

**EFFECT OF GENDER ON THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGIOUS
AFFILIATION ON THE VOTING BEHAVIOR OF MEMBERS OF U.S.
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

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ABSTRACT

Effect of Gender on the Influence of Religious Affiliation on the Voting Behavior of Members of
U.S. House of Representatives

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Literature Review

The role of religion in American political behavior is widely studied, but much of this literature thus far focused on the role of religion on mass political behavior. Within this literature, a select few works evaluate the effect religious affiliation has on the voting behavior of members of the U.S. House of Representatives. This work has mostly centered around a specific policy issue, such as social issues or foreign policy. In the same way, there is a significant body of research concerned with the distinctions between the voting behavior of women and men in legislative bodies. The majority of this academic work looks at how female legislators differ from their male colleagues in their support for women's issues as well as how women tend to be more liberal in their voting behavior than men. The work done on this issue thus far has made it clear that gender plays a role in the voting records of legislators. While the effects of religion and gender on legislative behavior have been thoroughly studied independently, there is little research on how religious affiliation and gender work in conjunction to affect the voting behavior of members of the U.S House of Representatives.

Thesis Statement

The impact of religious affiliation on the voting behavior of those in the U.S. House of Representatives varies between male and female congresspeople.

Theoretical Framework

By evaluating the roll-call voting records and religious affiliations of women and men in the U.S. House of Representatives over the last forty years, I am able to examine and how religious affiliation has affected the voting behavior of each gender in a distinct way.

Project Description

While independent effects of religious affiliation and gender on congressional voting behavior are well-documented, there is little research on how these two factors work together to affect congressional voting. In this paper, I seek to identify differences in how religious affiliation impacts the voting behavior of women and men in the U.S. House of Representatives. I posit that the effect of religious affiliation on legislative voting behavior will vary between women and men. I evaluate this claim by reviewing the roll-call voting records of members of Congress over the last forty years (97th Congress through 115th Congress) and examining how distinctions between the impact of religious affiliation on voting records of male and female legislators.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to the faculty of Texas A&M Department of Political Science. Over the past few years in the department, I have encountered some of the most supportive and encouraging faculty who have truly offered me a home during my time at Texas A&M. As I prepare to graduate from Texas A&M and continue my academic career in graduate school, I cannot express how thankful I am for the experience I take with me.

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I also thank the entire Texas A&M Department of Political Science for offering me such a welcoming home to grow during my undergraduate career.

Finally, thanks to my sisters and brother for the encouragement they have provided over the years and continue to provide as I prepare to finish my time at Texas A&M and begin a new chapter in my life.

INTRODUCTION

The role of religious affiliation in American political behavior is noteworthy and widely studied. Much of the academic literature on this subject thus far has focused on the effect of religion on mass political behavior and public opinion (Layman 1997; Brooks and Manza 2004). Within this field of research, a select few works examine how religious affiliation impacts the behavior of political elites, and in particular, the roll call voting behavior of members of the United States House of Representatives. This work has been largely focused on specific points of policy concern such as abortion, marriage equality, other social issues, or environmental policy. However, broader examinations of voting records also present evidence that religious affiliation affects the roll call voting of legislators (Fastnow, Grant, and Rudolph 1999; Newman et al. 2016; Oldmixon and Calfano 2007).

Similarly, there is a significant body of research focused on how gender affects United States political behavior. This research includes investigations into how roll call voting behavior of women and men in United States legislative bodies differs. The majority of this literature looks at how female legislators tend to have more liberal voting records than their male colleagues (Boles and Scheurer 2007; Frederick 2009). They are also more likely to support issues viewed as more directly affecting women such as abortion and social welfare more liberally than male legislators (Frederick 2010). The work done up until this point provides strong evidence for the belief that gender plays an impactful and notable role in the roll call voting behavior of legislators. This is evident not only in examination of the United States House of Representatives, but also in examinations of the United States Senate and state legislative bodies (Frederick 2009; Yamane and Oldmixon 2006).

Numerous scholars have established the effects of religion on roll call voting as a whole, but it is not understood how these effects may vary between men and women. Because of the variations in religious interactions between men and women, as well as the gendered language often used in religious teachings on authority, it would follow that religious affiliation affects the political behavior, and thus the roll call voting, of men and women to different degrees (Cassese and Holman 2017). I believe that this will be evident when Congressional voting records are examined not only with respect to religious affiliation, but while also taking gender into account.

CHAPTER I

LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of religion in American political behavior is widely studied, but much of this literature thus far focused on the role of religion on mass political behavior. Within the literature examining how religion affects American politics, a select few works evaluate the effect religious affiliation has on the behavior of members of the U.S. House of Representatives or other political elites. This work has been largely centered around a specific policy issue, such as abortion or marriage equality.

