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Attitudes Toward the Electability of Atheist and Nontraditional Religious Candidates

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Abstract

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Atheists are underrepresented in political office compared to their numbers in the general

population. In the United States, anti-atheist prejudice is prevalent, likely contributing to

the disparity in atheist representation. Informed by social identity theory and the

sociofunctional approach to prejudice, the purpose of this study was to examine the

comparative electability of atheists compared to other minority religious identities, as

well as one nonminority option for a baseline reference of attitudes. Using the voter

likelihood scale and three 7-point semantic differential scales, 579 participants rated their

intention to vote for and their feelings of trust, disgust, and fear toward one of four

political candidates representing different religious groups but who were otherwise the

same candidate (Protestant, Mormon, Scientologist, and atheist) presented to them

randomly. Data were analyzed using four separate 2 X 4 factorial analyses of variance.

Findings suggest that atheists are not viewed as unfavorably as Scientologists (groups

perceived as cults), though atheists were viewed unfavorably on all measures of trust,

disgust, and fear. Generating grassroots discourse about religious minority

underrepresentation in elected office, as well as the prejudicial views many Americans

hold toward minority religions, may build awareness and acceptance leading to positive

social change.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all of those who were born into ignorance, abuse, disability, or poverty-stricken homes, in hopes that despite the odds, they may one day achieve higher goals and grow beyond the hand they have been dealt.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Atheists are underrepresented in political office despite the number of Americans identifying as atheists having more than doubled in the last few years (Ingraham, 2016; Lipka, 2016a). A review of the literature suggests that widespread prejudice toward atheists is based on distrust and the belief that atheists are immoral (Edgell, Gerteis, & Hartmann, 2006; Franks & Scherr, 2014; Gervais, 2014; Gervais, Shariff, & Norenzayan, 2011). However, despite this, little research has been done to examine atheist prejudice and discrimination specifically in the political sphere. The stigma of atheists can be seen throughout U.S. culture; they are seen as a threat to the Christian values on which many Americans believe the country was founded (Gervais, 2013; Gervais, 2014; Gervais et al., 2011). As a result, there are no members of Congress who identify openly as atheists (Sandstrom, 2017). With 91% of the current Congress identify as Christian, there are many minority religions left unrepresented or not represented proportional to their respective population representation (Sandstrom, 2017). Viewed as outliers, non-mainstream religious groups, such as Mormons and Scientologists, are marginalized (Doherty, 2014; Grieg, 2017; Harrison, 2015; McAllister, 2013; Olson, 2006; Penning, 2009; Smith, 2014; Urban, 2012).

This study demonstrates the comparative unelectability of atheists with other reviled and marginalized minority religious groups, including the emotional responses these candidates elicit. Different emotions prompt different forms of prejudice, making it important to examine the ways prejudice toward atheists manifest (Cottrell & Neuberg,

2005). While atheists remain underrepresented, issues important to them will likely

continue to be ignored. This includes protections for atheists against the many forms of

discrimination they face, such as in child custody cases, the hiring process or in the

workplace (Gervais, Shariff, & Norenzayan, 2011; Volokh, 2006; Wallace et al., 2014).

This chapter will present the problem, purpose, and significance of the study. The

research questions and hypotheses will also be presented. Further, the nature of the

study, including the definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations

will also be discussed.

Background

Research examining anti-atheist prejudice has found the majority of Americans

believe that atheists lack morality and are therefore capable of horrendous acts (Gervais,

2013; Gervais, 2014; Gervais et al., 2011). This view makes it difficult for most people

to trust atheists and is likely partially responsible for atheist underrepresentation in

politics. Only one study, to-date, has examined anti-atheist prejudice in the political

realm, finding that compared to other historically marginalized groups (e.g., Black and

gay men), atheists were the least likely to receive votes and engendered the strongest

feelings of distrust, disgust, and fear responses from participants (Franks & Scherr,

2014).

While public perception of atheists is overwhelmingly negative, evidence

suggests that fringe religious groups that are viewed as "cultish" may be more reviled

than atheists (Cragun, Henry, Homan, & Hammer 2012a; Lalich, 2009; Olson, 2006).

However, these studies did not indicate specific religious designations, using only the

terms "new religious movement" and "cult" to gauge participant opinions, terms considered overwhelmingly negative (Cragun et al., 2012a; Olson, 2006). While no person identifies as belonging to a "cult," many outside observers believe they do (Cragun et al., 2012a; Olson, 2006). This pejorative use of cult is commonly used toward Mormons and Scientologists, suggesting these individuals may have difficulty gaining acceptance and trust of the general public, particularly in politics (Greig, 2017; Harrison, 2015). For example, during the 2012 Presidential election, concerns over Mitt Romney's religious affiliation dwarfed concerns for any other candidate, and voter aversion toward Mormons has increased following the election (Campbell, Green, & Monson, 2012; Smith, 2014; Smith, 2016). During the campaign, a pastor introducing Rick Perry (another Republican candidate during the primary) referred to the Mormon Church as a cult (Oppel Jr & Eckholm, 2011). This cult perception also extends to Scientology, with recent documentaries of those that have left the church painting the organization as sinister and secretive (Doherty, 2014; Gilbert, 2016; McAllister, 2013; Thurm, 2015). A comparative study of fringe religious groups and atheists in politics had not yet been conducted (Franks & Scherr, 2014). Therefore, this quantitative study measured voting intention and the emotional responses of distrust, disgust, and fear toward candidates identifying as atheist, Mormon, Scientologist, and Protestant.

Problem Statement

Historically marginalized groups such as African Americans and ethnic minorities (15%), women (20%), and members of the LGBT community (1.5%) have seen great gains in political representation in the U.S. Congress (Franks & Scherr, 2014). However,

individuals who self-identify as atheist are not making these strides; they represent only 0.2% of Congress compared to 20% of the population (Franks & Scherr, 2014). The 115th Congress was assessed for religious affiliation, and the Pew Research Center found that the Congress was 91% Christian, well overrepresenting the U.S. Christian population (all Christian denominations combined comprise 70.6% of the population), whereas only a single member of Congress identifies as unaffiliated and no members identify as a nontraditional religion such as Scientology (Sandstrom, 2017). Protestants, Catholics, and Jews are all overrepresented in Congress, while groups such as Muslims, Buddhists, and Mormons have equal representation in Congress proportional to the U.S. population (Sandstrom, 2017). Despite the fact that atheists are one of the most rapidly growing minority groups and continually rank as one of the least accepted groups in the United States, anti-atheist prejudice in politics has been rarely examined (Doane & Elliot, 2015; Franks & Scherr, 2014; Gervais, 2014; Ingraham, 2016). There are still states that require a religious oath for an individual to take political office, and despite the unconstitutionality of this, an atheist would first have to win elected office in one of these states to challenge the law. Research indicates the odds are unlikely an atheist would be viewed positively enough to win office (Franks & Scherr, 2014). This means that 20% of the population remain largely unrepresented in government and are often unable to seek or hold office as a result of both individual- and institutional discrimination (Franks & Scherr, 2014).

Discrimination and prejudicial attitudes toward atheists have largely centered on the idea that they lack morality, making their trustworthiness suspect (Gervais, 2014;

Gervais, Shariff, & Norenzayan, 2011). Recent research suggests that trust alone is not responsible for prejudice and discrimination against atheists. A study comparing attitudes toward an atheist, African American, and gay male political candidate found that disgust (typically associated with antigay discrimination) and fear (typically associated with anti-Black male racism) were greatest toward the atheist candidate (Franks & Scherr, 2014). While this study compared groups that are known to face discrimination, no study has yet compared atheist candidates to candidates of major (e.g., Protestant) and non-mainstream Christian (e.g., Mormon), or non-Christian (e.g., Scientology) religious groups within the United States (Cragun et al., 2012a; Franks & Scherr, 2014). This study aims used the same attitude and emotion domains (i.e., distrust, disgust, and fear) to compare an atheist candidate to candidates from both mainstream and nontraditional religious backgrounds. The view of mainstream religious groups served as a reference point in relation to both the atheist and fringe religious (e.g., non-mainstream Christian and non-Christian) identities and the emotional reactions these identities engender.

Research has not yet determined if a difference exists between fringe groups with a Christian basis (e.g., Mormons) versus religious groups that have no inherently Christian foundation (e.g., Scientologists). Scientology was selected for the non-Christian religion as it is well-known, and often viewed as fanatical (Doherty, 2014; McAllister, 2013; Olson, 2006; Urban, 2012). Mormonism was selected for the fringe Christian religious identity as it is well known, is viewed as fanatical, and recent studies suggest Mormons face voter aversion (Penning, 2009; Pew Research Center, 2014; Smith, 2014). In addition, it was expected that voter preference for a candidate will

increase for those participants who share a religious ideology with the candidate as predicted by social identity theory; the greater the difference between the voter and candidate ideology, the less likely he or she is to vote for the candidate (Ben-Bassat & Dahan, 2012; Tajfel, 1970). Add to that, the socio-functional approach to prejudice predicts that the greater the perception of threat based on religious values different from one's own, the higher the levels of disgust, distrust, and fear as well as a decrease in voter intentionality (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005). To-date, no research had examined the relationship between voter preferences and feelings of distrust, disgust, and fear toward political candidates or how atheist candidates will compare to Christian (e.g., Protestant), non-mainstream Christian (e.g., Mormon), and non-Christian (e.g., Scientologist) candidates in terms of voter intentions. Likewise, no studies had yet examined how similar religious ideologies shared by voter and candidate increases liking and voter preference for the candidate.

Purpose of the Study

This study assessed attitudes toward atheists and individuals who are members of traditional and nontraditional religions seeking public office. Franks and Scherr (2014) suggested that it is unclear whether someone who identifies as a non-mainstream Christian (e.g., Mormon) or non-Christian (e.g., Scientologist) would face more or less discrimination than an atheist. Fringe religious movements can be found both within Christian interpretations and outside (e.g., Mormonism is Christian, while Scientology is not). As such, it will be important to compare not only the non-Christian fringe affiliations, but also the non-mainstream Christian group affiliations. It is unclear if

fringe Christian denominations will be viewed more or less favorably than non-Christian denominations (Franks & Scherr, 2014; Lalich, 2009). Comparing emotional responses (i.e., distrust, disgust, and fear) and political acceptance of atheists compared to mainstream and non-mainstream religious identities is the gap this study addressed.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Question #1: Do atheists face greater discrimination when seeking political office than candidates who identify as mainstream Christian (Protestant), non-mainstream Christian (Mormon), or non-Christian (Scientologist) as measured by the voting likelihood scale (Franks & Scherr, 2014)?

Ho1: Atheists do not face greater discrimination when seeking political office than candidates who identify as mainstream Christian (Protestant), non-mainstream Christian (Mormon), or non-Christian (Scientologist) as measured by the voting likelihood scale (Franks & Scherr, 2014).

Ha1: Atheists do face greater discrimination when seeking political office than candidates who identify as mainstream Christian (Protestant), non-mainstream Christian (Mormon), or non-Christian (Scientologist) as measured by the voting likelihood scale (Franks & Scherr, 2014).

Research Question #2: Are participants more likely to vote for a candidate based on ideological similarity, as predicted by social identity theory and measured by the voting likelihood scale (Franks and Scherr, 2014)?

Ho2: Participants are not more likely to vote for a candidate based on ideological similarity, as predicted by social identity theory and measured by the voting likelihood scale (Franks & Scherr, 2014).

Ha2: Participants are more likely to vote for a candidate based on ideological similarity, as predicted by social identity theory and measured by the voting likelihood scale (Franks & Scherr, 2014).

Research Question #3: Are participants more likely to rate a candidate with lower levels of trust (higher levels of distrust) when their ideologies are similar, as predicted by social identity theory and the socio-functional approach, as measured by the 7-point semantic differential scales (Franks & Scherr, 2014)?

Ho3: Participants will not be more likely to rate a candidate with lower levels of distrust (higher levels of trust) when their ideologies are similar, as predicted by social identity theory and the socio-functional approach, as measured by the 7-point semantic differential scales (Franks & Scherr, 2014).

Ha3: Participants will be more likely to rate a candidate with lower levels of distrust (higher levels of trust) when their ideologies are similar, as predicted by social identity theory and the socio-functional approach, as measured by the 7-point semantic differential scales (Franks & Scherr, 2014).

Research Question #4: Are participants more likely to rate a candidate with lower levels of disgust when their ideologies are similar, as predicted by social identity theory and the socio-functional approach, as measured by the 7-point semantic differential scales (Franks & Scherr, 2014)?

Ho4: Participants will not be more likely to rate a candidate with lower levels of disgust when their ideologies are similar, as predicted by social identity theory and the socio-functional approach, as measured by the 7-point semantic differential scales (Franks & Scherr, 2014).

Ha4: Participants will be more likely to rate a candidate with lower levels of disgust when their ideologies are similar, as predicted by social identity theory and the socio-functional approach, as measured by the 7-point semantic differential scales (Franks & Scherr, 2014).

Research Question #5: Are participants more likely to rate a candidate with lower levels of fear when their ideologies are similar, as predicted by social identity theory and the socio-functional approach, as measured by the 7-point semantic differential scales (Franks & Scherr, 2014)?

Ho5: Participants will not be more likely to rate a candidate with lower levels of fear when their ideologies are similar, as predicted by social identity theory and the socio-functional approach, as measured by the 7-point semantic differential scales (Franks & Scherr, 2014).

Ha5: Participants will be more likely to rate a candidate with lower levels of fear when their ideologies are similar, as predicted by social identity theory and the socio-functional approach, as measured by the 7-point semantic differential scales (Franks & Scherr, 2014).

Theoretical Framework

Social psychology studies have long examined prejudice through the lens of Social Identity Theory. Social Identity Theory posits that personal identity is reflective of the social groups an individual belongs to, and as such, an individual's group membership directly reflects his or her self-concept (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Tajfel (1970) studied minimal and arbitrary differences between group interactions, and found that an individual will allocate more resources to their own group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Investment in one's group increases a positive sense of self, especially when comparisons are made to other groups. This results in ingroup and outgroup categories, where the outgroup is often a target of ingroup prejudice (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). However, research also suggests that simple ingroup and outgroup identities are not enough to explain the complexities of prejudice and discrimination. Studies that look at anti-atheist prejudice and discrimination typically frame the research within the socio-functional approach to prejudice, which suggests the affective as well as behavioral responses that a group elicits from others are a result of perceived threats from said group (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; Gervais, 2013). These threats are different, based on the outgroup identity of the individual assessed (e.g., fear of Black men, disgust for gay men, distrust of atheists), and these different threats elicit different forms of prejudice and discrimination (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; Gervais, 2013). As this study focused on attitudes toward atheists and other minority identities as pertains to voter preferences, group identity and social identification are appropriate and important for this study. By assessing emotional responses (e.g., disgust, distrust, and fear) and how these negative

emotions impact voter preference, the socio-functional approach complements Social Identity Theory's assumption that a candidate's religious similarity is likely to affect voter intention. Understanding how negative emotions influence minority group favorability may help underrepresented groups gain political access.

