

2020 Presidential Support Among Old Testament and New Testament Christians and Pseudo-Christians: A Pilot Study

Paul J. Lavrakas, Independent Consultant

Scott Richards, ReconnectResearch

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Overview

- Disclosure
- Background/Purpose
- Hypothesis
- Methods
- Findings
- Discussion/Implications/Next Steps



Disclosure

- Scott Richards, CEO of ReconnectResearch, funded this 2020 pilot study, that was conducted within a much larger pre-election survey being conducted by his company
- Lavrakas was a paid consultant with ReconnectResearch at the time the survey was planned and conducted
- All the work that Lavrakas did for this presentation has been unpaid
- Lavrakas' views, as expressed here/today, are not meant to represent the views of anyone other than himself
 - The content of this presentation is not meant to be insulting or degrading to anyone or any religion
- Lavrakas was raised as a devote Greek Orthodox Christian, but has been an Agnostic for the past 55 years



Background/Purpose

- My motivations to pursue this research
 1. A belief that **religious constructs are not being measured well enough in most political surveys, especially in surveys by major news organizations, as they relate to the political/ideological polarization that exists in the USA**
 2. A belief that the **complexities of this polarization** requires a **better understanding** of how religion relates to that polarization
 3. A belief that if I used **traditional methods for measuring “religious beliefs,”** then **social desirability** would lower the quality of the religious data I wanted to gather
 4. A desire to **develop a new sequence of questions** related to **religious beliefs**
 5. Do a preliminary/pilot study to **learn more about these measures and an “indirect” methodology** for gathering these sensitive data



Terminology

- **Christianity:**

- “A religion based on the person and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, and his beliefs and practices” (www.lexico.com/en/definition/christianity)

- **Pseudo-Christian:**

- “A person falsely called a Christian; a person who falsely claims to be a Christian; a pretended Christian.”
 - Origin: William Fulke in the late 1500s (www.lexico.com/en/definition/pseudo-christian)
- “One who [may] sincerely believe he or she is Christian and even has a level of ‘righteousness’ in their actions, but is really motivated by their own selfish [mis]interpretation of the unselfish Christian scriptures.”
(www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=pseudo-christian)



Background

- **Propositions/Assumptions:**

- Christian Bible's Two parts
 - **Old Testament** – generally depicts a Vengeful Deity; Jesus's teachings and practices are not mentioned here as it predates Jesus
 - **New Testament** – generally depicts a Loving and Compassionate Deity; Jesus' teachings and practices are the focus here
- Religion was consistently shown to be a meaningful predictor of Presidential candidate preference in the 2016 and 2020 elections (Newport, www.news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/324410/religious-group-voting-2020-election.aspx)
- In my view, many of the words and deeds of the previous U.S. president (Trump) are wholly at odds with Christianity as depicted in the New Testament and with Jesus's teachings and practices
- Why then did/do so many self-described Christians support Trump???
 - It can be argued that many of these people are really “Pseudo-Christians”



Christians & Pseudo-Christians

- **Hypothesis 1:** Self-identified Christians (some of whom are likely Pseudo-Christians) who supported Trump in the 2020 election campaign will be more likely to hold (and likely practice) a “Vengeful” view of Christianity, whereas Self-identified Christians who did not support Trump will be more likely to hold (and likely practice) a “Loving” view of Christianity



Methods

- Conducted a preliminary study to try to gather reliable and valid data on these topics
- Used a RICS nonprobability sample and IVR for recruitment and data collection (cf. Levine, Krotki & Lavrakas, 2019 *POQ* article) for a survey conducted by ReconnectResearch in January and February 2020
 - 67,000 inbound callers from across the USA (across the 24-hour day)
 - 4,800 answered that they were an adult
 - 3,300 answered the first substantive question
 - AAPOR RR3 approx. 5%
- Used a data collection method whereby the respondent was asked to think about, and answer about, her/his “Best Friend”
 - Asked some warm-up questions about the best friend before asking the substantive religious questions
 - ≈ 800 respondents reported data about their Christian best friend



Methods: Key Variables

- Data limited to a respondent whose Best Friend was reported to be a Christian
- *“How often does this person act like what the Bible says about...”*
 - *“Anyone who injures their neighbor is to be injured in the same manner - an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth” (VENGEANCE)*
 - *“Let all that you do, be done in love” (LOVE)*
 - *“The Lord detests those with lying lips, but he delights in people who are trustworthy” (LOVE)*
 - *“Vengeance is mine - I will repay, saith the Lord” (VENGEANCE)*
- Response alternatives: *“All or Most of the Time,” “Only Some of the Time,”* or *“Basically Never?”*



Unweighted Findings

- Reported **Best Friend's Approval of Trump** by Rating of Best Friend on Bible quotes

QUOTE		All or Most the of time	Only Some of the time	Basically Never	Chi-Square p-value
(V) <i>Anyone who injures their neighbor is to be injured in same manner</i>	Approve	38%	28%	34%	< .000
	Disapprove	25%	37%	39%	
(V) <i>Vengeance is mine saith the Lord</i>	Approve	46%	31%	23%	> .100
	Disapprove	41%	31%	28%	
(L) <i>Let all that you do, be done in love</i>	Approve	70%	23%	6%	.014
	Disapprove	61%	28%	11%	
(L) <i>The Lord delights in people who are trustworthy</i>	Approve	70%	21%	10%	> .100
	Disapprove	65%	24%	11%	

- Hypothesis 1 partially supported for Vengeance, but “opposite” findings for Love



Unweighted Findings

- Created a **Vengeance-Love Difference scale** by subtracting sum of the two “Love” items from sum of two “Vengeance” items; higher (more positive) scores indicate more of a *Vengeance style* of Christianity than a *Love style* of Christianity
- **Hypothesis 2:** One’s best friend who was reported to be Approving of Trump would show a more positive score on this variable than a best friends who was reported to be Disapproving Trump
 - Mean of Friends Approving Trump = - **1.02**
 - Mean of Friends Disapproving Trump = -**1.07**
 - Mean of each group was in the range of holding a somewhat higher Love score/style than their Vengeance score/style
 - Although the difference is in the direction predicted by Hypothesis 2, it is very small in size and nonsignificant (t -test $p > .10$)
 - Thus Hypothesis 2 was not supported



Discussion/Implications/Next Steps

- Primary Motivation: My dissatisfaction with how the domain of Religion is being measured in most political public opinion surveys
- Tried a different approach to gathering new religious data
 - Did not fully succeed in operationalizing the constructs well
 - Although did find some evidence in line with hypotheses
 - Data appear at least somewhat reliable and valid
 - Was not able to gather enough data on the religion constructs due to limited funding
- Findings raise many questions/issues for future research
 - Should next engage in a Cognitive Interviewing stage to better understand how the items created for this pilot study are understood by respondents
 - Need more than four Biblical items
 - What other survey errors affected the data that were gathered?
 - Will/can respondents report accurately on negative aspects of their best friend
 - Will respondents display social desirability biases when reporting on their best friend
 - Should do an experiment to ask the set of Biblical items about the respondent herself/himself vs. asking about her/his best friend
 - Will need a funding organization to partner with to make meaningful progress



Thank You!

pjlavrakas@comcast.net