In the same way, there is a significant body of research concerned with the distinctions between the voting behavior of women and men in legislative bodies. Much of this academic work looks at how female legislators differ from their male colleagues in their support for women's issues as well as how women tend to be more liberal in their voting behavior than men. The work done on this issue thus far has made it clear that gender plays a role in the voting records of legislators. While the effects of religion and gender on legislative behavior have been thoroughly studied independently, there is little research on how religious affiliation and gender work in conjunction to affect the voting behavior of members of the U.S House of Representatives. In my study, I posit that while religion does have a notable effect on roll call voting records of those in congress, the significance of this effect will vary between male and female representatives.

Religion in U.S. Politics

Despite the separation of church and state established by the Constitution, religious ideas have played a large part in United States politics throughout the country's history. Of course, this

connection between religion is not unique to the United States, but the constitutional commitment to separation of church and state and the cultural and religious diversity that the US enjoys allows religion to play a unique role in political behavior. From the birth of the United States, clergy and those involved in religion agreed that “political liberty and religion [were] vitally intertwined,” (Sandoz 2012) and as such, historians and political scientists have thoroughly investigated just how intertwined religion and American politics are. As historians have noted, it is rarely possible to assess the history of American politics without taking religion into account, and this recognition of religion must also extend into the study of American political behavior (Butler 2004).

Mass Political Behavior and Religion

The significant effects of religion on mass political behavior in the United States is well-documented and widely understood. Since the rise of the Moral Majority in 1979, political scientists have paid much attention to the interaction between religion and politics in the arena of United States politics. Scholars have examined this interaction through many different lenses, but almost all agree that religion plays an important role in United States political behavior. Early investigations by Kellstedt and others into the political effects of religion identified the party realignment that had emerged (Kellstedt et al, 1996). These works highlighted the role that religion played in events like the 1994 election, when Mainline Protestants, often thought of as a strong portion of the GOP voter bloc, fell behind Mormons and Evangelicals in their support for GOP House candidates (Kellstedt et al, 1996). During this time, Republicans grew their religious base by taking strong stances on issues like abortion that garnered incredible attention and opposition from observant Evangelicals and Catholics. This alignment of Evangelicals with the Republican party is also documented further by Layman’s 1997 work that illustrates the growing

Republican base among Evangelical Protestants between 1980 and 1994. Layman also evaluates the role of religiosity in presidential voting behavior, stating that those with high levels of religious commitment grew “increasingly more likely than their less religious counterparts to vote Republican” during this time (Layman 1997). In examination of the effects of religion, it is asserted that religious beliefs and practices have effects on relatively few issues, such as abortion, moral traditionalism, or other matters of personal morality (Leege and Kellstedt 1993).

In other works, scholars have investigated how religion shapes specific political beliefs and attitudes of U.S. voters. This body of literature often focuses on a single issue or population to evaluate. Such works include research done by Knolls (2009) which seeks connections between religious identify and immigration attitudes. In his work, Knolls focuses on the likelihood of those in minority religious traditions, such as Mormonism or Judaism, to empathize with other minority or marginalized groups such as immigrants (Knolls 2009). McDaniel, Nooruddin, and Shortle (2006) expand on the issue of immigration by arguing that negative attitudes towards immigrants can be linked with religious conservatism. They attribute this partially to the connection between religious conservatives, such as Evangelical Protestants, and the understanding that the United States was founded as a Christian nation. Other political scientists have also sought to identify the connections between religious beliefs and specific policy areas like same-sex marriage, abortion, and U.S. foreign policy (Bartkowski et al. 2012; Baumgartner, Francia, and Morris 2008; Sherkat, De Vries, and Creek 2010).

Political Elites, Congress, and Religion

At the intersection of religion and American politics, there is a smaller section of research that focuses on the effects of religion on the behavior of political elites and specifically those in the U.S. House of Representatives. One of the most thorough works investigating the influence

of religion on congressional behavior is Fastnow, Grant, and Rudolph's (1999) paper on religious tradition and voting behavior in the U.S. House. This piece investigates the effects of religious affiliation on congressional voting on abortion as well as the effects on broader roll call voting behavior as measured by the Americans for Democratic Action voting measures. Through multivariate analysis of voting and religious affiliation, Fastow, Grant, and Rudolph find that religious affiliation has a significant effect on congressional voting, even when controlling for political party. These findings are echoed by other works investigating the relationship between religion and congressional behavior (Guth 2014; Guth and Kellstedt 2005). Evidence of religion affecting elite behavior is also present in examinations of other legislative bodies at the state level (Yamane and Oldmixon 2006).