Nature of the Study

This study utilized a quantitative between subjects 2 x 4 experimental design, with participant religious affiliation similarity (i.e., mainstream Christian, non-mainstream Christian, non-Christian, and atheist) and candidate religious identities (i.e., mainstream Christian, non-mainstream Christian, non-Christian, and atheist) as the two independent variables and voter intention, disgust, distrust, and fear as the dependent variables. As a result of the four levels of independent variables, it was necessary to conduct four separate factorial analyses of variance, for each candidate and participant religious affiliation interaction type. Participants were asked to report the likelihood that they would vote for a candidate on a scale from 1 (no chance) to 9 (100% likely). Four political candidates were presented randomly to participants and described as males, each belonging to a different religious group (Protestant, Scientologist, Mormon, and atheist). Any identity information that would alter the perception of the candidate (e.g., race, political party, sexual orientation) has been intentionally left out (e.g., candidate prioritizes health-care policy, with no emphasis on how he does so). Furthermore, participants also rated the candidates on three 7-point semantic differential scales, assessing whether the candidate seemed (a) untrustworthy, (b) threatening or comforting, and (c) disgusting or appealing with 1 representing untrustworthiness, threatening, and

disgusting, and 7 representing trustworthiness, comfort, and appeal. This emotional scale was constructed within the framework of the socio-functional approach to prejudice, which asserts that individuals ascribe positive emotional values to what he or she deems as an ingroup (e.g., nationality, religion, race) and negative emotional values to a threatening outgroup (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005). The prejudicial response is distinctively different based on the emotion that elicited the prejudice be it the perceived threat to health, values, or physical safety (e.g., fear responses prompt the need to flee; Cottrell & Neurberg, 2005). This design is similar to the design utilized by Franks and Scherr (2014) to examine atheist candidates compared to African American and gay male candidates; whereas, this study compared attitudes toward atheists and individuals who identify with nontraditional religions.

Definition of Terms

Religion: A system of faith involving hierarchal institutions with organized practices, beliefs, faith, and worship, typically centered on a belief in a superhuman controlling power such as a god or gods (Allport, 1950).

Christianity: The organized religious institution based on the person and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth with structured beliefs and practices as defined by the Bible (Astley, 1992).

Christian: An individual who professes Christianity and its teachings and believes in Jesus Christ (Astley, 1992).

Protestantism: The faith, practice, and churches that are forms of the Christian doctrine that are regarded as Protestant rather than Catholic or Eastern Orthodox; these

Western Christian churches follow the principles of the Reformation and include Baptist, Presbyterian, and Lutheran churches (Astley, 1992).

Protestant: A member or follower of the Western Christian Protestant churches (Astley, 1992).

Scientology: A religious system founded by L. Ron Hubbard in the 1950s requiring spiritual fulfillment be met through graded courses of study and training; Scientology is the belief that each human has a reactive mind that responds to life traumas, clouding the analytic mind and keeping humans from experiencing reality (Christensen, 2016; Urban, 2012).

Scientologist: Adherents of the Church of Scientology doctrines and practices (Christensen, 2016; Urban, 2012).

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS): Founded in 1830 by Joseph Smith, a Christian restoration church that is considered by its members to be a restoration of the original church founded by Jesus Christ (Smith, 2016).

Mormon: Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Smith, 2016).

Atheist: A person who lacks belief in the existence of a god or gods or disbelieves entirely (Gervais, 2013).

Fringe Religion: Not part of the mainstream religious practices; an unconventional, peripheral, or extreme take on existing religious practices and groups (Olson, 2006).

Cult: A relatively small group of people having religious beliefs or practices regarded by others as strange or sinister; typically a system of religious veneration and devotion directed toward a particular figure or object (Richardson, 1993).

Cult (As Pejorative): An insult used to demean smaller or more unusual religious practices that may not academically fit the definition of a cult, but are considered strange to the general public (Olson, 2006).

Assumptions

There are aspects of this study that are believed to be true but cannot be demonstrated to be true, and therefore must be presented as assumptions to ensure the integrity of the study findings. It is assumed that participants responded to the survey questions honestly. While social desirability bias is always a possibility in self-report measures, anonymity and the ability to withdraw from the study at any time are preventive measures taken to minimize this and increase participant confidence. Furthermore, participants were also provided a statement of the importance of the study and its purpose, and the necessity of participants' accurate and honest responses. It is also assumed that participants whom elected to participate in this study can read English, are U.S. citizens, are of legal age, and of sound mind, and thus capable of navigating the study. A consent page was presented prior to the participant beginning the study in order to minimize participants accessing the study who should not participate in the study. Furthermore, it is assumed that participants have some basic computer skills and understanding of navigating webpages. The survey was designed in a simple and user-

friendly format in order to minimize errors during the survey process as a result of computer application skills.

Scope and Delimitations

The research questions address anti-atheist prejudice in a political setting and participants' emotional reactions to atheist candidates. This specific focus was chosen in order to expand upon the current literature and work towards alleviating atheist underrepresentation in political office. The comparative electability of atheists with nontraditional religious candidates had yet to be examined (Franks & Scherr, 2014). Existing studies on anti-atheist prejudice and atheists in a political setting have documented negative attitudes and distrust toward atheists and a low likelihood of participants voting for atheist candidates compared to other historically discriminated against groups (e.g., Black men and gay men) who were still Christian (Franks & Scherr, 2014; Gervais, 2013; Gervais, 2014; Gervais et al., 2011).

This study was limited to respondents online who are U.S. citizens of legal voting age, capable of reading English, and find the survey through *Survey Monkey* advertising and hosting services and social media site (i.e., *Reddit* and *Facebook*). However, while generalizability may be limited as a result of online hosting, demographic data was collected to ensure the variability of the sample.

The Socio-functional Approach to Prejudice and Social Identity Theory have been selected as the most appropriate framework for the proposed study. To date, nearly all anti-atheist prejudice research is grounded in these two theories; however studies examining the clinical ramifications for atheist identification (e.g., depression) have

examined atheist identity through the lens of concealable stigmatized identity theory and the consequences of belonging to a group that an individual may feel pressure to hide (Cragun, Kosmin, Keysar, Hammer, & Nielsen, 2012b; Doane & Elliot, 2015; Johnson, Rowatt, & LaBouff, 2012; Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009). Furthermore, some research examining cult perceptions utilized framing theory in order to examine how word and phrase changes altered perceptions of the same process for different groups (Pfeifer, 1992). While each offers important insight into atheist and group identity, both were beyond the scope of the proposed study.

Limitations

One major limitation of this study is the nonrandom sampling method. As the survey will be hosted online, this convenience sampling method can limit the generalizability of the study. In addition to meeting the criteria for inclusion, this could limit the diversity of the sample as well as unintentionally exclude individuals from low socioeconomic backgrounds who may not have Internet access. Another limitation of this study is the use of a between-groups design rather than a within-groups design. While it is not feasible to require participants to examine four separate candidates described identically except for religious identity, it does present a limitation as each respondent only viewed a single candidate option.

Significance of the Study

Although some studies have provided information about why individuals discriminate against atheists, very little research exists on prejudice toward atheists by voters (Franks & Scherr, 2014; Gervais, 2014; Gervais et al., 2011). Expecting that

voters prefer candidates with similar religious ideologies, this study not only adds to the literature on (a) anti-atheist prejudice but on (b) the impact of shared religious identity on voter preference. By advancing the literature on atheists and politics, perhaps gains can be made toward addressing their underrepresentation in elected office. Gaining political representation would allow historically underrepresented groups to better combat institutionalized discrimination that affects their interests (Franks & Scherr, 2014). For atheists this includes maintaining the separation of church and state and keeping politics more secularly inclusive rather than favoring Christianity. Examples of this favoritism include laws passed or changed solely based on Christian values (e.g., Burwell v. Hobby Lobby, 573 U.S), states that prevent atheists from holding public office, and public office meetings beginning with Christian specific invocations, while excluding other religions or nonreligious individuals (American Civil Liberties Union, 2017; McElfresh, 2016; Mehta, 2016; Richer, 2017; Sager, 2014). Furthermore, if atheists were able to gain access to public office, attention could be called to the common forms of discrimination atheists face on a daily basis to prevent hiring and workplace discrimination (Gervais, Shariff, & Norenzayan, 2011; Wallace et al., 2014). Atheist politicians could also hold judges accountable for custodial case discrimination of atheist parents versus Christian parents (Volokh, 2006). Without equal representation, prejudicial and discriminatory practices against atheists largely stay under the radar and will continue to go unlegislated.

Summary

This quantitative study examined the comparative electability of atheists to candidates of other nontraditional religious identities as well as the emotional responses

these candidates elicit. Distrust of atheists and the belief that atheists lack morals have

been well-documented, but only a single study has examined anti-atheist prejudice in a

political setting (Franks & Scherr, 2014; Gervais, 2014; Gervais, Shariff, & Norenzayan,

2011). This study expands on those findings, comparing atheists to nontraditional

religious identities rather than historically marginalized groups such as Black men and

gay men (Franks & Scherr, 2014). Voter intention and participant disgust, distrust, and

fear toward the candidates were measured to determine the extent to which various

religious identities are viewed negatively.

Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive review of the literature, including seminal

and contemporary research. The gaps within the literature were examined and

implications of the literature presented are discussed as is the theoretical foundation. A

literature review related to key variables is also provided.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Atheists in the United States are underrepresented in public office. For example, in the 115th Congress only a single member of Congress identified as unaffiliated, and no members identified as openly atheist (Sandstrom, 2017). In contrast, 91% identified as Christian, while the total United States population is only 70% Christian (Pew Research Center, 2014a; Sandstrom, 2017). The population of individuals identifying as atheist in the United States has more than doubled in the last few years, with 3.1% of Americans identifying as atheist on the 2014 Religious Landscape Study, up from 1.6% in 2007 (Ingraham, 2016; Lipka, 2016a). This underrepresentation is difficult to overcome with pervasive negative perceptions of and prejudice toward atheists. To demonstrate the unelectability of atheist political candidates, the aim for the study was to show (a) perceived atheist threat elicits negative emotional response and (b) atheists are more reviled than even the most historically reviled groups. This may account for atheist underrepresentation in political office.

Several studies have been conducted to examine anti-atheist prejudice, finding that atheists are distrusted, viewed as arrogant, immoral, associated with anti-American sentiments, and are most likely not to be accepted, both publicly and privately, when compared to almost any other ethnic and religious group studied (Edgell, Gerteis, & Hartmann, 2006; Franks & Scherr, 2014; Gervais, 2014; Gervais, Shariff, & Norenzayan, 2011). The majority of Americans (77% of white evangelicals, 67% of Black Protestants, 55% of Catholics, and 46% of white mainline Protestants) would be unhappy if an atheist

were to marry into the family (Lipka & Martinez, 2014). Surveys suggest there is greater acceptance of individuals marrying across party lines, despite high levels of polarization in the current political environment, than there is of individuals who are religious marrying those who are not (Lipka & Martinez, 2014).

This prejudice also extends to the political sphere; however, little research has been done to examine reasons for atheist underrepresentation in political office despite polls indicating that most Americans find atheist candidates less electable than candidates with traditional religious affiliations (e.g., Jewish, Catholic, Baptist; Jones, 2012; Pew Research Center, 2014a). Examples of anti-atheist prejudice include comments made by political candidates about atheists as well as actions taken toward atheists in the public sphere. In 2015, United States presidential candidate Ted Cruz remarked that atheists were not fit to be president, as a president must be willing to start his day with prayer and submit to the King, Jesus Christ (Wing, 2015). Cecil Bothwell, an atheist elected to public office in Asheville, North Carolina, had to defend his election after opponents challenged the constitutionality of his holding political office, solely on the grounds of his atheism and because he took his oath of office on the Constitution instead of the Bible (Zucchino, 2009). Despite federal laws making it illegal to require a religious test for public office, seven states still officially have laws on the books barring atheists from office (Franks & Scherr, 2014). Furthermore, in Arkansas a woman running for a seat on the board of education is the target of slander campaigns based solely on the fact she is an atheist and who opposed a local school that violated the First Amendment by inviting a Catholic nun to bless the school's new fitness trail (Mehta, 2017). Facebook founder

Mark Zuckerberg had previously listed his religious affiliation as atheist, but recently changed this stance to "believing religion is important," with many analysts speculating a public office run in the near future, and open identification as an atheist is considered "political suicide" (Ohlheiser, 2017; Zauzmer, 2016).

Policies that limit atheists' access to public office or their right to live a secular lifestyle do not likewise apply to Christians. This includes the seven states that currently ban atheists from holding public office, as well as the government demonstrating preferential treatment to Christianity and its symbols (Faircloth, 2012; Ferber, 2009; Ferber, 2012; Franks & Scherr, 2014; Stack, 2016; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2008). For example, Christian icons and symbols are frequently found in public and government places, such as the use of the Bible to swear in on for court testimony, references to God on the currency and in the pledge, or nativity scenes and the monuments of the Ten Commandments placed in government buildings, while also denying other religious or secular displays until court intervention occurs (Getto & Harjai, 2015; Schwers, 2015). Furthermore, churches are granted tax exempt status, while also being granted tax funding for various projects (Goodstein, 2014; Moyer, 2017; Totenberg, 2017). Examples of Christian privilege in politics abound, including the use of public school funds for religious schools through vouchers, tax-breaks in the form of faith-based incentives, and legislation prioritizing Christian values (e.g., Burwell v. Hobby Lobby, 573 U.S.). Atheist underrepresentation makes it difficult to maintain a secular government for all citizens, regardless of religious affiliation.

A study conducted in the South eastern United States to evaluate religious discrimination in the workplace, sent out 3,200 fictitious resumes to employers with each resume assigned one of seven religious affiliations: atheist, Catholic, evangelical Christian, Jewish, Muslim, pagan, Wallonian (a fictitious religion created for the purpose of the study) and a control group with no mention of religious affiliation (Wallace, Wright, & Hyde, 2014). Candidates who mentioned any religious affiliation received 20% fewer phone calls and 33% fewer emails than the control group. Researchers believed this may be because overt religious affiliations in the workplace may present conflict. However, atheists faced considerable challenges from employers, with 49% fewer emails and 43% fewer phone calls than the control group and were ranked lower than the pagan or fictitious religion, as well as rating second to last on the employer preference scale, nearly matching the least preferred Muslims (Wallace et al., 2014). In addition to this form of hiring discrimination Gervais (Gervais et al., 2011) found that atheists face hiring discrimination in all high trust domain job roles, such as day care providers.

While the Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, many in the United States do not believe this includes freedom *from* religion. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) often fights cases related to unjust treatment of atheists and the preferential treatment of Christians by the government. Examples include (a) religious booths or decorations placed in government buildings while similar secular booths or decorations are rejected (e.g., Warren, Michigan City Hall); (b) cases in which the government allows public funding to church groups (e.g., *Trinity Lutheran v. Comer*); (c) cases where

atheist school children have been removed from class or shamed for not saying God in the pledge (e.g., Acadiana High School; Lafayette, Louisiana); (d) as well as government sponsored Christian prayer in public assembly meetings, forcing the public to participate (e.g., Rowan County, North Carolina prayer practices; American Civil Liberties Union, 2017; McElfresh, 2016; Mehta, 2016; Richer, 2017; Sager, 2014).

Other examples of atheists denied equal protection under the law include child custody cases in which a parent participating in a church is granted custody over an atheist parent, because the judge rules that religion is for the greater good of the child (Stafford, 2010). One case in New Mexico required a mother to attend religious counseling in order to gain custody of her children. When she complained to the court about the religious overtones of the sessions, nothing was done, and she quit going. Being held in contempt of court, her children were removed from her care for four weeks, and she was forced to attend the sessions to regain custody of her children. The mother's sessions included handouts with Biblical scripture and homework assignments forcing the atheist to write "what is God to me" (Holland, 2015). As punishment, this atheist mother was forced into Christian indoctrination to retain custody of her children. Recently brought to national attention, the first bill offering protection to atheists was signed by President Obama in December of 2016 (Beres, 2017; Johnson, 2016; United States Congress, 2016). This bill was amended and passed as a moral stance against the persecution of atheist writers and cartoonists, particularly in Middle Eastern countries. This bill also recognizes prejudice-based crimes, granting atheists and the nonreligious a protected class status (Beres, 2017; Johnson, 2016; United States Congress, 2016). A

great deal of lobbying took place on the part of atheist activist groups to ensure their inclusion in this bill. Greater political representation of atheists may alleviate some of the legal issues, namely their lack of protections, as it would give atheists some legislative power.

