

Voter Turnout in America: Are Christians More Likely to Vote?

Presented by: Chad Huckaby
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Lee W. Payne

Abstract:

Voter turnout in the United States is an important issue in political science. There are a number of factors that affect whether an individual votes in elections, which include education, age, and race. Research on the concept of the effect that religion has on voting behavior in the United States is sparse at best. Thus, the purpose of my research was to formulate and test a hypothesis regarding turnout and religion. Given Christianity's being the largest religion in the United States, I decided to see whether Christians are more likely to vote. The method involved using survey data from the General Social Survey's (GSS) 2006 data. I used statistical analysis software to run regression models of a variables measuring both voting and identification as a Christian. I hypothesized that Christians would be more likely to vote than non-Christians. Based on the results, I was able to reject the null hypothesis that being a Christian had no effect on whether an individual votes. Based on my research, Christians are much more likely to vote than non-Christians.

Hypotheses:

H₀: The religious preference of an individual has no effect on whether the respondent votes.

H₁: The religious preference of an individual has an effect on whether the respondent votes. The specific effect is that Christians will vote in higher numbers than non-Christians.

Data and Methods:

The dataset that I used was the General Social Survey's (GSS) 2006 data. The unit of analysis of my research will be the individual level since the GSS is surveyed on the individual level. The dependent variable is voted04, which is nominal and asks whether a respondent voted in the 2004 presidential election or not. Summary statistics are in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary Statistics (N=4510)

Dependent Variable	Observations	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Voted04	4126	0.736	0.441	0	1

The independent variable is a dummy variable created from a variable contained in the GSS 2006 dataset. For ease of study, I recoded relig into a simpler binary nominal variable. The variable, which I call "religdum," is recoded to include all sects of Christianity except Orthodox Christian in one choice, named "Christian" while the other was "Non-Christian". In other words, religious preference is operationalized as the whether a respondent chooses to identify with Christianity or not. Summary statistics of the independent and control variables is in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary Statistics (N=4510)

Independent Variable	Observations	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Religdum	4484	0.79	0.407	0	1
Education (in years)	4499	13.29	3.23	0	20
Sex	4510	0.55	0.5	0	1
Race (2 Category)	3918	.162	.368	0	1
Age	4492	47.14	16.89	18	89

Results:

I used simple logistic regression, along with multiple logistic regression with controls. Finally, I computed predicted probabilities of voting. The results are contained in Tables 3-6.

Table 3: Logistic Regression of Voting with religdum

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable Voted04 (Odds Ratio)
Religdum	1.447**
Constant	2.102
Pseudo r ²	0.004
Prob>chi2	0.000
Log Likelihood	-2356.68
N	4107

Table 4: Logistic Regression of Voting with Controls

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable Voted04
Religdum	1.51**
Education	1.33**
Sex	1.04
Race	0.94**
Age	1.03**
Constant	0.01
Pseudo r ²	0.146
Log Likelihood	-2009.2
N	4080

Table 5: Predicted Probabilities of Voting Based On Religdum

Category	Mean	Frequency
Non-Christian	0.662	935
Christian	0.728	3520
Total	0.714	4455

Table 6: Predicted Probabilities of Voting Based On Religdum with Controls

Category	Mean
Non-Christian	0.686
Christian	0.769
Total	0.751

Conclusion

Based on the results of the statistical analyses, I was able to reject the null hypothesis. Voter turnout is not great in the United States. There are a myriad of factors that help influence whether a person takes the time to go to the polls on Election Day. Both biology and environment have a role, and many other factors in between. In my examination of voting behavior, I found that being a increases the probability that an individual will vote.

Acknowledgements

A special thanks to:

Dr. Lee Payne for all of his support and encouragement.
The SEA Department of Government
STATA Corp for their great software