84% of non-religious respondents favoring legal euthanasia compared to only 55% of conservative Protestants. A Cramer’s V of 0.233 reflects moderate strength between variables, with a *P* value of 0.000 that supports this relationship. The position taken on legalized euthanasia reflects political attitudes that tie into greater First Amendment debates on religious liberty. Further, the significant gap between non-religious people and conservative Protestants reinforces traditional stereotypes, which may predict future political outcomes for similar issues.

## Religion and Welfare Spending

Table 5 addresses the issue of welfare with the hypothesis, “Conservative Protestants are less likely to support welfare spending than are non-religious people.” This topic is highly contested in modern politics and affects all classes of citizens along religious and moral lines.

Table 5 indicates a Cramer’s V of 0.054, which is too weak to be useful. This is coupled with a *P* value of 0.309, exceeding the significance standard and rendering the hypothesis unsupported. The results appear to reflect higher percentages of conservative Protestants against welfare spending, but the data is not statistically significant enough to support the stated hypothesis. Perhaps even more compelling is

**Table 5: Conservative Protestants are less likely to support welfare spending than non-religious people.**

		Religion					TOTAL
		Lib. Prot.	Con. Prot.	Catholic	Jewish	None	
Support for Welfare Spending	TOO LITTLE	23%	24%	23%	25%	25%	24%
		(51)	(155)	(106)	(6)	(70)	(388)
	RIGHT	40%	36%	40%	50%	43%	39%
		(88)	(235)	(182)	(12)	(121)	(638)
	TOO MUCH	37%	41%	36%	26%	33%	37%
		(80)	(271)	(165)	(6)	(92)	(614)
	TOTALS	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
		(219)	(661)	(453)	(24)	(283)	(1640)
	Source: 2008 National Opinion Research Center (NORC) General Social Survey (GSS)						
	Nominal Statistics			Cramer's V = 0.054		Probability = 0.309	

*\*Hypothesis is not supported*

the opposition to welfare spending, witnessed throughout the religious pool being tested. The results seem to run contrary to certain prescribed notions of Christian charity among the active church-going populace. Unfortunately, no further conclusions can be reached based on these findings.

### Religion and Assistance to the Poor

Table 6 reflects the findings of the hypothesis, “Conservative Protestants are less likely to support assistance to the poor than are non-religious people.” The key component of this hypothesis is “assistance to the poor,” as opposed to welfare, which may have a negative connotation. The shift in phrasing significantly alters the respondents’ support for government assistance for the needy.

As Table 6 indicates, the relationship between variables is too weak to be useful, with a Cramer’s V of only 0.068. However, the results do reveal a *P* value of 0.046, which is just below the threshold for sampling error (<.05). This is significant, since it demonstrates greater accuracy in the findings. Many possible reasons could account for this significant change in response, but perhaps even more compelling is how the question is framed to produce a desired outcome among variable relationships. This is important to policymakers looking for alternative ways to shape political discussion among varying interests. Such methods can, and often will, influence the greater political agenda.

**Table 6: Conservative Protestants are less likely to support assistance to the poor than non-religious people.**

		Religion					TOTAL
		Lib. Prot.	Con. Prot.	Catholic	Jewish	None	
Support for Assistance to the Poor	TOO LITTLE	65%	70%	69%	70%	74%	70%
		(150)	(489)	(300)	(25)	(210)	(1174)
	RIGHT	27%	21%	27%	23%	20%	23%
		(61)	(146)	(117)	(8)	(56)	(388)
	TOO MUCH	8%	9%	5%	7%	6%	7%
		(18)	(64)	(21)	(2)	(17)	(122)
	TOTALS	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
		(229)	(699)	(438)	(35)	(283)	(1684)
	Source: 2008 National Opinion Research Center (NORC) General Social Survey (GSS)						
	Nominal Statistics		Cramer's V = 0.068			Probability = 0.046	

*\*Hypothesis is not supported*

## Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine how religion shapes political attitudes. In collecting individual and quantitative analysis from general survey data, several dependent variables of mixed political origin were identified and tested against the single independent variable of religion, using cross tabulation methods. This was followed by a measure of association using Cramer's V, including a test of statistical significance (*P*) value to determine relational strength among variables. The results affirmed some traditional norms, while revealing important findings based on moral and religious stereotypes.