Gender in U.S. Politics

From gaps in political knowledge and participation to distinctions in how political candidates are judged, the role that gender plays in United State politics is well-documented (Dolan 2011; Hooghe and Stolle 2004; Dolan 2014).

Gender and Mass Political Behavior

Political scientists have established that gender can be a key factor in effecting the partisanship, policy preferences, and political involvement of United States voters (Box-Steffensmeier, De Boef, & Lin 2004; Hansen, Franz, & Netemeyer-Mays 1976; Shapiro and Mahajan 1986). In recent decades, the partisan gender gap, where women are significantly more likely than men to associate with the Democratic Party, has widened. According to surveys done by Pew Research Center, in 2017 56% of American women identified with or leaned towards the Democratic Party. This is a sharp rise from the 48% of American women who indicated the same in 1994 ("Trends" 2018). Gender also plays a part in political participation. This gap in political

involvement is present in most liberal democracies, and the United States is no exception (Hooghe and Stolle 2004).

As Hooghe and Stolle (2004) discuss, early investigations into this gap in political participation assumed that it would dissipate as the education and role of women in society increased, but more recent evidence refutes this assumption. Other research demonstrates that this gap in political engagement can be at least partially attributed to differences between men and women in political interest and information (Verba, Burns, & Schlozman 1997). After discussing the consequences for political representation and governmental responsiveness that stem from these disparities, Verba, Burns, and Schlozman attempt to explain the of these gaps. Their study finds that when asked about the names of five public officials and five general items of political knowledge, for nine out of ten items, men were more likely to answer correctly. The only answer that women performed better on concerned naming the head of the local school system. This difference in school system knowledge is attributed to education being thought of as a traditionally appropriate realm for women's involvement. In investigating political interest, these researchers find a small gap in the indicated interest in politics of men and women. Although women are certainly more enfranchised than they were historically, these disparities that affect political engagement may be attributed to the still present implicit messages that the political world is reserved for men.

Political Elites, Congress, and Gender

As can be expected, gender differences in political behavior extend into the behavior of political elites and those in legislative bodies. This is demonstrated by the greater likelihood of women in congress to vote in favor of issues affecting women than their male counterparts (Swers 1998). Using regression analysis, Swers (1998) investigates the effects of gender on

support for legislation concerning women's issues. Swers utilizes ratings from the American Association for University Women (AAUW) and information from the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues (CCWI) to identify key votes on women's issues. Swers's analysis illustrated that although ideology may be the biggest predictor of support for legislation on women's issues, gender did play a statistically significant effect on a legislator's likelihood of supporting these issues.

It is also evident by the tendency of women in elective office to hold more liberal voting records (Boles and Scheurer 2007; Frederick 2010). Although women in congress have been traditionally thought of as more liberal, there is also evidence that party polarization has led to a reduction in the ideological differences between male and female Republican representatives (Frederick 2009). Frederick identifies this trend by evaluating Poole and Rosenthal's DW-NOMINATE scores for members of congress from the 97th Congress through the 109th Congress. While Frederick argues that there is a narrowing difference in ideology between men and women in the Republican party, he also discusses that the ideological difference between women in the Republican and Democratic parties has increased during this time period. Frederick illustrates that within these thirteen Congresses, eight of them include data for Republican women exhibiting significantly greater liberalism than their male Republican colleagues.

Religion plays a large role in the lives of both men and women in the United States. Recent polling by Pew Research Center revealed that women in the United States are more religious than men. This is particularly the case when comparing the significance of religion in the lives of Christian women and men. While 62% of Christian men said that religion is "very important", 72% of Christian women responded this way (Fahmy 2018). Within the individual and private aspects of religion (prayer, religious service attendance, etc.) this gap is still evident,

even when controlled for religious affiliation. The gaps in religious behavior between U.S. men and women implies that the way that men and women interact with and are affected by religious beliefs varies.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

I investigated potential gender-based discrepancies in the significance of the effect that religious affiliation has on roll call voting by first collecting data on the religious affiliation, gender, political party, and voting records for members of congress from 97th Congress through the 115th Congress. I used the Americans for Democratic Action's Liberal Quotient scores as a single measure of roll call voting behavior. Americans for Democratic Action is an organization that tracks key congressional votes on progressive legislation in many policy areas including military and foreign policy, social issues, and economic policy. Every year, Americans for Democratic Action releases a congressional voting record listing every member of congress and their assigned Liberal Quotient, a rating that reflects the percentage of votes cast or paired live that align with the views of the Americans for Democratic Action. Other scholars investigating the interaction between religious affiliation and roll call voting have also used these scores to evaluate roll call voting behavior for members of congress (Green and Guth 1991; Fastnow, Grant, and Rudolph 1999; Guth 2007; Guth 2014).