As a result of pervasive negative perceptions of atheists, it is difficult for many of them to openly identify as atheist. Many atheists remain "in the closet" to avoid the stigma, prejudice, and discrimination associated with atheist identification (Doane & Elliot, 2015; Johnson, Rowatt, & LaBouff, 2012). However, while open atheists do report experiencing prejudice and discrimination, individuals who choose to hide their identity report even greater levels of negative well-being as a result of this identity conflict (Cragun et al., 2012b; Doane & Elliot, 2015; Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009). Typically, minority groups that face prejudice from the majority (e.g., Blacks, gays, Muslims, etc.) face more intense and more prevalent prejudice as the group grows in size. For example, as Americans view larger numbers of Muslims coming to the United States, Muslim individuals face more prejudice that is more intense in nature, and larger numbers of Muslims per capita report experiencing prejudice (Gervais, 2011). However, atheists are the opposite; research suggests people are more prejudiced toward atheists in part because they believe them to be such a small group relative to the general population (Gervais, 2011). In recent years, the LGBT community has gained more mainstream public acceptance, while atheists have not (Franks & Scherr, 2014; Harms, 2011). Research suggests that greater exposure to atheists minimizes prejudice toward atheists, meaning more open atheist political candidates may also contribute to more atheists

feeling safe and comfortable in identifying themselves as such, possibly allowing atheists to gain acceptance the same way the LGBT community has been (Gervais, 2011; Harms, 2011). Because of this, atheist views and ideas are thought to be outliers. However, when people perceive greater numbers of atheists around them, prejudice and implicit distrust toward atheists decreases suggesting that open atheist identification and greater representation in office may minimize anti-atheist prejudice (Gervais, 2011). In order to address this problem, a greater understanding of the specific prejudice atheists face is needed to resolve their comparative unelectability.

Current Literature and the Relevance of the Problem

Though research on anti-atheist prejudice has increased over the last decade, it is still sparse. The studies that have been done find that anti-atheist prejudice is associated mainly with distrust (Gervais, 2013; Gervais, 2014; Gervais et al., 2011). Specifically, it is believed by many in the U.S. that morality derives from a higher power, and without answering to this higher power people lack morals (Gervais, 2013; Gervais, 2014; Gervais et al., 2011). This interpretation of morality causes individuals to view it as a fixed value, where the Bible defines right and wrong in absolute terms. As atheists do not have religious "rules" to adhere to, the atheist, therefore, cannot have morals, meaning nothing is stopping him or her from committing all manner of crimes (Gervais, 2013; Gervais, 2014; Gervais et al., 2011). This leads to the conclusion that without morals, atheists are more likely to be criminals and engage in morally repugnant behavior, resulting in the inability to trust them (Gervais, 2013; Gervais, 2014; Gervais et al., 2011).

These findings were expanded when a study by Franks and Scherr (2014) examined more than just distrust toward atheists but also disgust and fear, and found that atheist political candidates were viewed with more disgust and fear than were candidates belonging to groups that face discrimination typically associated with these emotions (e.g., Black males and gay males). Furthermore, the likelihood participants would vote for the atheist candidate compared to a Black male candidate or the gay male candidate was measured, and participants were less likely to vote for the atheist candidate when compared to these candidates representing groups that are historically discriminated against (Franks & Scherr, 2014). However, the focus of the Franks and Scherr (2014) study was on comparing atheists to either the majority religious group (e.g., Christians) or historically marginalized groups (e.g., Black males and gay males). Only one study has compared atheists and the nontraditionally religious (e.g., cultists, with no real-world religious label) in any fashion (e.g., Cragun et al., 2012a), and no study has compared these groups in a political setting.

Research suggests that the only social or religious groups that may be more reviled than atheists are cults (Cragun et al., 2012a; Lalich, 2009; Olson, 2006). As such, the use of cult groups may serve as a useful metric for determining the extent to which the general public dislikes atheists. The aforementioned study did not compare atheists and cultists in a political setting, and furthermore did not use any specific religious label to compare atheists to cultists (Cragun et al., 2012a). Instead the study assessed atheists versus "cultists," using the cultist label specifically. Research has not yet determined the comparative electability of atheists with religions historically at odds with mainstream

values (e.g., Mormons and Scientologists both viewed as fanatical). Determining

whether atheists engender feelings of fear, distrust, and disgust and are more or less

electable than historically unelectable political candidates (i.e., Mormons and

Scientologists) is important in terms of the potential for atheist representation in political

office (Doherty, 2014; Grieg, 2017; Harrison, 2015; McAllister, 2013; Olson, 2006;

Penning, 2009; Pew Research Center, 2014a; Smith, 2014; Urban, 2012).

Preview of Major Sections of the Chapter

This chapter outlines the literature to-date regarding anti-atheist prejudice as well

as the literature assessing the consequences of such prejudice for the atheist population,

especially insofar as political underrepresentation is concerned. Social Identity Theory

and the socio-functional approach to prejudice will be discussed, including not only the

types of research that have been done within each framework, but also the relevance of

each theory to the proposed study. The literature related to the key variables are

reviewed, including studies that have identified the range of negative emotions

underlying anti-atheist prejudice and the implications for atheists seeking political office

is discussed. Nontraditional religious affiliations, cult identity, atheist identity, and how

the public perceive these groups are discussed. The gaps within the literature are

identified as is the significance of the proposed study.

Literature Search Strategy

Conducting an extensive review of the literature to assess key areas for future

research and gain an understanding of the problem was necessary and possible through

the use of the Walden University Library and Google Scholar. Databases used during

this review include: Academic Search Complete, Annual Reviews, LexisNexis Academic, ProQuest Central, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, SAGE Premier, ScienceDirect, SocINDEX, and Taylor & Francis. Books containing pertinent information about research methods and theory were purchased and reviewed, and articles referenced within the books were investigated. The American Psychological Association database PsycNET was also utilized. Data on political representation and religious populations within the United States were obtained from Pew Research Center's Religious Landscape Study and was especially helpful in establishing empirical support for the relevance of this study.

Search terms included the following: *religious discrimination, anti-atheist prejudice, discrimination, prejudice, socio-functional approach, social identity, cults, cult perceptions, religious identity, atheism, intergroup prejudice, intergroup dynamics, intergroup threats, intergroup emotions, voter attitudes, stereotyping, values threat, threat perceptions, religiosity, fringe religious groups, fringe Christian groups, Scientology, perceptions of Mormons, Mormonism, Catholicism, Protestantism, Muslims, government, emotional reactions, emotional responses, religious denominations, attitudes, morality, political discrimination, and factorial research design.*

The literature dealing with prejudicial attitudes is extensive, including the seminal work on Social Identity Theory and the socio-functional approach (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In addition to articles on theoretical approaches to prejudice, an investigation of attitudes toward religious and nonreligious individuals was conducted. The empirical work of preeminent authors on anti-atheist

prejudice includes research from Will Gervais (2011, 2013, 2014), Ritter and Preston

(2011), and Cook, Cottrell, and Webster (2015). Research on other forms of religious

prejudice and discrimination in order to establish context as well as the prevalence of the

problem is also discussed (e.g., Dunkel & Dutton, 2016; Johnson, Rowatt, & Labouff,

2010; Mikołajczak, & Pietrzak, 2014). Research utilizing the socio-functional approach

to prejudice to compare atheist political candidates to historically marginalized groups is

also discussed (Franks & Scherr, 2014), as well as pertinent information regarding the

perceptions of Americans to cult and fringe religious groups (Cragun et al., 2012a;

Urban, 2012; Olson, 2006).

Theoretical Foundation

The Socio-functional Approach to Prejudice

Despite numerous types of stereotypes that prompt prejudice and discrimination,

traditional theories and approaches to prejudice only analyze negative feelings as an

aggregate and their intensity exhibited toward a group and its members (Cottrell &

Neuberg, 2005; Gervais, 2011). However, until recently, researchers have not focused on

the range of emotions, both positive and negative, associated with prejudice (e.g., anger,

fear, disgust, pity, admiration, guilt, etc.). This diversity of emotion was first noted by

Allport (1954). While Katz (1960) suggested attitudes serve a specific function (e.g.,

adjustment, ego-defensive, value-expressive, and knowledge functions), as well as

discussing attitude arousal on the basis of threats (e.g., ego-defensive attitudes are

aroused by threats, appeals to hatred, repressed impulses, and authoritarian suggestions),

the theory was never used in the context of specific emotions for specific types of

stereotyping or prejudice. As such, the emotional range associated with prejudice was
not examined and conceptualized into a workable theory until Cottrell and Neuberg
(2005) established the socio-functional approach to prejudice studies. The assumption
was that if individuals have distinct beliefs regarding different groups, the distinct
feelings associated with those beliefs may provide greater context and understanding of
prejudice (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005).

The socio-functional approach to prejudice posits that researchers must first
understand the unique threats posed before understanding the prejudice against that group
(Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005). Prejudice is typically linked to the perception of a threat,
and each threat perception correlates to a specific emotional response. Perceived threats
to security and safety elicit the emotional response of fear, whereas threats to physical
(e.g., food poisoning) or moral contamination (e.g., sexual liberation versus abstinence
before marriage) elicit the emotional response of disgust (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005).
These visceral emotions each present differently (e.g., facial expressions, neurological
processes, and physiologic patterns) and as such has distinct correlated behavior (Cottrell
& Neuberg, 2005). Examining these emotions, researchers have found that priming
individuals with the emotion relative to a specific group (e.g., disgust toward gays, anger
toward Arabs) increased implicit bias toward those groups (Dasgupta, DeSteno,
Williams, & Hunsinger, 2009). Studies utilizing the socio-functional approach to
prejudice have typically associated a single perceived threat and correlated emotional
response to a group facing prejudice (see: Cook, Li, Newell, Cottrell, & Neel, 2016;
Levin et al., 2016; Levin, Kteily, Pratto, Sidanius, & Matthews, 2013). The proposed

study hypothesizes that participants will exhibit greater levels of disgust, distrust, and fear toward atheist political candidates than toward other nontraditional religious groups that are typically considered at odds with mainstream American values (e.g., Scientologists and Mormons). As a result of these negative emotions and the associated threats many believe atheists pose, the electability of atheists is called into question, resulting in political underrepresentation of atheists at local, state, and federal levels of government.

A series of experiments conducted by Cottrell and Neuberg (2005) to assess how specific threat perceptions (real or imagined threats to safety, values, etc.) about a group (e.g., Blacks, Muslims, gays, etc.) in relation to the stereotypes typically associated with the group (e.g., unintelligent, lazy, poor, criminal, etc.) would cause the individual to feel. The study noted that fear toward Black men, as a result of media images that often prime criminality, was associated with a perceived threat to safety. This means that the type of threat perceived (e.g., fear) by the majority ingroup (e.g., Whites) from the minority outgroup (e.g., Blacks) engenders a prejudicial response reflected by the subsequent behavior (e.g., fear responses elicit the tendency to flee). An emotional response to a group perceived to be a moral threat (e.g., disgust), might prompt the expulsion of the contaminated idea or object (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005). While activist feminists, African Americans, and fundamentalist Christians were all viewed as threats in the Cottrell and Neuberg (2005) study, the type of threat each group posed was different, and the extent to which each group faced prejudice, the types of emotions, and types of stereotypes related to each group were significantly different (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005).

The specificity of emotions related to threat perceptions and prejudice allows for precise examination of prejudice in the context of a given group, while traditional measures of prejudice are too general and ignore how prejudice is activated. By examining threat to emotion activations by prejudice, a greater understanding of the degree to which atheists are viewed negatively can be achieved. Furthermore, this understanding may contribute to ameliorating the problem of atheist unelectability.

It was expected that this study would also have similar findings to Cottrell and Neuberg (2005), where group affiliation elicits different emotional reactions and levels of intensity among participants. For example, studies examining perceptions of Muslims find people are typically angry toward Muslims and fearful of them, and these emotions are related to threats to personal security (fear) and personal resources (anger). Atheists on the other hand are viewed as a moral contaminant, therefore disgusting and cannot be trusted (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; Kuppens & Yzerbyt, 2012; Matthews & Levin, 2012). It is currently unclear how Scientologists and Mormons will be perceived.

Utilizing the socio-functional approach to prejudice, distrust has been found to be a core feature of anti-atheist bias (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2007; Gervais, Shariff, & Norenzayan, 2011). Research suggests atheists are distrusted in part because they do not adhere to a structured religious practice or dogma and, consequently, perceived to lack cooperation and morality which undermines the social order (Franks & Scherr, 2014). Gervais, Shariff, and Norenzayan (2011) found that participants who reported distrusting atheists not only believe in God but also believe that God is watching their behavior, resulting not only in the participant feeling mindful of their actions, but also believing

atheists are not mindful of their actions because they lack this belief (Gervais et al., 2011). While belief in God correlated with greater levels of distrust of atheists, liberal and secular groups in the U.S. were also found to distrust atheists (Gervais et al., 2011). Findings show atheists were socially excluded from high-trust domains (e.g., daycare worker) while a description of a criminally untrustworthy individual (e.g., damaging property, stealing) was assumed to be either an atheist or a rapist but not a Christian, Muslim, Jew, feminist, or homosexual (Gervais et al., 2011).

The study was limited to the U.S., which is predominately Christian. A recent study looked at global distrust by examining 13 countries including majority-Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, and nonreligious countries. The experiment utilized the conjunction fallacy, where participants are asked which group is more likely to commit a specific act, and even in highly secular countries (e.g., Netherlands, Czech Republic, Finland, China), participants intuitively judged atheists less trustworthy and more likely to commit immoral acts (Gervais et al., 2017). Even atheists tend to judge other atheists as distrustful, suggesting that anti-atheist prejudice is globally widespread (Gervais et al., 2017). These findings suggest that people perceive religion and belief in a god as necessary for morality, trust, and prosociality to exist in individuals (Gervais et al., 2017; Neuberg et al., 2014).

Franks and Scherr (2014) utilized the socio-functional approach and the previous research relating distrust to atheist prejudice in order to not only examine anti-atheist prejudice in a political setting but also to examine other emotions related to different types of prejudice. Specifically, Franks and Scherr (2014) sought to examine the two

emotions most commonly connected to bias and prejudice toward two of the most historically discriminated against groups in the United States, Black men and gay men. Fear is predominately responsible for prejudice toward Black men, particularly as a result of media priming that presents Black men as criminal, and disgust largely governs the prejudice toward gay men, as it is considered a threat to values and morals. Each of these emotions, connected to prejudice within the framework, stems from unique threats these groups are perceived to pose to the White, heterosexual, Christian majority in the US (Franks & Scherr, 2014; Schaller & Neuberg, 2012). Appraisals of threats are linked to specific emotions, e.g., a threat to physical safety would elicit fear, a threat to personal rights and freedoms would elicit anger, and a threat to group value and morality would elicit feelings of disgust (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005). The study found that not only were atheist candidates more distrusted (as was predicted based on prior findings) than Black male and gay male candidates, but atheists were also considered more disgusting and participants were more afraid of the atheist candidate as well (Franks & Scherr, 2014). To contrast the high levels of distrust associated with atheists, many political candidates emphasize their traditional religious values, which may be an attempt to enhance public perception of the candidate's morality and elicit trust (Clifford & Gaskins, 2016). Utilizing the socio-functional approach in a political setting allows researchers to get a glimpse into the emotional prejudices that influence voter preference.

