



Political Attitudes of Americans in Religious Spaces of Worship

Gibson Farabow, Sophomore, Government Major



Introduction

- The separation of church and state is a coveted element of the United States Constitution. However, the attitudes and behaviors of religious (and non-religious) people towards politics – especially in their places of worship – is less studied.
- I chose to focus on this specific topic midway through the semester after my original research question consistently yielded predictable results.

Research Questions

- Original question: Is there a significant association between political interest and feelings of political representation?
- Updated question: Is political interest a strong predictor of one’s inclination to discuss politics in a place of worship?

Methods

Sample

- Adults (age 18+) in the United States who took the Outlook on Life Surveys (OOL 2012).
- OOL is a nationally representative survey which has a target population of adult male and female African American and White US citizens for comparison.

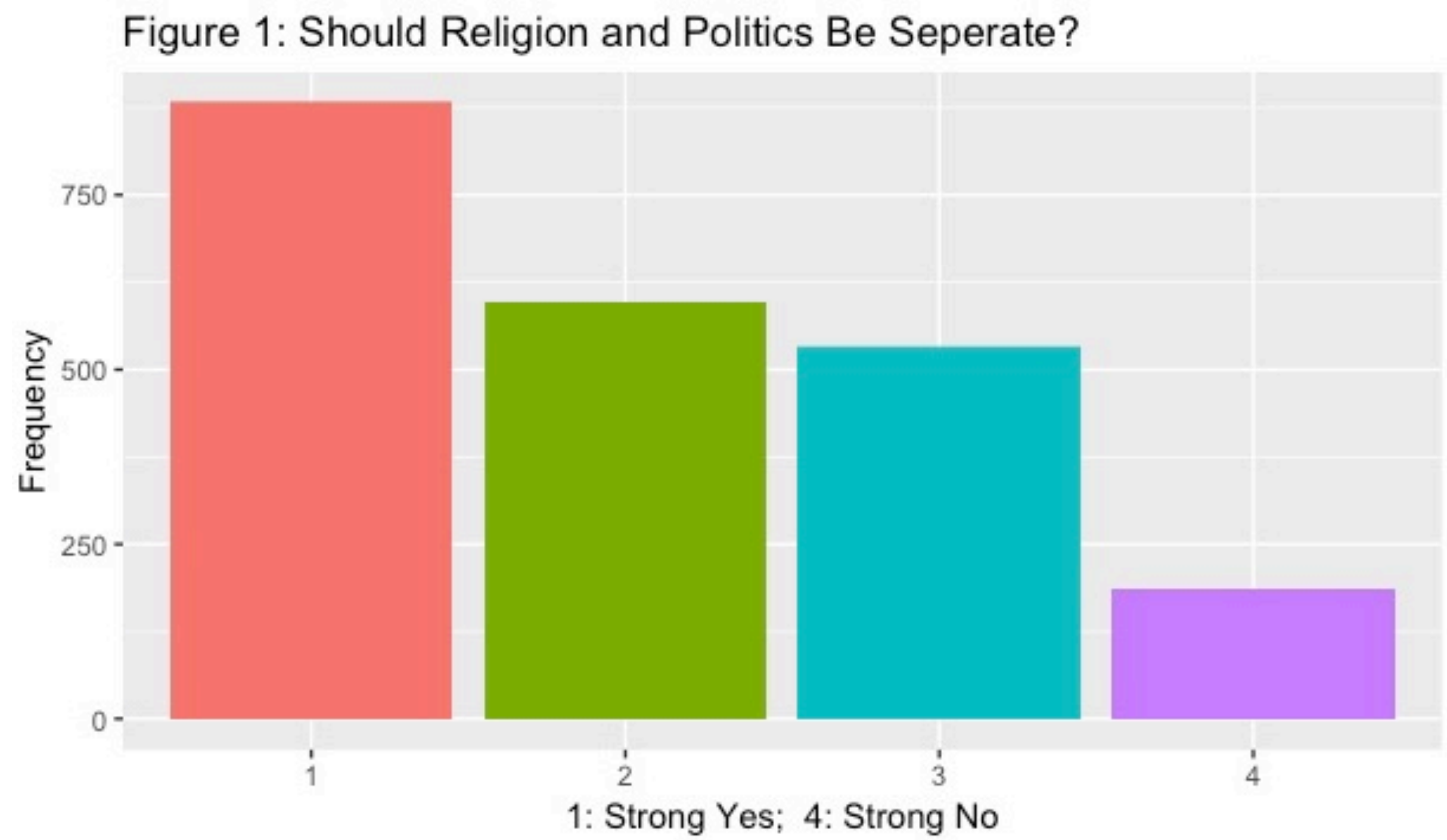
Measures

- Political interest is the explanatory variable, and ‘church & politics’ is the response variable. Political interest was measured on a scale of 1 to 5; 1 being no political interest, and 5 being extreme political interest.
- The likelihood of discussing politics in a place of worship is measured on a scale of 1 to 4 in response to the question of whether religion and politics should be separate. 1 represents the strong feeling that ‘church & politics’ should be separate, and 5 represents the strong belief that ‘church & politics’ go together.