I collected data on religious affiliation, gender, and political party from the Congressional Quarterly Congress collection. The collection of religion data for members of congress initially indicated forty-eight distinct religious affiliations. I subsequently consolidated similar denominations into Protestant Christians, Catholics, and all others (Table 1). This method of consolidation was necessary given the large number of denominations and the small number of representatives in many individual denominations. Prior researchers have also consolidated religious affiliations of legislators in similar ways when evaluating the effect that religion has on

congressional roll call voting (Green and Guth 1991; Guth 2007). Protestant and Catholic religious traditions have significantly different theological beliefs and practices, which makes it appropriate to separate the two when evaluating the effects that one’s religious affiliation may have on roll call voting. After collecting my initial data, I further cleaned the data to include only each members’ first year in congress. This was done to prevent potential skewing that stems from counting a member’s record multiple times if they served multiple terms in congress. This data cleaning reduced the number of observations in my dataset from 7,805 to 1,598.

Table 1— Consolidated religious affiliations and included denominations

Religious Affiliation	Included Denominations			
Protestant Christian (928)	Evangelical	Assembly of God (20)	Methodist (802)	Episcopalian (564)
	Lutheran (4)	Independent	Lutheran (280)	Disciples of Christ (16)
	Non-denominational Protestant (8)	Bible Church (3)	Protestant (355)	Quaker (6)
	Nazarene (6)	French Huguenot (4)	Congregationalist (36)	Independent Christian (2)
	Southern Baptist (16)	Seventh-Day Adventist (29)	United Church of Christ (40)	United Methodist (31)
	Christian Missionary Alliance (1)	Apostolic Christian (7)	Christian (178)	Society of Friends (8)
	Christian Reformed (10)	Pentecostal (6)	Presbyterian (651)	Anglican (6)
	Evangelical (22)	African Methodist Episcopal (34)	Church of Christ (41)	Non-denominational (1)
		Baptist (9)		
Catholic (469)	Roman Catholic (468)	Eastern Catholic (1)		
All Others (201)	Theist (3)	Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (7)	Serbian Orthodox (63)	Unitarian (63)
	Hindu (1)	Mormon (144)	Christian Scientist	Unitarian
	Muslim (7)	Eastern Orthodox (2)	Greek Orthodox (63)	Universalist (1)
	Buddhist (9)	Eastern Orthodox (54)		Jewish (445)
	Not Specified (117)			
Humanist (1)				

CHAPTER III

DATA ANALYSIS

The overall mean Liberal Quotient score for Catholics was 49.661, while the mean score for Catholic men was 47.667 and the mean score for Catholic women was 62.508. The mean Liberal Quotient score for Protestants was 33.630. The mean score for Protestant men was 30.694, and the mean score for Protestant women was 55.464. Among all others, the mean Liberal Quotient score was 60.005, while the mean Liberal Quotient for men of all other traditions was 58.195 and the mean for women of all other traditions was 68.027. This preliminary descriptive data suggests that together, religion and gender influence congressional roll call voting behavior, but my further investigation suggests that gender does not affect the impact of religious affiliation on roll call voting in a statistically significant way.

Once I collected all the necessary data, I constructed a regression to analysis the expected effects of each consolidated religious affiliation on the roll call voting of men and women in congress. I included a variable for partisanship to control for this factor in one's roll call voting behavior. I used an interaction variable (male) to examine the difference in effects for women and men. I coded each religious tradition as a dummy variable. I included only the variables for Protestant and Catholic in my regression. Because 'All Others' included every representative of who was not present in the Protestant and Catholic traditions, it is unnecessary to include the third 'All Others' dummy variable in my regression model. Instead of including this variable, we can identify the regression model intercept as the baseline for all those who are not included in the Protestant or Catholic groups and are not affected by our interaction variable. Table 2 contains the information revealed in this regression model. This regression model shows an

expected 3.308 point decrease in Americans for Democratic Action Liberal Quotient scores for Protestant women and a 10.713 point decrease in Liberal Quotient scores for Protestant men. It also shows a 7.718 point decrease in Liberal Quotient scores for Catholic men, but a 0.921 point increase for Catholic women.