Following the Franks and Scherr (2014) study that established atheists in a political setting were targets of more than a single negative prejudicial emotion, Cook, Cottrell, and Webster (2015) found atheists were perceived as a greater threat to values

and elicited a stronger reaction of moral disgust than other groups such as gay men and Muslims. Primed with stories of moral decline, the experimental group was presented with a narrative of current college students not valuing traditional values such as loyalty and fidelity as well as greater instances of students lying and cheating than in past years (Cook et al., 2015). The individuals primed with threat-to-values stories showed an increase in prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory intentions toward atheists (Cook et al., 2015). This finding is in line with previous research finding that high levels of distrust toward atheists relates to the belief that atheists lack cooperation and undermine the social order (Cook et al., 2015; Franks & Scherr, 2014; Gervais et al., 2011). Examining the comparative electability of atheists and nontraditional religious candidates provided new data for each group, specifically in a political setting, and may provide insight into improving the electability of atheists by understanding the context of the prejudice atheists face and to what extent the prejudice is exhibited relative to other reviled religious groups.

Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory (SIT) suggests people identify themselves in relation to the groups they belong to (Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel, 1979; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This means that an individual's family and relationships, vocation and hobbies, religious and political affiliations, social and economic class, gender, and race are all groups that define the person's self-identity. Which identity is most accessible to an individual will vary based on the specific situation he or she is in (Yakushko, Davidson, & Williams, 2009). For example, religious icons displayed publically may remind an individual of his or her

religious identity while the national anthem is a reminder of national identity. This can also occur and even be heightened when an individual's identity is threatened by conflict with another group (e.g., gender roles, racial identity, role of authority, religious identities, etc.). Threats to individual identity can become especially volatile when threatened or disrespected (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). For example, in the United States, the majority of individuals (70%) belong to some form of Christian church (Pew Research Center, 2014). If an atheist is open about his or her identity, a perceived threat may be experienced by both the Christian and the atheist, as each will perceive challenges to their self-identity, pride, and self-esteem (Cowgill, Rios, & Simpson, 2017; Edgell, Gerteis, & Hartmann, 2006; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). As individuals tend to view themselves in a positive light, they also tend to view the groups they belong to in an equally positive light (Cialdini et al., 1976; Cialdini & Richardson, 1980). Individuals may view themselves positively based on the accomplishments of their group (even if they did not contribute directly to these accomplishments). They may also attempt to enhance the status of their group through involvement in it, such as proselytizing a specific religious faith (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Tajfel and Turner (1979) proposed that individuals evaluate others utilizing three mental processes: (1) categorization (i.e., individuals categorize people and objects to organize the social environment), (2) social identification (i.e., individuals adopt the identity of the group to which they belong), and (3) social comparison (i.e., individuals compare their groups to others). Categorization is a natural mental process that allows the person to quickly understand the world around them by evaluating people based on

their group identities (e.g., a man versus a woman). This enhances the individual's sense of safety as the person associates a specific group (e.g., police) with a specific trait (e.g., safety). However, as categorization exaggerates differences between groups and minimizes differences within groups (e.g., people often see the outgroup as more homogenous than the ingroup, making it easy to assert "they are all alike"), this presents the danger of stereotyping and prejudice (Tajfel, 1981). Viewing a group as monolithic (e.g., atheists all lack morals) makes it likely all individuals in that group are judged the same regardless of individual differences. Once stereotypes become established as a cognitive representation of a group, it is difficult to alter these perceptions. These perceptions influence individual judgments and thereby influence beliefs and emotions that lead to prejudicial views. The expectation prior to data collection was that underlying stereotypes and prejudicial feelings may disincline participants to vote for that candidate. Specifically, it was expected participants will be more likely to vote for candidates with similar versus dissimilar identities.

Social identity, while able to promote self-esteem, prosociality, and societal cooperation, also produces religious and political tribalism, meaning that individuals will rigidly defend and support their group simply because they belong to it (Simpson, 2006). For example, the Democratic Party platform presents many issues that, for many Democrats, are not necessarily ideologically consistent. An individual's stance on trade does not decide his or her stance on immigration or abortion. However, despite members potentially disagreeing with specifics of the platform, and having little in common with other members, individuals will coalesce around their party's platform which they view

as far superior to the Republican Party platform (Baldassarri & Gelman, 2008; Fiorina & Abrams, 2008; Ornstein, 2014).

As groups may compete with one another for status (e.g., the winning political party of a presidential election) or resources (e.g., the number of people belonging to a church in a single community), prejudice can arise that fuels polarization (i.e., division into sharply contrasting groups with opposing ideologies) and eventually tribalism (Levine, Prosser, Evans, & Reicher, 2005). While tribalism (i.e., behavior and attitudes that stem from strong loyalty to one's own social group or "tribe") benefits the ingroup, it can also mean that group members (a) fail to question their group's doctrine when warranted and (b) staunchly oppose their group's foes even when not warranted. Tribalism is prominent in the current political environment, with Democrats and Republicans supporting their respective party at all costs, regardless of legislative beliefs or gains (Baldassarri & Gelman, 2008; Fiorina & Abrams, 2008; Ornstein, 2014).

This tribalism of the current environment also extends to religious identification, as the Republican Party is strongly linked to and identifies as evangelical Christian (Lipka, 2016b). One need only examine media coverage from conservative news outlets during Democratic President Obama's administration to see how often he was painted as "other," by suggesting he was a Kenya-born Muslim (Gore, 2017). One-third of conservatives and 17% of Americans believed Barack Obama to be a Muslim, while many conservatives also believed he was an anti-American immigrant from Africa (Gore, 2017). This type of tribalism was examined in a study assessing participant reactions to

various target subject identities, based on which identity had been made more salient at the time (Kuppens & Yzerbyt, 2012).

Kuppens and Yzerbyt (2012) presented female Muslim subjects for Western female participants to examine, with the predominate social identity varying for each subject (e.g., Muslim woman, student, young adult). In groups where the subject was presented as a Muslim woman, female participants felt greater levels of disgust, fear, and anger. However, when the same subject (Muslim woman) was presented as a student or young adult, with no emphasis on her religious identity, these emotions were not nearly as frequent or as strong (Kuppens & Yzerbyt, 2012). It is believed the reason for the reaction is that the combined identity of Muslim woman elicits a threat reaction in Western women related to the fear of physical harm (because of Islamic terrorism), threats to personal rights and freedoms (e.g., Sharia law in majority Muslim countries), and threats to group values and morality (e.g., religious and ideological differences related to women's rights). The study provided evidence of how identity salience affects the emotional response of participant observers when the acknowledged identity of a target subject threatens a social identity of the participant (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; Kuppens & Yzerbyt, 2012). This could have political implications for atheists, if atheist candidates can understate the atheist identity and instead foreground political party or national identity that resonates with the majority of voters.

According to Seul (1999) religious group conflict is well-explained through the use of Social Identity Theory for many reasons. First, a great deal more of an individual's psychological needs and cultural meaning are met by their religious group

affiliation (e.g., cosmology, moral frameworks, institutional organization, rituals, traditions, etc.). With much of an individual's identity tied to religious group affiliation, it stands to reason that intergroup conflict would be common across religious groups, even in cases of seemingly arbitrary and minimal differences (Ysseldyk, Matheson, & Anisman, 2010). This concept was further validated in a global analysis of cultural and religious intergroup conflict. The analysis, including 194 religious and ethnic groups around the world from 97 sites, found that in places where religion is highly infused in group life (e.g., Pakistan), groups were significantly more prejudiced against opposing groups with incompatible values (e.g., Christians and Sunni Muslims in Pakistan), which led to greater discrimination (Neuberg et al., 2014). The study found, further, that when a disadvantaged group had lower levels of religious infusion (secularists in Argentina), the group typically avoided direct, aggressive conflict against the more resource-rich and powerful counterparts (Christians in Argentina), whereas disadvantaged groups with high levels of religious infusion sought out direct and aggressive conflicts (Palestinians versus Israelis), even in the face of significant tangible costs (Neuberg et al., 2014).

Further, religious infusion was also a significant predictor of all forms of conflict including prejudice, interpersonal discrimination, individual and collective violence, and demonstrated increases in symbolic aggression (Neuberg et al., 2014). Not only does this demonstrate the importance of social identity, it may explain why atheists in the United States are less aggressive toward Christians versus the aggressive nature of fundamentalist Christians toward religious minorities and secular ideas (e.g., the "war on Christmas"; Ferber, 2012). Lacking political representation, atheists lack the resources to

challenge large, wealthy, and politically powerful Christian groups. Another study suggests any culturally diverse organizations (e.g., religious groups that are shaped by ideology and not necessarily ethnicity) are likely to experience conflict between the minority and majority identities within the group as a result of the "us" versus "them" social categorization practice (e.g., White and Black people belonging to the same Christian denomination; Hofhuis, van der Zee, & Otten, 2012). This may offer insight into why similar but different Christian groups experience conflict among themselves; while they are similar in religion, interpretational differences create group differences across denominations.

Studies informed by Social Identity Theory require two opposing groups who challenge each other's core motives of belonging and self-enhancement (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). However, these studies examine social identity differences between groups without examining threats or emotions that underlie prejudice. The theory complements other theories that may be more capable of explaining a specific threat or emotion related to ingroup/outgroup threats and prejudice (Haselton & Buss, 2003). For this reason, Social Identity Theory was revised over time, generating new theories. For example, social identity threat theory emerged to assess how ingroups perceive outgroup threats as well as how minorities, that frequently feel threatened, manage this situation (Alexander, 1974; Brewer, 1997; Brewer & Caporael, 1990; Cook, Purdie-Vaughns, Garcia, & Cohen, 2012). As this theory branched into smaller subsets, one focused on the array of emotions individuals experience related to prejudice and focusing specifically on which threats prompted which emotions. This allowed for a look at the (a) interaction between

outgroup threat and their emotional reactions and (b) subsequent behaviors associated with each (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005). To understand how group identities and emotional threat perceptions interact, the proposed study will be informed by both Social Identity Theory and the socio-functional approach to intergroup prejudice.

Rationale for SIT and Socio-functional Approach in Proposed Study

Frameworks that have been produced as a result of SIT, including the socio-functional approach, are extensive and each assesses a small aspect of the complex attitudes and the underlying mechanisms involved in intergroup relations (e.g., Feather & McKee, 2012; Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007; Whitley, 1999). This study compared emotions elicited by prejudice toward atheists and nontraditional religious groups in a political context, and the socio-functional approach facilitated this assessment. SIT will predict participants' voting intentions relative to their own social identities. The socio-functional approach has been used in other studies to assess the unique prejudice, and its underlying emotions, exhibited toward atheists. Because atheists do not represent a cohesive group, with no unifying doctrine, ethnicity or nationality, and no ideological agreement outside of expressing disbelief in a deity, utilizing this approach to understand the emotions associated with prejudice and discrimination toward atheists is necessary to explain the gross underrepresentation of atheists in elected office.

However, many fringe groups are isolated from other groups and therefore unified in their ideology and goals across members (e.g., Mormons and Scientologists; Doherty, 2014; McAllister, 2013; Olson, 2006; Urban, 2012). SIT has been particularly successful at providing powerful explanations for ingroup bias and outgroup stereotyping (Brown,

2000). However, SIT could become more predictive by incorporating affect into the theory (Brown, 2000). For that reason, using the socio-functional approach in relation to SIT is useful. With this in mind, examining groups through the lens of SIT and the sociofuntional approach may explain the unelectability of atheist political candidates as well as predict participants' ingroup voting favoritism. Furthermore, while SIT asserts that participants will likely prefer candidates similar to themselves, the sociofuntional approach allows for an examination of the emotions associated with the types of perceived threats from dissimilar candidates. Both theories serve to explain the prejudice underlying the historical unelectability of atheist candidates seeking political office.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables

Key variables related to this study include (a) religious discrimination, with a focus on atheists as well as nontraditional religious identities (b) ingroup/outgroup prejudice and discrimination as a function of social identity (c) voting behavior as a function of ingroup/outgroup prejudice and discrimination, and (d) the emotional responses associated with ingroup/outgroup prejudice and discrimination. Literature related to these variables as well as the methodology of this study were reviewed and synthesized in order to identify areas for future research and understand the background of the problem in its entirety. The predominance of Christian political representation has resulted in the lack of representation in both nontraditional religious and nonreligious individuals. This minimizes these groups ability to effectively fight for issues important to them, while increasing the ability of Christians to do so. The purpose of this study is to gain greater understanding of the prejudice that makes it difficult for nonreligious

political candidates to both run and win elected office, as well as political candidates from less traditional religious groups.

Religious Discrimination

Within social psychological study, researchers have attempted to understand the complex mechanisms of religion (e.g., Allport, 1950; Allport, 1966; Brown, 1964; Hall, Matz, & Wood, 2010; Herek, 1987). One of the most fascinating discoveries regarding religious study is the relationship between religiosity and prejudice/discrimination. Gordon Allport (as cited in Allport & Ross, 1967) described religious individuals as possessing either intrinsic or extrinsic orientation toward religion, which motivated prejudice and discrimination. An extrinsic religious orientation means the individual has personal motives that lie outside of religion (e.g., social acceptance) and is, therefore, using religion for some nonreligious ends (e.g., social advancement; Allport, 1950). An intrinsic religious orientation means the individual believes in living by the letter of the religious doctrine; the motives to be religious lie within the individual (Allport, 1950). Allport and Ross (1967) found that churchgoers were more prejudiced than non-churchgoers, and that within the churchgoer group, people described as indiscriminately pro-religious were the most prejudiced of all. Focused on ethnic discrimination, Allport and Ross noted that individuals with an extrinsic religious orientation were significantly more prejudiced than those with an intrinsic religious orientation. However, subsequent studies that have utilized the religious orientation approach find that individuals with an intrinsic orientation are also prejudiced, but their target of prejudice is instead the LGBT community (Herek, 1987). This presented new evidence that religion itself could not

only provide justification for prejudice, but engender it as a result of its teachings. That is because the LGBT community is viewed as a moral threat to Christian religious teachings, as it is viewed as a sin. This corresponds to research findings utilizing the socio-functional approach to prejudice that suggest members of the LGBT community are viewed as a moral threat and therefore people are disgusted by them (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; Franks & Scherr, 2014).

Religion has historically been difficult to operationally define, and as such different researchers have approached the topic of religion through different lenses. Allport (1962) stated that religious prejudice be considered in the context of the personal (e.g., personality factors of the individual) and society (e.g., social groups, authority figures, and hierarchical structures). Some research focuses on the organizational structure of religion (e.g., the institution of religion) and its subsequent effects (e.g., Heichel, Knill, & Schmitt, 2013; Sommer, Bloom, & Arikan, 2013; Swan, Heesacker, Snipes, & Perrin, 2014). For example, highly religious nations were found not to be less corrupt than nonreligious nations, and instead democracy seemed to be a necessary element of a religious nation to curtail corruption (Sommer, Bloom, & Arikan, 2013). Other researchers focus on the benefits or consequences to the individual as a result of the practice or adherence to religion as well as differences between spiritual and religious belief concepts and how these vary from the ritualistic practice of religion (e.g., Ivtzan, Chan, Gardner, & Prashar, 2013; Lutjen, Silton, & Flannelly, 2012; Wilson, Bulbulia, & Sibley, 2014). Some studies compare the differences between religion as a practice and institution with god concepts (e.g., morality and prosociality) to determine how each

affects people differently (e.g., Preston & Ritter, 2013; Shariff & Norenzayan, 2007; Shariff, Willard, Andersen, & Norenzayan, 2015).