In the literature review, sides of the religious spectrum were analyzed for their political stance on issues affecting religious freedom. Conservative and secular scholars made competing arguments on church and state separation, while a review of the First Amendment Establishment Clause discussed the elimination of school prayer in *Engel v. Vitale* and refusal of business to same-sex couples in *Craig v. Masterpiece Cakeshop, Inc.* These arguments brought to light some contemporary free speech issues while exposing popular support among secular courts on matters of religious liberty. Lastly, the removal of God from historical artefacts of Christian heritage, such as the Regent's Prayer in New York, has generated serious contention among conservative and secular parties over state-exercised power.

The findings of abortion were significant in that they reinforced the hypothesis, "More non-religious people support abortion than do conservative Protestants."

Moreover, higher percentages of religiously orthodox respondents—Catholics and Protestants—are reporting less support for “right to life” issues than in decades prior. The findings suggest a growing disconnect among religious people on key abortion behaviors presently accepted in the modern secularized state.

In regard to special hiring treatment for women, the results were inconclusive and the hypothesis rejected for lack of significance among variables. That is not to say the issue does not merit inquiry, since Catholics and conservative Protestants both reported higher percentages of support. Presently, women account for over 47% of the workforce, yet earn 78 cents on the dollar compared to their male counterparts (DeNavas-Walt and Proctor 2014). While the findings alone could not prove a direct relationship between special hiring treatment for women and religion, the results do suggest that greater economic disparities along gender lines are affecting households and communities previously rooted in conservative religious custom.

Euthanasia produced some of the strongest findings next to abortion, with more non-religious people supporting physician-assisted suicide than do conservative Protestants. Many “blue states” are now adopting laws to support legal euthanasia, as witnessed in California, Oregon, and Montana, but euthanasia still lacks general support among the nation’s populace (Pereira 2011). The research findings nonetheless reflect a fundamental shift in moral and religious attitudes influencing the present sociopolitical climate. These numbers are particularly significant when addressing other controversial issues relating to life and liberty, such as the death penalty for convicted murderers.

Ironically, greater disparities among religiously orthodox respondents were witnessed on the death penalty issue than on the abortion and euthanasia questions. The findings supported the hypothesis that “more conservative Protestants support the death penalty than do non-religious people,” but only by a narrow margin. This begs the question of how mainstream religious groups have grown more tolerant towards historically conservative state-run institutions. To further test this theory, welfare was selected as the next dependent variable against religion.

Support for welfare remained divided across the religious spectrum, and the data failed to support the hypothesis, “Conservative Protestants are less likely to support welfare spending than are non-religious people.” The results did reveal greater numbers of conservative Protestants agreeing that too much was being spent on welfare. However, the data were not strong enough to yield a statistically significant relationship between variables. The Central Intelligence Agency’s (CIA) World Factbook currently ranks the U.S. 43<sup>rd</sup> on distribution of family income (CIA 2014). Such disparities not only create widening divisions along political and ideological lines for the nation, but also threaten to undermine the entire global economic system. Even more interesting than the findings on welfare are the data on assistance to the poor.

As previously mentioned, *how* a question is framed may significantly alter a statistical outcome for a given variable relationship. When analyzing assistance to the poor in relation to religion, the hypothesis was determined to be unsupported, yet an interesting observation was made in the data output. The results were nearly inverted from the findings on welfare, with greater numbers of conservative Protestants agreeing that “too little” was being spent on assistance to the poor. This poses a significant research problem, since the question seemingly addresses the same issue as the fifth hypothesis, albeit phrased differently to elicit a desired emotional response. While it is

possible the question addresses the social aspect of “assistance,” the more interesting issue raised by these results may be *why* the question is framed in such a way. Empirical studies may provide a better explanation of these results in future studies, but for now nothing further can be inferred based on these results.

In closing, religion’s influence on political attitudes remains a constantly debated field in political science. The evidence presented in this study links to a greater body of research being shaped by religious and secular scholars at present. While the findings of this research point to multiple socioeconomic and political attitudes, none of these attitudes can be easily explained without taking religion into account. This study not only addressed contemporary issues surrounding First Amendment religious liberties, but also examined dissenting viewpoints from both conservative and secular scholars. Most importantly, new perspectives were introduced based on hard data rather than trending opinions.

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