The Association Between Religiosity and A Person’s View on Capital Punishment

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Research Questions

• How does religiosity relate to people’s attitudes favoring capital punishment for crimes like murder?
• Does the association vary by gender?

Significance

• Capital punishment is authorized in 31 states in the United States (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2018).
• In 2015, support for the death penalty is the lowest it’s been in the past 40 years (Pew Research Center, 2015).

Background

• Capital punishment is only used in the most serious of offenses (ACLU, 2018).
• A country’s predominant religion has a significant affect on if the death penalty would be abolished (Mathias, 2013).
• People who are religious are more likely to favor the death penalty in the U.S. (Rade & Desmarais, 2017).
• Religiosity can shape a person’s views on the death penalty (Miller & Hayward, 2008).
• Men are more likely than women to support death penalty (Miller & Hayward, 2008).

Hypothesis

• Religiosity will be related to a person favoring capital punishment for a person who committed murder.
• Men will be more likely to than women to favor the death penalty.
• The effects of religion on people’s views on the death penalty will similar for men and women.

Data and Sample

• 2016 General Social Survey (N=2,674).
• Representative sample of U.S. Adults 18 and older.

Dependent Measure

Opinion of death penalty for murder
• “Do you favor or oppose the death penalty for persons convicted of murder?”
  ➢ Favoring the Death Penalty 60.9%
  ➢ Opposing the Death Penalty 39.1%

Independent Measures

The Religiosity of a Person
• “To what extent do you consider yourself a religious person?”
  ➢ Religious 77.5%
    (very/moderate/slightly religious)
  ➢ Not Religious 22.5%

Control Measure

Gender of Respondent
• Male 45.2%
• Female 54.8%

Analysis

• Cross tabulation and Chi-square test using SPSS

Results

Figure 1. % Distributions of opinion of death penalty by Religiosity of a person for U.S. Men: GSS 2016 (N=1,235)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Favor</th>
<th>Oppose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>68.1</td>
<td>31.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Religious</td>
<td>60.1</td>
<td>39.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• The Chi-square test suggests that these differences are statistically significant at p <.01 level for men.

Figure 2. % Distributions of opinions of death penalty by Religiosity of a person for U.S. Women: GSS 2016 (N=1,439)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Favor</th>
<th>Oppose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>58.6</td>
<td>41.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Religious</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>49.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• The Chi-square test suggests that these differences are statistically significant at p <.05 level for women.

Summary of Findings

• People who consider themselves religious are more likely to favor the death penalty for people who commit murder.
• Men are more likely than women to favor the death penalty for people who commit murder.
• The effects of religiosity on the view of the death penalty are similar for men and women.

Implications

• Religiosity increases the chances of a person favoring capital punishment.
• Religiosity should be considered in the selection of jury members for the case that involves the death penalty for people who commit murder.

References