Research often distinguishes between spirituality and religion, claiming that religion is a practice while spirituality is a belief. An individual may not necessarily practice specific behaviors or adhere to a given institution as a result of his or her belief (e.g., Emmons, 1999; Pargament, 1999; Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999). Pargament (1999) believed that while religion is defined as institutional, organizational, ritualistic, and ideological, spirituality is defined as personal, affective, experiential, and thoughtful. Because Social Identity Theory deals with an individual's identity in relation to his or her social groups, the proposed study will focus on the institution and practice of religion.

Both prejudice and discrimination in relation to religion come in many forms. Studies have been conducted to demonstrate the role of religion in discriminating against ethnicities and races (e.g., Johnson, Rowatt, & LaBouff, 2010; Rowatt & Franklin, 2004), sexual orientation (e.g., Cunningham & Melton, 2013; Whitley, 2009; Woodford, Levy, & Walls, 2013), as well as gender (e.g., Burn & Busso, 2005; Maltby, Hall, Anderson, & Edwards, 2010; Mikołajczak & Pietrzak, 2014; Taşdemir & Sakall-Uğurlu, 2010). Studies also show country-specific majority religions (e.g., Christianity in the U.S.) discriminate against minority religions (e.g., Muslim immigrants) in that same country (e.g., Jasperse, Ward, & Jose, 2012; Taras, 2013; Wallace, Wright, & Hyde, 2014). This prejudice and discrimination often become political and polarized (Ghumman & Ryan, 2013; Hauslohner, 2017; Khera & Smith, 2017; Taras, 2013). For example, in the United

States, the Republican Party often brands itself as the party of "family values" in an appeal to Christian Evangelicals, and in doing so invokes biblical doctrine (Patrikios, 2008; Tavits & Potter, 2015). As a counterpoint, the Democratic Party's more secular platform is criticized by the right as an attack on their religious values, creating an "us" versus "them" culture conflict over what constitutes American values (Patrikios, 2008).

Interestingly enough, this type of culture conflict spurs the Christian majority into often claiming themselves the target of discrimination; they lament a future of an America losing its Christian identity (Coston & Kimmel, 2012; Jones et al., 2016). Referred to as Christonormativity, this phenomenon is the result of Christian dominance and privilege in the United States (Ferber, 2012; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2008). Some researchers even suggest that Christianity is so dominant in U.S. culture, that it can be implicated in all other categories of oppression (e.g., racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, classism, etc.) as the cause justified by biblical arguments (e.g., Bible verses that refer to gay sex as an abomination, women as subordinate to men, other religions as worthy of death; Ferber, 2012; Todd, 2010). Examples of studies in this area include (a) changing perceptions of Americans toward Middle Eastern immigrants as they have shifted from majority-Christian to majority-Muslim and (b) the prevalence of Christian privilege in schools that marginalize all non-Christian students (Blumenfeld, Joshi, & Fairchild, 2009; Nelson, 2009; Tehranian, 2009).

While many Christian groups are vocal about the perceived lack of religious freedom, these groups are often able to discriminate against women, the LGBT community, immigrants, Muslims, and the nonreligious (e.g., Gerstein, 2016; Hiltzik,

2017). Not only through public perception, but politically, Christians wield a great deal of power, enabling them to legislate their values through measures that: prevent women from obtaining access to abortion and birth control, laws that restrict transgender bathroom use, challenge the legality of marriage equality, and fight against immigration, particularly Muslims (e.g., Masci & Lipka, 2015; Zapotosky, Nakamura, & Hauslohner, 2017). The nonreligious and atheist population of the US do not curry this favor with the predominately Christian Congress, and because of public perception and systemic prejudice and discrimination against the nonreligious, are unlikely to achieve elected status to empower themselves politically (Franks & Scherr, 2014).

Atheists and Nonreligious. It has been argued that sweeping anti-religious and anti-immigrant movements are often recycled in different regions and at different points in time, but utilize the same emotional rhetoric customized to target different groups (Casanova, 2012). This can be seen in the 19th-century toward Catholic immigrants in America, which was largely supported through nativism, and is currently taking place in Europe and America targeting Muslim immigrants (Casanova, 2012). Another example of this was during the American "Red Scare" that fueled a great deal of anti-Asian, anti-communist, and anti-atheist attitudes and policies in the US (Skoll & Korstanje, 2013). Atheist prejudice and discrimination in the U.S. is prevalent, with citizens disliking atheists more than any religious group and over half stating they would not support an atheist candidate for president (Lipka, 2016a). This could be partly because the U.S. is comparatively more religious than other developed nations, or it could be related to the rhetoric that fueled fear of "godless communism" (Skoll & Korstanje, 2013).

Atheists have faced a variety of types of discrimination within the U.S. Atheism is a concealable identity that carries enormous stigma, and like other stigmatized groups (e.g., LGBT), choose to remain "in the closet" for fear of backlash (Johnson, Rowatt, & LaBouff, 2012; Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009). This concealable stigmatized identity (CSI) presents problems both for those who choose to "out" themselves as well as those who choose to conceal their identity for fear of discrimination (Cragun et al., 2012b; Doane & Elliot, 2015; Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009). A recent study concluded that traditional polling methods do not account for this stigmatization and as such even with anonymity, atheists do not self-identify as such through direct poll questions (Gervais & Najle, 2017). However, through the unmatched count technique and Bayesian estimation, the study found that atheist prevalence exceeds 11% of the population with greater than .99 probability and exceeds 20% with roughly .8 probability (Gervais & Najle, 2017). The most credible estimate was 26%, which is much larger than the Pew reported figure of 3.1% (Gervais & Najle, 2017; Pew Research Center, 2014a).

At present, open atheist identification is difficult as evidence suggests that atheists who do openly identify face verbal abuse, ostracism, prejudice and discrimination, and are targets of hate crimes (Giddings & Dunn, 2016; Hammer, Cragun, Hwang, & Smith, 2012). For example, some court cases have denied custody to one parent simply because of atheist identification (Volokh, 2006). Atheists are also targets of hiring and job discrimination (Gervais, Shariff, & Norenzayan, 2011; Wallace et al., 2014). They are also targets of political discrimination, making it difficult for atheists to run for or be elected to public office (Franks & Scherr, 2014). Recently, Mark Zuckerberg, who had

been an open atheist recanted his atheist identification, and many believed this is because

he aspires to be elected to office, and open atheism is considered "political suicide"

(Solon, 2017). Given the pervasiveness of anti-atheist prejudice and discrimination, it is

noteworthy that research documenting it began as recently as the 2000s.

Research documenting the perceptions of atheist morality has been the major

focal point of anti-atheist studies, with a great deal of evidence supporting the belief that

atheists are immoral and therefore not trustworthy (e.g., Edgell, Gerteis, & Hartmann,

2006; Gervais, Shariff, & Norenzayan, 2011; Gervais, 2013). Experiments asking

participants to judge who would likely have committed serial murder, consensual incest,

necrobestiality, and cannibalism found that American participants intuitively believed

these actions to be representative of atheists, more so than eleven other religious, ethnic,

and cultural groups (Gervais, 2014). This type of prejudice has been found to be very

resilient, with some studies suggesting anti-atheist prejudice is best explained by the

perception that atheists lack the capacity for caring, kindness, and compassion, while

other studies find atheists are viewed as repugnant and as such elicit moral disgust

(Anderson, 2016; Cook, Cottrell, & Webster, 2015; Gervais & Norenzayan, 2012a;

Mudd, Najle, Ng, & Gervais, 2015; Simpson & Rios, 2016). One study even suggests

American participants found beverages more disgusting tasting after copying a passage

from either the Qur'an or the book *The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins (Ritter &

Preston, 2011). Interestingly, this study also found that allowing participants to wash

their hands following the copying of the passage, eliminated the disgust, suggesting that

symbolic disgust manifests physically and removing it protects an individual's moral

values (Ritter & Preston, 2011). In 2015, researchers examining existential threats found that atheists prompt the religious to question their beliefs and think about death, creating a fear threat reaction, which increased disparagement, social distancing, and distrust of atheists (Cook, Cohen, & Solomon, 2015). Together it suggests that anti-atheist prejudice is highly complex and further investigation is necessary to explain the underrepresentation of atheists in political office.

Researchers have tested strategies for eliminating anti-atheist prejudice. Some suggest that research questions frame atheism as positive (e.g., the majority of scientists and academics are nonbelievers) and that skepticism has become increasingly necessary in society, thus it is a valued trait and the natural outcome of skepticism may be agnosticism or atheism (Caldwell-Harris, 2012). This concept was furthered by Norenzayan and Gervais (2013) in their discussion of the origin and evolution of religious disbelief. Studies have used imaginative scenarios or priming methods, finding that (a) priming secular concepts or (b) showing visuals of interactions with atheists decreases bias and prejudice (Gervais, 2011; Gervais & Norenzayan, 2012b; LaBouff & Ledoux, 2016; LaBouff, Rowatt, Johnson, & Finkle, 2012). This is especially important regarding institutions of government and power, such as police, court systems, and government officials, as evidence suggests that foregrounding secular rule of law decreases political intolerance and prejudice toward atheists (Norenzayan & Gervais, 2015). Finding ways to minimize anti-atheist prejudice is a necessary step toward increasing their political representation.

While most of the anti-atheist literature has focused on morality, little research has examined atheist prejudice and discrimination in a political context despite their conspicuous underrepresention in elected office. Franks and Scherr (2014) examined anti-atheist prejudice in politics and found that atheist candidates faced greater levels of distrust, disgust, and fear, as well as decreased voter intention compared to other historically marginalized candidates such as African American and gay males. Other studies have confirmed that religious identity labeling plays a role in how an individual is perceived (Charles, Rowland, Long, & Yarrison, 2012; Swan & Heesacker, 2012). With this in mind, it is expected that examining religious identity in a political context would place even greater importance on the religious identity-participant perception relationship, given the importance of political positions.

Franks and Scherr (2017) and Franks (2017) expanded on this research to understand anti-atheist prejudice in a political context. Franks and Scherr (2017) found that analytic thinking (operationalized for the study as performance on the Cognitive Reflections Test) increased acceptance of secular ideas and reduced anti-atheist prejudice (operationalized as the participant's willingness to vote for the atheist). However, it may be difficult to prime analytic thinking in a real-world election, and other research that has attempted to prime analytic thinking did not find reduced anti-atheist bias, suggesting that where the study takes place (e.g., church vs. school) and the type of sample may alter the results (Sanchez, Sumdermeier, Gray, & Calin-Jageman, 2017). For example, voters facing a polling location with confusing and complex voting rules and long lines may resort to intuitive and emotion-based (Berger, Meredith, & Weaver, 2008; Eidelman,

Crandall, Goodman, & Blanchar, 2012; Franks & Scherr, 2017; Greene, Morelli, Lowenberg, Nystrom, & Cohen, 2008; Mani, Mullainathan, Shafir, & Zhao, 2013). Franks (2017) also found that while informational manipulations (e.g., suggesting an atheist candidate is popular to participant groups) improved voter intention for the candidate, Christian participants still preferred a Christian candidate similar to themselves. It was noted however, that the participants were more likely to consider the atheist candidate if the Christian candidate was labeled a theocrat (Franks, 2017). This suggests that pejorative representation of a religious candidate or ideology (e.g., referring to a fringe or nontraditional religion as a cult) may alter perceptions and value assessments of the candidate and therefore voter intentions.

Nontraditional Religious Groups. It is not yet known how nontraditional religious groups would compare to the nonreligious in a political contest; however, it is known that these groups also face discrimination. Many major religions paradoxically present both prosocial and aggressive tendencies. Research examining this paradox in both Catholic and Protestant Christians found that different presentations of God prompted different behaviors from believers (Johnson, Li, Cohen, & Okun, 2013). When God is presented as an authoritarian figure (e.g., controlling, commanding, or punishing) Christians were more likely to behave aggressively toward outgroups (Johnson et al., 2013). When God was instead presented as benevolent (e.g., helping, forgiving, or protecting) Christians were more likely to engage in volunteerism and provide aid to outgroups (Johnson et al., 2013). Further, when God concepts were experimentally manipulated for non-Catholic Christians, the benevolent God increased an individual's

willingness to forgive others, whereas the authoritarian God decreased forgiveness (Johnson et al., 2013). Many stories of the Christian God frequently depict a figure that demands obedience, so these findings paint a grim picture for groups seeking to avoid prejudice from traditional Christians in the U.S.

Groups that either (a) receive a great deal of attention in the media such as Muslim immigrants, (b) are increasing in popularity and in the number of adherents such as atheists, or (c) have practices too far removed from the mainstream religion such as Scientology, are likely to be targets of Christian prejudice. A study seeking to examine perceptions of cults presented participants with descriptions of indoctrination practices for groups labeled the Marines, the Catholic Church, and the Moonies, where indoctrination practices were identical for each group. A vignette was presented of a young man joining either the Marines, the Catholic Seminary, or the Moonies. Participants were then asked to evaluate each of the practices, and researchers noted variations among participant perceptions simply as a result of the group's identity (Pfeifer, 1992). Participants were more likely to prefer the term "brainwashing" to describe the techniques of the Moonies, "resocialization" for the techniques of the Catholic Church, and "conversion" for the techniques of the Marines, despite their identical descriptions (Pfeifer, 1992). Further, the man was judged to have been coerced into joining the Moonies and participants were more likely to rate a negative description of cult activity as more accurate than a positive description. This means that people's evaluations of an indoctrination process are often based on emotional reactions from negative schematic representations, rather than an objective evaluation of the group's

practices. The study examined how individuals view cults and their practices and found that public perception is more powerful than the practices of the group itself. Furthermore, the study found that people generally were not well-informed about groups considered to be cults, and much of the information individuals did possess was acquired secondhand based on public perceptions rather than accurate information (Pfeifer, 1992).

Many minority and nontraditional religions in the U.S. are often labeled as a cult by the general population, if the group is newly established or has practices considered too far removed from those of the mainstream. Research suggests that many Americans are prejudice toward Mormons specifically as they perceive the religion as smaller and newer comparative to other mainstream religions, and older religious practices are viewed as more stable and pure (Eidelman, Pattershall, & Crandall, 2010; Heise, 2013; Warner & Kiddoo, 2014). This makes Pfeifer's (1992) findings relevant to the public perception of smaller or newer religious groups (e.g., Scientologists and Mormons). Both religions were founded in the United States (considered a comparatively "new" country), and both have a small percentage of adherents compared to mainstream religions and even compared to the atheist population. An interesting consideration of studies examining cult perceptions is identifying a group as a cult, which can be difficult. First, no religious group or adherent considers themselves as a cult or cultist, while the general public tends to view newer or nontraditional religions as cults, suggesting that outsiders of the religion view them negatively (Cragun et al., 2012a). The literature on cult identification only further complicates this issue finding it difficult to determine which groups are considered a cult and which are not. Richardson (1993) states that the term

cult was once understood to refer to a religious group with a charismatic founder and these groups were contrasted with other religious organizational types. However, now the term cult is a pejorative used as a catch-all that refers to any unusual religious groups and their activities (Lalich, 2009; Richardson, 1993). Groups that are a part of the anticult movement (ACM) successfully utilized the tactic of labeling a religious group as a cult to curry public support for raids of the Fundamentalists Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in 2008 and the Waco Branch Davidians in 1993 (Barker, 1986; Wright, 2011; Wright & Fagen, 2011).