Table 2— Regression model coefficients with gender interaction

	Coefficient	Standard Error	t-value	Pr(> t)
Intercept (All Others, Female)	13.934	3.953	3.525	0.0004
Dem (Female)	71.481	2.922	24.461	< 2E-16
Protestant (Female)	-3.308	3.807	-0.869	0.385
Catholic (Female)	0.921	4.303	0.223	0.824
Male	7.342	4.303	1.707	0.088
Dem (Male)	-12.120	3.119	-3.886	0.0001
Protestant (Male)	-10.713	4.179	-2.564	0.010
Catholic (Male)	-7.718	4.530	-1.704	0.089

Once I constructed a regression model with variables for religious tradition, partisanship, and the interaction of gender, I generated 95% confidence intervals for each religious tradition coefficient and the corresponding gender interaction coefficient. Table 3 illustrates the intervals for each variable. These confidence intervals were used to assess the statistical significance of

differences between the effect of each religious tradition on the roll call voting behavior of men and women. If the confidence intervals for coefficients for men and women of each religious tradition do not overlap, we can infer that the difference in effects between the men and women is statistically significant. If the two coefficients for each religious tradition do overlap, the difference between men and women does not meet the threshold for being statistically significant.

Table 3—Coefficient confidence intervals for gender and religious tradition

Variable	Male 95% Confidence Interval	Female 95% Confidence Interval
Protestant	(-18.910, 2.516)	(-10.775, 4.160)
Catholic	(-16.603, 1.167)	-7.194, 9.035)

While the impact of religious affiliation on roll call voting does seem to differ slightly between men and women in congress, the 95% confidence intervals for the impact on Protestant men and women overlapped. The 95% confidence intervals for Catholic men and women in congress also overlapped. Because the coefficient confidence intervals overlap between men and women in each tradition, the slight differences between men and women in each group do not appear to be statistically significant.

Although a regression model including gender does not depict statistically significant difference in roll call voting behavior between men and women of different affiliations, a regression that does not include gender shows that religious tradition by itself does have a significant impact on roll call voting behavior. The results of this regression are illustrated in

Table 4. This statistically significant impact is present for both Protestants and Catholics. When gender is not considered, a regression model shows an expected 12.554 point decrease in Liberal Quotient scores for Protestants in congress and an expected 5.834 decrease in Liberal Quotient scores for Catholics. Both of these coefficients are statistically significant as can be seen from their t-values of -7.892 and -3.418, respectively. These strong coefficients for Protestant and Catholic traditions illustrate that while the effects of religion may not vary by gender, per se, the effects are still noteworthy and worth investigating further.

Table 4—Regression model coefficients without gender

		Standard Error	t-value	Pr(> t)
Intercept (All Others)	20.162	1.574	12.807	<2E-16
Dem.	61.604	1.028	59.911	<2E-16
Protestant	-12.554	1.591	-7.892	5.47E-15
Catholic	-5.834	1.707	-3.418	0.0006

CONCLUSION

The bodies of literature addressing the effects of gender and religion individually on legislative behavior and roll call voting is vast. It is well-documented that religious affiliation affects a legislator's roll call voting behavior, and it is well-documented that gender affects this behavior as well. At this point, what is lacking in the literature is an investigation into how these two variables work with each other to affect legislative behavior. Current data from Pew Research Center on how the American men and women interact with religious life differently, it is worth exploring how the effects of religious affiliation on roll call voting behavior may differ between male and female legislators in the United States congress. Through analysis and modeling of religious affiliation, gender, and roll call voting behavior, I have uncovered at least some preliminary answers to the question of how these relate to each other.

After collecting data on the gender and religious affiliations of members of congress, as well as the Americans for Democratic Action Liberal Quotient score, I was able to construct a regression model to evaluate how gender and religious affiliation work together to impact roll call voting behavior. Because the confidence intervals for religious affiliation coefficients overlapped between Catholic men and women as well as between Protestant men and women, there does not appear to be a statistically significant difference in the expected effects of religious affiliation on roll call voting behavior. Although there was not a statistically significant difference in the effect of religious affiliation between men and women in congress, when a regression model of this effect is constructed without the distinction between male and female legislators, it is clear that the impact of religious affiliation on roll call voting behavior is noteworthy and statistically significant.

While this analysis did not confirm the prediction that the impact of religious affiliation on roll call voting behavior would vary between men and women, there still exists a few elements of this question that could be investigated. As the number of women in congress continues to grow, I expect that the amount of data available to compare the roll call voting behavior of men and women will also grow. Moving forward, it may be worth investigating if the effects of religious affiliation on roll call voting dealing with specific policy issues may vary between gender. It is possible that men and women take religious affiliation into account different when it comes to different policy issue, so that could be another way to move forward with this direction of research.

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