Results

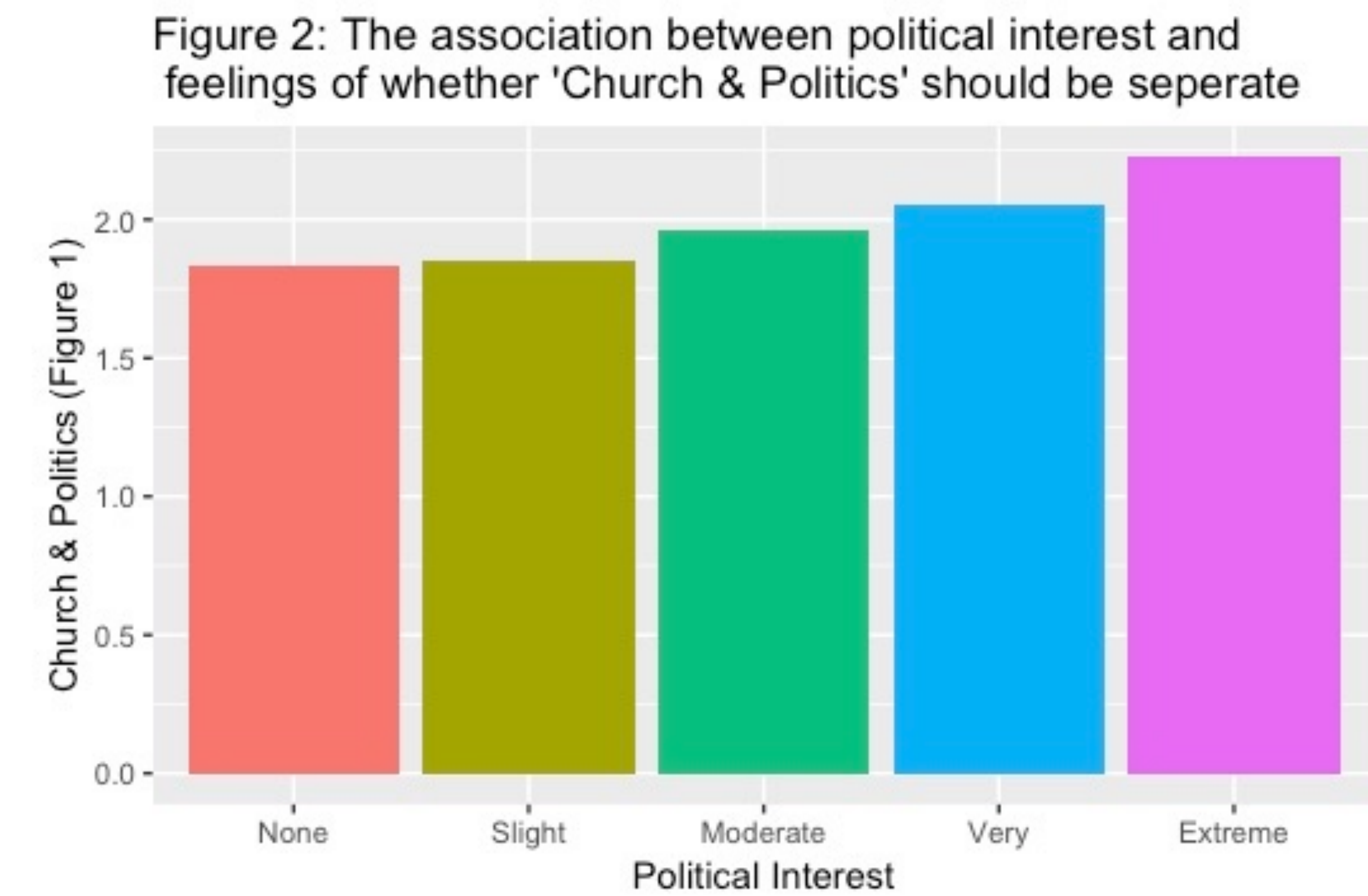
Simple

- Political interest had a normal, bell-shaped distribution. The question of whether religion and politics should be separated had distribution overwhelmingly skewed right (Figure 1). Both were statistically significant.