Olson (2006) suggests that relabeling the term cult to "New Religious Movement" or "New Christian Church" reduced negative attitudes. Furthermore, *New Christian Church* garnered the most positive responses, implying that there is a differentiation between a new religious group and a new Christian group (Olson, 2006). A study conducted by Cragun, Henry, Homan, and Hammer (2012) compared attitudes toward cult members and atheists and found that the students surveyed held greater negative attitudes toward cultists than atheists. However, the context for this study was not political. Furthermore, the study compared atheists and "cult members" and did not use any real-world religious examples of a group that may be considered a cult to the general public (e.g., Scientologists or Mormons).

The proposed study, inspired by the Cragun et al. (2012a) and Franks and Scherr (2014) studies, seeks to bridge this gap, by providing actual nontraditional religious examples (i.e., Scientologists and Mormons), often depicted as cult-like, in a political context. The proposed study seeks to compare candidates from each religious affiliation

with atheist candidates to assess the electability of atheists candidates with other,

typically reviled religious groups.

One religious group that often receives negative attention is the Church of

Scientology (Doherty, 2014; McAllister, 2013). The unusual structure and teachings of

the church have led many to believe the church leadership uses brainwashing techniques

to maintain control of its members. This is in part a result of the history of the Church's

founder, L. Ron Hubbard, who is often positioned as a cult leader with ties to the famous

occultist Aleister Crowley (Urban, 2012). The reclusive nature of the church combined

with media portrayals and interviews from individuals who have "escaped," reinforce the

image of the church as a cult (Doherty, 2014; Gilbert, 2016; McAllister, 2013; Thurm,

2015).

Another religious group that frequently receives negative attention is the Church

of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, commonly referred to as the Mormon Church.

Despite the fact the church is a Christian denomination, its divergence from mainstream

Christian doctrine makes it the target of religious prejudice (Penning, 2009). It has been

argued that the prejudice and discrimination Mormons face is similar to 19th Century

Catholics and modern-day Muslims in America (Grow, 2004; Penning, 2009). However,

Catholics now enjoy a great deal of power and political relevance, whereas the Mormon

Church has yet to accomplish this feat (Grow, 2004). An article posted on a site hosted

by the Protestant-affiliated Liberty University argues that the cosmology argument

presented by the Mormon Church is too similar to evolution and therefore justifies

Mormonism's defeat (Pruitt, 2014). Historical review and academic studies contend that

a great deal of the negative perception of Mormons stems from the belief that Mormons devalue women (e.g., polygamy). Furthermore, when individuals believe the church is a newer religion, they desire greater social distance (the levels of intimacy tolerated) from the church (Heise, 2013; Warner & Kiddoo, 2014). Greater social distance toward a group is a sign of greater levels of prejudice as well as less positivity toward the group (Warner & Kiddoo, 2014). Groups and practices perceived as older are viewed more positively (stable and entitative) than those that are relatively new (Eidelman, Pattershall, & Crandall, 2010). As the Mormon Church is the only major religion established on American soil (in 1830) the religion itself is viewed as new, and this study found that the view "older is better" extends to adherents of a group and not just the group itself (Warner & Kiddoo, 2014).

Politically, the Mormon candidates may find themselves in a difficult position, as the conservatives struggle to view them as "Christian" and liberals find them too repressive (Smith, 2014; Smith, 2016). During the 2007 election cycle, Mitt Romney's religion was a major focal point of media coverage, accounting for 30 percent of his total media coverage and 50 percent of all religion-related presidential primary stories (Baker & Campbell, 2010). A later evaluation of the candidacy of Mormon presidential candidate Mitt Romney found that many conservatives were hesitant to vote for him, particularly those that did not strongly identify as a Republican. However for those individuals that did strongly identify as a Republican, party identity and the desire for their candidate to win led many Christian voters to identify Mormons as Christian and reconcile voting for Romney (Smith, 2016). However, overall voter aversion to

Mormons is increasing as a result of Romney's candidacy (Smith, 2014). Surveys

examining voter intentions and feelings following the 2008 election find that

conservatives do not want to vote for a Mormon candidate, as "they are not really

Christian" and liberals do not want to vote for a Mormon candidate because they

"represent a repressive religious coalition" (Smith, 2014). A separate study found voters

in the 2008 election were more concerned with Romney's religious affiliation than any

other candidate (Campbell, Green, & Monson, 2012). Furthermore, exposure to

Mormons related directly to individual perceptions of Mormons. Those voters who had

no prior exposure to Mormons were likely to be persuaded by both negative and positive

information, while voters with sustained Mormon contact were not likely persuaded by

information either way. Most interestingly, voters with moderate contact reacted the

strongest to negative information about Mormons but were not persuaded by positive

information (Campbell et al., 2012). Given that Mormons are only 1.6% of the U.S.

population, this may explain why findings indicate a rise in voter aversion toward

Mormon candidates following Romney (Pew Research Center, 2014b; Smith, 2014).

This may also suggest that atheist candidates may face the same obstacles, given their

population size (3.1%) and the odds of the average person interacting with atheists

regularly (Pew Research Center, 2014a). As a result, it is important to consider the role

of religious identity and subsequent voter intention.

Ingroup/Outgroup Prejudice and Discrimination as a Function of Social Identity

Some social identity literature emphasizes prejudice and discrimination as an

aspect of outgroup threat perceptions. Other studies instead focus on prejudice as a

function of ingroup favoritism, with no malicious intent (Dunkel & Dutton, 2016). An

example of the latter would be employment networking. Employers frequently ask

employees to refer their qualified acquaintances to apply for positions within the

company. However, most people affiliate with others similar to themselves culturally

and ideologically (e.g., ethnicity, religious identity). This can create unintentional

segregation in a workplace when networking is largely responsible for job applicants and

hiring, leading to unintentional discrimination toward applicants from different

backgrounds simply because they were never considered to begin with (Greenwald &

Pettigrew, 2014). This type of discrimination is, therefore, a function of networking and

ingroup preference rather than outgroup prejudice based on threat perceptions and

hostility (Greenwald & Pettigrew, 2014). The authors argue, further, that discrimination

need not involve hostile prejudicial emotions, but simply be the act of treating others

unfairly or unequally "because of" race, skin color, sex, religion, national origin, age, or

disability status, regardless of any intention to do so (Greenwald & Pettigrew, 2014).

While this ingroup favoritism may explain certain facets of how atheists become

marginalized politically (e.g., Christians are more likely to vote for candidates like

themselves) research suggests atheists are viewed as criminal and threatening (e.g.,

Gervais, 2013; Gervais, 2014; Gervais et al., 2011; Gervais et al., 2017). Therefore, the

more closely an individual's religious identity mirrors that of the target subject, the more

likely the individual is to accept, or in the case of the proposed study, vote for the similar

person while expressing prejudice toward dissimilar persons.

It has been said that while individuals choose their ideologies, ideologies likewise choose the people, based on the needs of those people and how maintaining that specific belief structure serves those needs (Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009). For example, it has been argued that Christian theology is not only useful in providing a moral code for its adherents, but also useful as a weapon to protect Christians from outgroups that are deemed threatening (Ferber, 2012; Todd, 2010). It is this function of social identity that appears the most relevant to the proposed study, given the extreme emotional responses typically associated with anti-atheist prejudice (Cook et al., 2015; Franks & Scherr, 2014; Gervais et al., 2017). As Katz (1960) suggested, attitudes serve a specific function, and the function served determines what may arouse or alter the attitude. Ego-defensive attitudes are aroused by perceived threats, appeals of hatred, repressed impulses, and authoritarian suggestion, whereas value-expressive attitudes are aroused by cues related to the individual's values and need to reassert self-image (Katz, 1960). As religious identity serves both functions, it is particularly salient, and volatile when challenged.

Emotional Responses Association with Ingroup/Outgroup Prejudice and Discrimination

Emotional responses related to ingroup/outgroup bias and prejudice are typically a function of perceived threats and the emotions that underlie them (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005). Gervais, Shariff, and Norenzayan (2011), Franks and Scherr (2014), and Cook, Cottrell, and Webster (2015) find strong evidence that atheists are viewed as a threat to physical safety (fear response) and a threat to group values (disgust response). Furthermore, perceptions of religion leave individuals believing religious belief is

necessary to promote important prosocial behaviors such as cooperation and morality and to protect the social order. This means people believe if religion offers prosocial benefits, an individual lacking religious belief does not offer these benefits (Cook et al., 2015; Franks and Scherr, 2014; Gervais, 2011). In a study examining emotional responses, prejudice, and voting behavior, a positive relationship was found between disgust sensitivity and political conservativism (Inbar, Pizarro, Iyer, & Haidt, 2012). Given what is known about atheists in relation to moral threat perceptions and feelings of disgust, conservatism may be a strong predictor of anti-atheist prejudice, and party identity may also predict participant voting based solely on religious identities.

Voting Behavior as a Function of Ingroup/Outgroup Prejudice and Discrimination

Voting behavior is often linked to group behavior and identity (Ben-Bassat & Dahan, 2012). Furthermore, voting behavior and its relationship to prejudice and discrimination has been examined in several election cycles, with the most prominent being the 2008 presidential election. Researchers found that individuals with greater levels of explicit racial and ethnic prejudice were less likely to vote for Barack Obama and more likely to vote for John McCain (Payne et al., 2010). However, individuals with higher levels of implicit ethnic and racial prejudice, while more unlikely to vote for Obama were not more likely to vote for McCain, instead choosing to abstain or vote for a third-party candidate (Payne et al., 2010). A study examining affective reactions to policies that benefit marginalized and historically discriminated against groups accurately predicted that if the individual held a prejudicial emotion such as disgust toward homosexuals, a policy that benefited homosexuals was also viewed as disgusting

(Cottrell, Richards, & Nichols, 2010). Importantly, general affect measures of prejudice (e.g., measuring general feelings or averaging specific emotions for a composite index of general affect) did not accurately predict policy attitudes, but measures of specific emotions (e.g., disgust) did (Cottrell et al., 2010). Furthermore, a study comparing affective polarization across party lines found that participants were not only immediately hostile (as measured by implicit association tests) to nonpartisan targets (e.g., a person with a different party affiliation) but that the responses were stronger in intensity than racial prejudice (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015). As such, voting behavior is strongly linked to ingroup identity and those in the outgroup engender strong negative emotions and prejudice.

Results from three separate studies find that participants will abstain from voting when the election lacks candidates who endorse their specific moral concerns and values (Johnson et al., 2014). These concerns include care and fairness, which predicted voting intention for liberal voters, while loyalty, authority, and sanctity concerns predicted voting intentions for conservatives (Johnson et al., 2014). Taken together with other studies, these findings suggest atheists must be aware of the social identity they present as well as demonstrate an ability to show kindness and caring in order to improve voting intentions toward them (Kuppens & Yzerbyt, 2012; Simpson & Rios, 2017). If the atheist candidate does not present a strong party identity, with an emphasis on that party's values, voters may simply focus on the atheist identity and their current perceptions of atheists, continuing the cycle of atheist unelectability.

Analyses of far-right leaders suggest that these leaders can influence discriminatory action without directly using words associated with discrimination (Verkuyten, 2013). One example is the characterization of Islam as a doctrine used for violent political and religious ends versus Islam as a religion embraced and practiced by Muslim people. By framing the two as separate from one another, leaders have effectively defined Islam as an external threat to Western values, while simultaneously resisting accusations of prejudice (Verkuyten, 2013). Similar tactics could be used against atheists as well, by associating atheism with communism, similar to Cold War strategies used to contrast the democratic Christian United States with Russia's godless tyranny (Skoll & Korstanje, 2013). While other historically marginalized groups (e.g., Blacks and the LGBT) have made large gains in political representation in the last few decades relative to their population size, gaining proportional atheist representation will likely be more difficult (Franks & Scherr, 2014). Religion informs U.S. society as both a belief system and a social identity that atheists are perceived to stand in complete contrast to and against. Not only are individuals more likely to trust a political candidate that references God, but these references to God also reduce perceptions of a nation in decline (Shepherd, Eibach, & Kay, 2016). Overcoming such barriers will be difficult, but research may offer the best way to accomplish a representative government and ameliorate the problem of atheist unelectability.

Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate the comparative unelectability of atheist political candidates because of perceived threats that elicit negative emotional

responses (e.g., distrust, disgust, and fear). The findings may help alleviate this problem and promote positive social change by achieving greater atheist representation and legislative equality. Both the Social Identity Theory and the socio-functional approach informed this study. Social Identity Theory suggests that participants will most likely support candidates similar to themselves and less likely to support candidates dissimilar to themselves, while the socio-functional approach to prejudice allows for the measurement of participants' emotional reactions to each candidate (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

People view atheists as immoral and untrustworthy, making it difficult for atheists to gain political representation (Gervais, 2013; Gervais et al., 2011). While some examination of atheists in political settings has revealed atheists face more difficulty obtaining elected status than Black or gay men, no study has compared the comparative electability of atheists and nontraditional religious candidates (Franks & Scherr, 2014). The aim of this study is to provide further insight into the problem of atheist unelectability.

To examine the comparative electability of atheist and nontraditional religious candidates, Chapter 3 describes the research design and approach used to answer the research questions. Sampling, instruments, and the statistical methods utilized to analyze the data will are also provided.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The underrepresentation of atheists in political office denies them the legislative power enjoyed by other groups (Franks & Scherr, 2014; Pew Research Center, 2014a; Sandstrom, 2017). Pervasive anti-atheist prejudice results in job discrimination, difficulty winning child custody cases, and attacks in the public sphere based solely on a lack of religious belief (e.g., Holland, 2015; Mehta, 2017; Wallace et al., 2014; Wing, 2015). Were atheists represented in elected office proportional to their representation in the general population, they would be in a better position to address issues concerning them. The purpose of this study is to examine the (a) comparative electability of atheists to other nontraditional religious candidates and (b) emotions that underlie the prejudice these candidates may face. To date, no study has examined the comparative electability of American atheists to other nontraditional religious political candidates. Research examining the electability of atheists is necessary to ameliorate the problem of their underrepresentation, and in doing so, establishment of a more representative government.

This chapter presents information on the quantitative methodology the proposed study will utilize, as well as participant recruitment and sample size information. The measurement instruments are described as well as the rationale for their use. The independent, dependent, and confounding variables are discussed, as well as the validity and reliability of previous studies utilizing similar methodology and instruments. Data collection procedures and analysis strategies are presented. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the ethical procedures taken to protect participants.

Research Design and Rationale

This study examines atheist electability to political office by measuring (a) voter intention and (b) emotional responses to (d) political candidates based on their (d) religious affiliation relative to the (e) participant's religious identity. A quantitative design was chosen for this study as it is appropriate for examining relationships among variables. Qualitative designs do not rely on statistical analyses, and instead are more exploratory in nature. The constructs to be assessed have been explored in previous research, some of which used a similar framework and methodology (e.g., Franks & Scherr, 2014, Cook, Cottrell, & Webster, 2015). Furthermore, a quantitative design allows the study to be replicated more easily to verify the results across different samples (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). Two independent variables (a) participant religious identity and (b) candidate religious identity with at least four levels each (i.e., Protestant, Scientologist, Mormon, and atheist) and four dependent variables (i.e., voter intention, disgust, distrust, and fear) were examined to determine the relationship among them. This factorial design is necessary to consider multiple factors together at once.

The participant's voting intentions were measured by the voter likelihood scale while the three emotional reactions (e.g., disgust, distrust, and fear) were measured by three 7-point semantic differential scales. The research questions presented served as a guide to assessing the statistical significance of the candidate's religious identity (IV) and its interaction with the participant's religious identity (IV) and the main effects on voter intention (DV), disgust (DV), distrust (DV), and fear (DV). One potential constraint may be the difficulty in getting a sufficient number of participants for the rarer religious

identities such as Scientology. However, as the main focus of the study is majority

prejudice against the minority religious groups, this will not impede completion of this

study.

The purpose of this study is to compare the electability of and emotional

responses to political candidates who represent traditional and nontraditional religious

affiliations, where voting intentions were used as a proxy to measure prejudice. The

research questions ask (a) if atheists experience greater discrimination when seeking

political office than candidates of nontraditional religious identities, (b) if participants are

more likely to vote or not vote for a candidate based on a similar or dissimilar religious

identity, and (c) which types of political candidate religious identities will rate worse on

the semantic scales regarding distrust, disgust, and fear.

Methodology

Population

The target population selected for this study is United States citizens over the age

of 18 that are legally allowed to vote. Recent reports of registered and eligible voters

place this population size at 218,959,000 (Goldmacher, 2016; Krogstad, 2016).

Individuals unable to read in English and those who do not have access to the Internet

will not be able to participate.

Sampling

Any research that uses the Internet to host surveys and collect data is utilizing a

type of nonprobability sampling strategy known as convenience sampling. The perk of

this method is the easily accessible participants; however, as with any nonrandom

sampling method, there is no guarantee of accurately capturing a representative sample of the population. The Internet does allow greater access to larger and more diverse samples, but it is unlikely the sample will be truly representative. For example, the study may unintentionally eliminate lower socioeconomic individuals who do not have Internet access. Use of the Internet as a tool for sampling and hosting the survey was chosen to minimize costs of conducting the study, to conveniently sample a large and diverse group, and the convenience to participants. *Survey Monkey* both hosts the survey and recruits participants via social media Internet advertising.

Power Analysis

An a priori analysis for an ANOVA with fixed effects, special-main effects, and interactions utilizing G*Power suggested the study would require a sample size of 256 total participants ($N = 256$) to produce a moderate effect size (Cohen's $d = .5$), with a power level of .80, and an alpha level of .05 (Cohen, 1969). This includes the necessary analyses with the 4 levels of the two independent variables, the 4 types of dependent variables, the interaction of independent and dependent variables, and posthoc comparisons (64 participants in each level of the 4-level variables). As such, participants were randomly assigned one of four candidates, each candidate having a minimum of 64 participant responses each. The power of a test of statistical significance (.80) is defined as the probability the test will reject the null hypothesis when it should (avoiding a Type II error), essentially meaning there is an 80% chance of finding differences or relationships among variables if they actually exist. This power is affected by the effect size and the size of the sample. In the social sciences and specifically in similar studies

to this one, the power level is generally accepted as .80 or greater, and thus why it was chosen here. The alpha level of .05 means there is a 5% chance of a Type I error occurring, and was chosen as conventional for social science studies as well as to match similar previous studies. Effect size serves only as an estimate, as it cannot be calculated until after data collection, however researchers typically estimate a moderate to large effect size during power analysis, and studies similar to this one used Cohen's *d* to calculate effect size during analyses, and is why it was chosen here. Each value is not only conventional for similar social science studies, but should also minimize errors and demonstrate greater significance in the statistical findings if a relationship between variables exists.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Following Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, the survey was hosted using the online survey site *Survey Monkey*, along with the candidate descriptions and requests for demographic data such as participant age (legal voting age and age of consent is 18 years of age), participant religious and political affiliation. Using an online setting allows for greater access to a random and diverse sample, as well as larger numbers of participants. The survey began with a consent form, informing participants by entering the survey, they give consent to participate. This form states that by continuing with the survey, the participant acknowledges they are at least 18 years old, is able to read in English, and resides in the United States. Further, participants were informed of the confidential and voluntary nature of the study, that participants may end participation at any time or refrain from answering any questions, and that participants

should not include any personally identifying information (e.g., name). The form

concluded with appropriate contact information for the university and researcher should

any questions or concerns arise. Participants pushed an "I Agree" button to proceed and

an "I Do Not Agree" button to discontinue.

Participants were recruited online using *Survey Monkey*, with postings to other

sites provided by the hosting site. Further, postings were made to the social media

website *Facebook* to religious group pages (e.g., Mormon, Scientologist, atheist) in order

to attract a variety of religious identities to participate. The survey was also posted on

sites aimed at attracting research participants such as *Call for Participants* and *The*

Inquisitive Mind. The survey was also later posted on *Reddit*. The recruitment flyer

asked participants to evaluate political candidates to determine how much information is

necessary to form accurate impressions; this slightly obscured the true purpose of the

study (Franks & Scherr, 2014). A copy of the recruitment flyer can be found in the

appendices. If told they were being assessed for prejudice and ingroup preferences,

participants' responses may reflect a social desirability response (Podsakoff, MacKenzie,

Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Participants were asked to read about a candidate running for

the U.S. House of Representatives, and were told the information may be about any

aspect of the candidate's life or personality. The political candidate was described as a

39-year-old male named, John, whose political agenda prioritizes the economy, health

care, and education (Franks & Scherr, 2014). Participants were randomly assigned, using

Survey Monkey tools, to read about one of four candidates, identified as: Protestant,

atheist, Scientologist, or Mormon. The sample ($N = 256$) was divided into four groups

(64 participants per candidate type). Each participant reviewed one of the four candidate descriptions.

Following this, participants indicated their likelihood of voting for that candidate using the voter likelihood scale and the three 7-point semantic differential scales measuring distrust, disgust, and fear. The candidate description and subsequent surveys were estimated to take approximately 10 minutes to complete. At the conclusion of the survey, participants were directed to a page thanking them for their participation, providing them with the true purpose of the study, and debriefing information; they were provided with university and researcher emails for questions or concerns related to the study.

Instrumentation and Operationalization of Constructs

Using the socio-functional approach as their framework, Franks and Scherr (2014) developed the three 7-point semantic differential scales to measure disgust, distrust, and fear along with the voter likelihood scale to measure voter intention. Using the socio-functional approach, Franks and Scherr (2014) developed these measures to examine anti-atheist prejudice in political settings. There are no psychometrics reported for these measures beyond the pilot study for terminology and the significance measures reported within the study. This study utilized these measures along with a similar candidate description used by Franks and Scherr (2014); however, religious affiliation will be manipulated rather than sexual orientation or race. These tools were developed in a pilot study prior to the Franks and Scherr (2014) study which determined the word choices for each of the three emotions (e.g., distrust, disgust, and fear). Informed by anti-

atheist prejudice research, these scales measure perceptions of atheist morality and trustworthiness (e.g., Gervais, 2013; Gervais, 2014; Gervais et al., 2011). Permission for use of the scales can be found in the appendices.

Demographic Questions

Demographic questions followed the consent page and asked the participant for their religious and political affiliation, age, gender, education level, race, and socioeconomic status. This information ensures a diverse sample has been obtained, improving the generalizability of the data as well as checking for differences across groups to address potential demographic confounds.

Candidate Description

Participants were randomly assigned one of four candidates running for the U.S. House of Representatives to review. This description is similar to the candidate description used in the Franks and Scherr (2014) study. The candidates were described as follows: John is a 39-year-old [religious identity] male running for the U.S. House of Representatives. He is married and has two children age 6 and 3. After graduating from law school, he spent 10 years working as an assistant district attorney. In his spare time he enjoys outdoor activities like hiking, kayaking, and skiing. His political agenda prioritizes the economy, health care, and education. The only variance in candidate descriptions will be the religious affiliation (e.g., Protestant, atheist, Scientologist, or Mormon). The full description for each candidate can be found in the appendices.

Three 7-Point Semantic Differential Scales

Each participant was asked to complete three separate 7-point semantic differential scales, developed by Franks and Scherr (2014) to measure prejudice toward atheist political candidates. Each scale measured participants' feelings of trust, fear, and disgust toward the candidate. Scale values range from "1" (untrustworthy, threatening, and disgusting), to "7" (trustworthy, comforting, and appealing). The three 7-point semantic differential scales can be found in the appendices.

The three 7-point semantic differential scales for distrust, disgust, and fear were developed for a study examining anti-atheist prejudice in politics informed by the socio-functional framework (Franks & Scherr, 2014). A pilot study was conducted to determine the construct validity of an appropriate antonym for disgusting and an appropriate description for fear of bodily harm. Frequencies were reported, with 18 out of 20 respondents agreeing the words were appropriate. A copy of the pilot study and frequencies can be found in the appendices. These scales were used to assess samples of the U.S. voting population, similar to the proposed study (Franks & Scherr, 2014). Statistical significance was demonstrated utilizing these scales, with Christian participants rating atheists less trustworthy (95% CI (0.71, 2.08), $p < .001$, $d = 1.08$), gay candidates more disgusting (95% CI (1.12, 2.51), $p < .001$, $d = 1.18$), and all minority candidates more threatening (gay Candidate, 95% CI (0.32, 1.64), $p = .004$, $d = 0.79$; atheist candidate, 95% CI (0.19, 1.44), $p = .01$, $d = 0.67$; and Black candidate, 95% CI (–0.12, 1.29), $p = .08$, $d = 0.45$) than the White Christian candidate. This study demonstrated the ability of the scales to measure participant disgust, distrust, and fear

toward target candidates. Following data collection, Cronbach's Alpha (to measure

internal consistency) was measured and a factor analysis for unidimensionality was

conducted. As there are three semantic differential scales, the alpha and factor analysis

were computed separately.

Voter Likelihood Scale

Participants reported their intention to vote for the candidate using the voter

likelihood scale developed by Franks and Scherr (2014). Ranging from 1 (no chance) – 9

(100% likely) the scale measures the likelihood participants will vote for each candidate.

The voter likelihood scale can be found in the appendices. Both this study and the Franks

and Scherr (2014) study sampled portions of the U.S. voting population. In the Franks

and Scherr (2014) study, participants ($N = 200$) used the scale to report the likelihood of

supporting a candidate type, and statistical significance was reported from the data

collected utilizing the scale. For example, Christians reported a significantly greater

likelihood of voting for the White Christian candidate than the gay male candidate, 95%

confidence interval (CI; 0.26, 2.20), $p = .013$, $d = 0.70$), and a greater likelihood of voting

for the White Christian candidate than the atheist candidate, 95% confidence interval

(1.13, 2.95), $p < .001$, $d = 1.08$), and significantly greater likelihood of voting for the

Black male candidate than the atheist candidate, 95% confidence interval (0.44, 2.48), $p =$

.005, $d = 0.68$). The difference in voting intentions from the White Christian to the

atheist candidate was especially large (i.e., $d = 1.08$), and the overall participant faith

status by candidate type interaction effect was also significant for voting intentions, $F(3,$

167) = 8.01, *p* < .001, demonstrating the ability of the scale to measure voting intentions (Franks & Scherr, 2014). This measure has strong face validity.

Data Analysis Plan

The effect of the two independent variables (e.g., candidate and participant religious affiliation) on the four dependent variables (e.g., voter intention, distrust, fear, and disgust) was analyzed quantitatively with four separate 2 x 4 factorial ANOVAs using IBM-SPSS-24 software, where each of the two independent variables has four conditions (i.e., Protestant, Mormon, Scientologist, and atheist). Demographic data was assessed using descriptive statistical tests in SPSS. The means and standard deviations were calculated. Data was screened to include only U.S. citizens of legal voting age. Data cleansing was necessary only in cases with incomplete responses. Both *Survey Monkey* and SPSS can be used to filter out incomplete cases; to minimize errors during analysis. If there were insufficient distribution of cases in the eight cells of a 2 x 4 factorial ANOVA, then the participant religious affiliation factor would have been discarded and only the 4-level candidate independent variable would be analyzed on each of the four dependent variables.

Research Questions

Research Question #1: Do atheists face greater discrimination when seeking political office than candidates who identify as mainstream Christian (Protestant), non-mainstream Christian (Mormon), or non-Christian (Scientologist) as measured by the voting likelihood scale (Franks & Scherr, 2014)?

Ho1: Atheists do not face greater discrimination when seeking political office than candidates who identify as mainstream Christian (Protestant), non-mainstream Christian (Mormon), or non-Christian (Scientologist) as measured by the voting likelihood scale (Franks & Scherr, 2014).

Ha1: Atheists do face greater discrimination when seeking political office than candidates who identify as mainstream Christian (Protestant), non-mainstream Christian (Mormon), or non-Christian (Scientologist) as measured by the voting likelihood scale (Franks & Scherr, 2014).

Research Question #2: Are participants more likely to vote for a candidate based on ideological similarity, as predicted by social identity theory and measured by the voting likelihood scale (Franks and Scherr, 2014)?

Ho2: Participants are not more likely to vote for a candidate based on ideological similarity, as predicted by social identity theory and measured by the voting likelihood scale (Franks & Scherr, 2014).

Ha2: Participants are more likely to vote for a candidate based on ideological similarity, as predicted by social identity theory and measured by the voting likelihood scale (Franks & Scherr, 2014).

Research Question #3: Are participants more likely to rate a candidate with lower levels of trust (higher levels of distrust) when their ideologies are similar, as predicted by social identity theory and the socio-functional approach, as measured by the 7-point semantic differential scales (Franks & Scherr, 2014)?

Ho3: Participants will not be more likely to rate a candidate with lower levels of distrust (higher levels of trust) when their ideologies are similar, as predicted by social identity theory and the socio-functional approach, as measured by the 7-point semantic differential scales (Franks & Scherr, 2014).

Ha3: Participants will be more likely to rate a candidate with lower levels of distrust (higher levels of trust) when their ideologies are similar, as predicted by social identity theory and the socio-functional approach, as measured by the 7-point semantic differential scales (Franks & Scherr, 2014).

Research Question #4: Are participants more likely to rate a candidate with lower levels of disgust when their ideologies are similar, as predicted by social identity theory and the socio-functional approach, as measured by the 7-point semantic differential scales (Franks & Scherr, 2014)?

Ho4: Participants will not be more likely to rate a candidate with lower levels of disgust when their ideologies are similar, as predicted by social identity theory and the socio-functional approach, as measured by the 7-point semantic differential scales (Franks & Scherr, 2014).

Ha4: Participants will be more likely to rate a candidate with lower levels of disgust when their ideologies are similar, as predicted by social identity theory and the socio-functional approach, as measured by the 7-point semantic differential scales (Franks & Scherr, 2014).

Research Question #5: Are participants more likely to rate a candidate with lower levels of fear when their ideologies are similar, as predicted by social identity theory and

the socio-functional approach, as measured by the 7-point semantic differential scales

(Franks & Scherr, 2014)?

Ho5: Participants will not be more likely to rate a candidate with lower levels of

fear when their ideologies are similar, as predicted by social identity theory and the

socio-functional approach, as measured by the 7-point semantic differential scales

(Franks & Scherr, 2014).

Ha5: Participants will be more likely to rate a candidate with lower levels of fear

when their ideologies are similar, as predicted by social identity theory and the socio-

functional approach, as measured by the 7-point semantic differential scales (Franks &

Scherr, 2014).

Each independent variable will have at least four levels (i.e., candidate and

participant religious affiliation including Protestant, Mormon, Scientologist, and atheist

identities). A factorial analysis of variance was selected as the appropriate statistical test

of significance because there is more than one independent variable and each independent

variable has at least four levels. Furthermore, it is necessary to utilize a factorial

ANOVA to test not only the main effect of the variables but to assess the interaction

effect between the two independent variables. This interaction effect between the

candidate's religious identity and the participant's religious identity will be assessed, as

will the dependent variables (main effect) of voting intention, disgust, distrust, and fear as

measured by the voter likelihood scale and the three semantic differential scales, similar

to the approach used by Franks and Scherr (2014). As it is not possible to manipulate the

participant's religious affiliation, at least four separate analyses will be conducted to

compare participant religious identity to candidate religious identity, and the four dependent variables, with each analysis using one level of the two independent variables (e.g., Protestant candidate by Protestant candidate to voter intention, disgust, distrust, and fear).