Bivariate

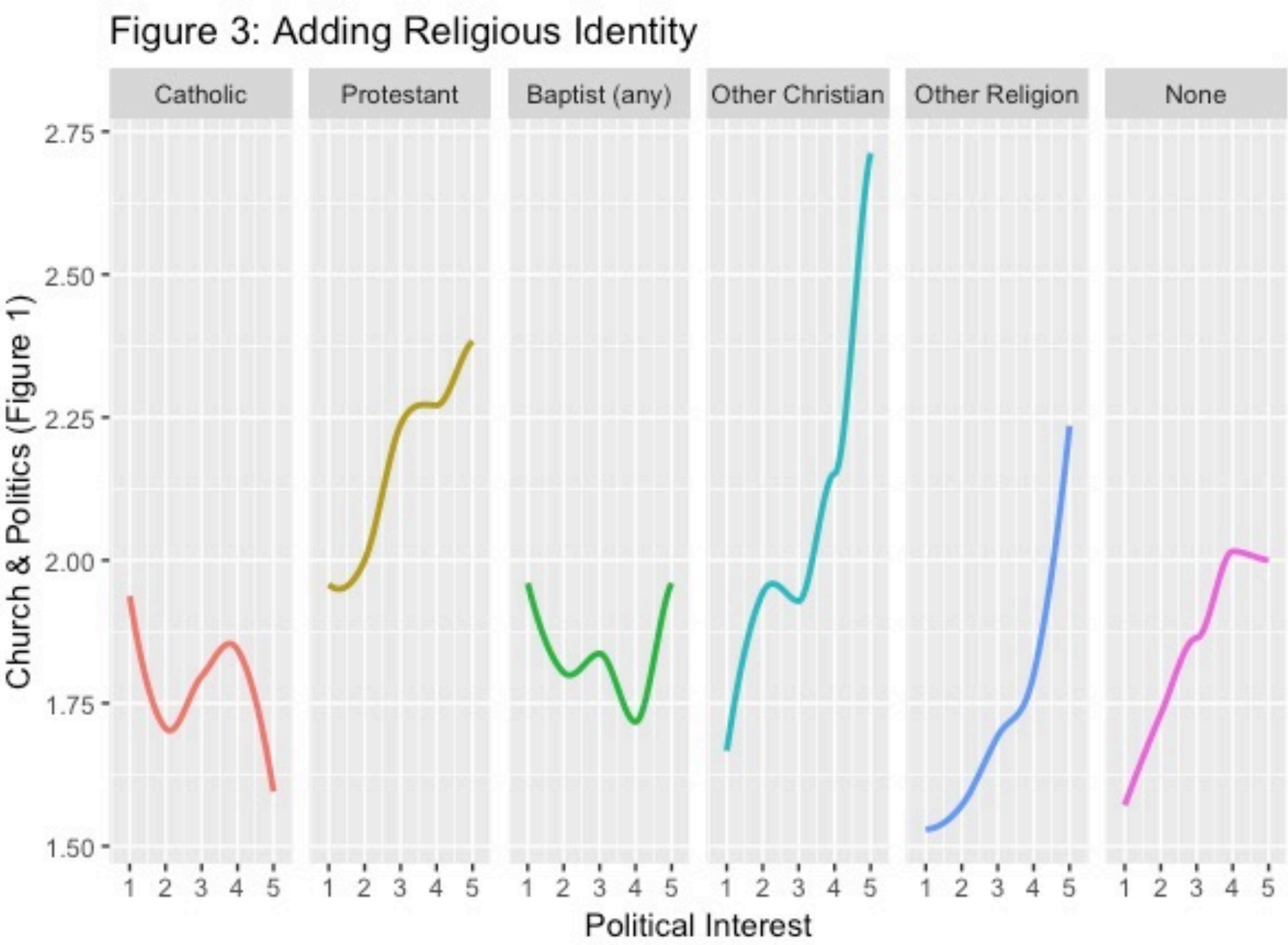
- The Pearson correlation test revealed a statistically significant, positive and weak correlation between increasing political interest and the belief of whether or not politics should be left out of religious places of worship ($r = 0.124$; $p < .001$).



Multivariate

- Religious identity was added as a variable, aggregated into groups of similar sizes. A multiple regression test was run to specify the data by religion ('None' was set as the reference category).

- The results showed a statistically significant relationship for each specific religion except for Catholicism ($p > .05$). Results for the other religions generally revealed positive and weak to moderate correlations which were statistically significant.



Discussion

- Different religious identities evoke surprisingly various relationships with politics. However, the nature of the OOL sample limits our ability to specifically analyze religions other than Christianity.
- For Protestants, other Christians, and people of other religions, as political interest increases, openness to political discourse in places of worship decreases.
- Baptists seem to have a relatively consistent view that politics and religion should be more separate than not.
- It is unclear why Catholics were the only group not to have a statistically significant association; this suggests that political interest is not seen as relevant to the Catholic church.
- More research needs to be done to understand political attitudes and behaviors American Catholics.

References

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