There are several methods of interpreting factorial ANOVA results. While the simple main effects method is commonly used for studies with three or more factors, the proposed study focuses more on the interaction than the main effect. Furthermore, interpreting the main effect in the presence of a statistically significant interaction effect could lead to erroneous conclusions. For example, if a focus is placed exclusively on voting intentions (main effect) which will likely vary across candidates, the significance of any interaction between candidate and participant identities may be minimized during interpretation, resulting in less accurate conclusions. As such, the ANOVA results will be interpreted using the pairwise comparison method, which is considered the most useful interpretation method for determining which combination of factors produces the most meaningful comparisons. Main effects will be examined for significance with appropriate follow-up post-hoc analyses.

Threats to Validity

Possible threats to validity included participant response rates, as well as the consideration of confounding variables. Religious identification is a sensitive issue and atheist identification in particular is stigmatized; participants may not want to identify themselves as such. The participants were told all responses are anonymous in hopes of mitigating this issue. Demographic information was collected to minimize confounding

variables and determine generalizability. Furthermore, the political candidates were presented to participants with no political party affiliation. Political candidates' policy issues have been framed in non-partisan terms, allowing participants to make their own inferences (e.g., prioritizes health care does not suggest if the candidate favors liberal or conservative policies on the topic). Generalizability of the study may also be a threat to validity, as this survey is limited to participants that read in English and have Internet access, unintentionally lowering the chances low-socioeconomic individuals will be included in the study. However, by collecting demographic data, variability in the sample was determined to help minimize this threat as much as possible. Participants who did not complete the entire survey will not be included to avoid threats related to response rates.

Ethical Procedures

This study will obtained approval from the Walden University IRB prior to collecting data. Furthermore, this study adheres to all ethical guidelines required by the American Psychological Association's (APA) Code of Conduct, such as maintaining participant confidentiality and informing the participants of their right to stop participation at any time (American Psychological Association, 2010). Participants viewed an informed consent page prior to entering the survey, which will inform the participants of their rights and the voluntary nature of this study. Data has been stored securely, as both the researcher's computer and *Survey Monkey* are password protected. Data must be stored for a minimum of five years (American Psychological Association, 2010), and data collected will be viewed only by the researcher. Data disposal will be

achieved by permanently deleting the information utilizing commercial software designed to remove all data from a storage device such as *Eraser*. This study was not expected to present psychological risks to the participants, however participants were provided contact information for the researcher and institution for any questions or concerns the participant might have as well as a debriefing form with instructions to print the form for participant records. The debriefing page immediately followed the last question on the survey. At this point, the purpose of the study was revealed, and participants were allowed to withdraw their data now that he or she is fully informed as to the intent and purpose of the study. Information on resources such as the IRB and health resources that can be accessed either online or through telephone (as the survey is online and participants may be anywhere in the United States) were provided. An "I Agree" button was present for participants to consent to submit their data, while an "I Do Not Agree" button was available to participants that choose to withdraw, and their data will be deleted from the form and not submitted. A copy of the informed consent form and the debriefing form can be found in the appendices.

Summary

This quantitative study will assess the comparative electability of atheist and nontraditional religious political candidates using an online survey. Data was collected from over 256 participants representative of the U.S. voting population. After the participants read a brief candidate description, they were asked to report their voter intention and emotional reactions to the candidate with the voter likelihood scale and the three 7-point semantic differential scales. Data was analyzed with four separate 2 x 4

factorial analyses of variance using IBM-SPSS-24 software. Participants entered the

survey through a consent page, and exited the survey through a debriefing page. All

Walden University IRB and APA Code of Conduct procedures were adhered to. Chapter

4 describes the data analyses and findings.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to quantitatively assess the comparative electability of atheist political candidates with candidates from other nontraditional religious backgrounds. This chapter describes the data collection, screening, and cleaning, as well as provides the descriptive statistics for the variables of study and summarizes the results of each factorial ANOVA.

Research Questions

Research Question #1: Do atheists face greater discrimination when seeking political office than candidates who identify as mainstream Christian (Protestant), non-mainstream Christian (Mormon), or non-Christian (Scientologist) as measured by the voting likelihood scale (Franks & Scherr, 2014)?

Ho1: Atheists do not face greater discrimination when seeking political office than candidates who identify as mainstream Christian (Protestant), non-mainstream Christian (Mormon), or non-Christian (Scientologist) as measured by the voting likelihood scale (Franks & Scherr, 2014).

Ha1: Atheists do face greater discrimination when seeking political office than candidates who identify as mainstream Christian (Protestant), non-mainstream Christian (Mormon), or non-Christian (Scientologist) as measured by the voting likelihood scale (Franks & Scherr, 2014).

Research Question #2: Are participants more likely to vote for a candidate based on ideological similarity, as predicted by social identity theory and measured by the voting likelihood scale (Franks and Scherr, 2014)?

Ho2: Participants are not more likely to vote for a candidate based on ideological similarity, as predicted by social identity theory and measured by the voting likelihood scale (Franks & Scherr, 2014).

Ha2: Participants are more likely to vote for a candidate based on ideological similarity, as predicted by social identity theory and measured by the voting likelihood scale (Franks & Scherr, 2014).

Research Question #3: Are participants more likely to rate a candidate with lower levels of trust (higher levels of distrust) when their ideologies are similar, as predicted by social identity theory and the socio-functional approach, as measured by the 7-point semantic differential scales (Franks & Scherr, 2014)?

Ho3: Participants will not be more likely to rate a candidate with lower levels of distrust (higher levels of trust) when their ideologies are similar, as predicted by social identity theory and the socio-functional approach, as measured by the 7-point semantic differential scales (Franks & Scherr, 2014).

Ha3: Participants will be more likely to rate a candidate with lower levels of distrust (higher levels of trust) when their ideologies are similar, as predicted by social identity theory and the socio-functional approach, as measured by the 7-point semantic differential scales (Franks & Scherr, 2014).

Research Question #4: Are participants more likely to rate a candidate with lower levels of disgust when their ideologies are similar, as predicted by social identity theory and the socio-functional approach, as measured by the 7-point semantic differential scales (Franks & Scherr, 2014)?

Ho4: Participants will not be more likely to rate a candidate with lower levels of disgust when their ideologies are similar, as predicted by social identity theory and the socio-functional approach, as measured by the 7-point semantic differential scales (Franks & Scherr, 2014).

Ha4: Participants will be more likely to rate a candidate with lower levels of disgust when their ideologies are similar, as predicted by social identity theory and the socio-functional approach, as measured by the 7-point semantic differential scales (Franks & Scherr, 2014).

Research Question #5: Are participants more likely to rate a candidate with lower levels of fear when their ideologies are similar, as predicted by social identity theory and the socio-functional approach, as measured by the 7-point semantic differential scales (Franks & Scherr, 2014)?

Ho5: Participants will not be more likely to rate a candidate with lower levels of fear when their ideologies are similar, as predicted by social identity theory and the socio-functional approach, as measured by the 7-point semantic differential scales (Franks & Scherr, 2014).

Ha5: Participants will be more likely to rate a candidate with lower levels of fear when their ideologies are similar, as predicted by social identity theory and the socio-

functional approach, as measured by the 7-point semantic differential scales (Franks & Scherr, 2014).

Data Collection

Data collection began March 29, 2018, following approval from the IRB. The survey was made accessible to the public, and links were generated and posted to *Facebook* religious group pages in order to target the necessary participants (e.g., Mormon, Scientologist, atheist, Christian) as well as research participant sites such as *Call for Participants* and *The Inquisitive Mind*. During data collection, the atheist group of participants far outpaced other groups, particularly Christians, and as such it became necessary to expand data collection to *Reddit*. This change in procedure was approved by the Walden IRB on July 10, 2018. The survey was advertised in both religious and political *Reddit* threads. The survey was concluded on September 24, 2018. Participants were required to be of legal voting age in the US (18) and residents of the US.

Participants were asked twice if they wished to continue with the survey, once after reading the informed consent page, before beginning the survey, and once again before submitting their responses and following a debriefing page. For any participant selecting the "no" box, they were rerouted to the end of the survey, thanking them for their time. The informed consent page consisted of the purpose of the study, an outline of the procedures for the study as well as the voluntary nature of participation, risks and benefits, privacy rights, and contact information. Participants were also informed that those who agreed to enter the survey were indicating their consent to participate, however they were free to stop at any time, and were once again allowed to not submit their

responses at the conclusion of the survey. No personally identifying information was collected, as it was not necessary for the nature of the study, further protecting participants.

Recruitment, Change in Procedure, and Response Rates

Once the survey went live on *Survey Monkey*, advertisements to participants were posted on *Facebook* pages targeting specific religious groups, with the expectation that each religious group was represented within the study. Given the nature of social media and that individual followers of a group page may have also chosen to share the survey on their own pages or other pages, it is unknown if the survey was posted in other locations. The survey was also shared on research-oriented sites such as *Call for Participants* and *The Inquisitive Mind*, however very few participants were generated through these pages. *Survey Monkey* provides separate collector links to track participant totals from each collection type, and only 12 participants were counted between these two pages. *Facebook* posts resulted in 616 participants.

The first week after the survey went live, participation was very high but then began to wane. Most notably, while the atheist, agnostic, and nonreligious participants already exceeded the necessary sample size, the survey was not attracting many Christian participants. Because of this, a procedural change was submitted to the IRB in order to expand data collection. The request sought to advertise the survey using *Reddit,* and was approved in July, 2018. *Reddit* was then added as a collector, which resulted in 339 more participants across all religious categories.

The response rate for the survey was 89%, with 967 total participants and 862 completed surveys; the incomplete cases were removed from the data. Any participants that chose not to submit their responses either at the beginning or end of the survey would not have been calculated in the totals. Of the 862 participants, 88 participants belong to Jewish (3), Muslim (1), Hindu (1), Buddhist (4), Native American (1), Wiccan (3), Catholic (68), and Pagan (7) faiths, respectively, while 195 participants claimed to be agnostic (76) or nonreligious (119). This leaves 579 participants identifying as Protestant (64), Mormon (73), Scientologist, and atheist (373). The hypotheses for this study focused only on Protestant, Mormon, Scientologist, and atheist participants and political candidates of the same identities; therefore, only participants identifying as Protestant, Mormon, Scientologist, or atheist were analyzed for the purposes of this study. The a priori analysis for an ANOVA with fixed effects, special-main effects, and interactions that was calculated using G*Power suggested the study would require a sample size of 256 total participants ($N = 256$) to produce a moderate effect size (Cohen's $d = .5$), with a power level of .80 and an alpha level of .05 (Cohen, 1969). As such, the participant total far exceeds this goal. However, it is important to note the sample contains more atheist participants than Mormon, Scientologist, and Protestant participants.

Descriptive Statistics and Demographic Characteristics

Table 1 displays the demographic data collected, (i.e., age, gender, education level, race, socioeconomic status, political affiliation, religious identity). The largest percentage of participants were 30-39 ($N = 189$, 32.6%) and more females than males completed the survey ($N = 329$, 56.8%). The largest demographic disparity was found in

race/ethnicity with 78.9% of participants identifying as White ($N = 457$). Education was

distributed across each choice, with the largest number of participants having completed

a 4-year college degree ($N = 178$, 30.7%). Nearly half of the participants identified as

Democratic ($N = 289$, 49.9%), and the most frequently reported household income was

between \$25,000 and \$49,000 ($N = 111$, 19.2%). Religious identity was fairly evenly

distributed across all groups except atheists which represented 44.3% of participants ($N =$

373).

Table 1

Frequencies: Age, Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Education, Political Affiliation, and Income

Variable	n	%
Age		
18-20	22	3.8
21-29	117	20.2
30-39	189	32.6
40-49	108	18.7
50-59	93	16.1
60 +	50	8.6
Gender		
Female	329	56.8
Male	250	43.2
Race/Ethnicity		
American Indian	5	.9
Asian	13	2.2
Black	10	1.7
Hispanic	21	3.6
White	457	78.9
Mixed	73	12.6
Education		
Some High School	18	3.1
High School	48	8.3
Some College	144	24.9
2 Year Degree	66	11.4
4 Year Degree	178	30.7
Graduate Degree	125	21.6
Political Affiliation		

Democratic	289	49.9
Republican	81	14.0
Independent	43	7.4
Green	4	.7
Constitution	1	.2
Libertarian	28	4.8
Other	13	2.2
None	120	20.7
Income Level		
$0-$9,999	11	1.9
$10,000 to $24,999	36	6.2
$25,000 to $49,999	111	19.2
$50,000 to $74,999	108	18.7
$75,000 to $99,999	96	16.6
$100,000 to $124,999	66	11.4
$125,000 to $149,999	42	7.3
$150,000 to $174,999	27	4.7
$175,000 to $199,999	20	3.5
$200,000 and up	36	6.2
Prefer not to answer	26	4.5
Religious Identity		
Protestant	64	7.6
Mormon	73	8.7
Scientology	69	8.2
Atheist	373	44.3

The convenience non-probability sampling method used to recruit participants means that the sample may not be truly representative of US voters belonging to each religious identity and as such cannot be generalized to all voters of each religious category. This limitation may result in low external validity. However, while the use of the Internet may unintentionally eliminate low-income participants, it should provide an overall larger range of participants from across the United States.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The sample consisted of 579 US residents of legal voting age. Table 2 displays

the means and standard deviations for participant religious identity compared to the

candidate type evaluated in the survey.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for Religious Identity and Candidate Type

Religious Identity	Candidate Type	Mean	*SD*	*N*
Protestant	Protestant	5.625	1.857	16
	Mormon	3.125	2.029	16
	Scientologist	2.625	1.500	16
	Atheist	3.250	1.732	16
	Total	3.656	2.102	64
Mormon	Protestant	5.813	1.106	16
	Mormon	6.053	1.747	19
	Scientologist	4.000	1.700	19
	Atheist	4.105	1.595	19
	Total	4.959	1.813	73
Scientologist	Protestant	5.389	1.577	18
	Mormon	4.438	1.460	16
	Scientologist	5.471	1.972	17
	Atheist	5.500	1.855	18
	Total	5.217	1.748	69
Atheist	Protestant	5.193	1.353	93
	Mormon	4.052	1.788	97
	Scientologist	3.222	1.860	99
	Atheist	6.833	1.769	84
	Total	4.743	2.160	373
Total	Protestant	5.336	1.424	143
	Mormon	4.250	1.920	148
	Scientologist	3.501	1.963	151
	Atheist	5.861	2.200	137
	Total	4.706	2.101	579

Evaluation of Statistical Assumptions

The assumptions of the factorial ANOVA include the necessity of the dependent variables to be measured at the interval or ratio level. As all dependent variables are measured on a numbered scale (e.g., voter likelihood scale) or a semantic differential scale (e.g., 7 points of intensity), the dependent variables are interval (i.e., there is a measurable distance between each value of the dependent variables), fulfilling this assumption. The second assumption of "goodness of fit" and the third assumption of homoscedasticity is not met in this data set. Kolmogorov-Simonov test as well as Levene's test does not show the data to be evenly distributed. However, some statisticians suggest that normality testing is problematic because (1) in large samples they can be significant even for small and unimportant effects and (2) in small samples they will lack power to detect violations of assumptions (Ruxton, Wilkinson, & Neuhäuser, 2015). With this in mind, the data will be interpreted with caution and further analyses of the demographic data will be conducted to ensure random assignment occurred.

The fourth assumption is that no multicollinearity occurs. Multicollinearity occurs when the independent variables are intercorrelated, thus not being independent from each other. As the independent variables are participant and candidate religious affiliation, this assumption has been met. A participant's religious identity is not dependent upon the candidate's religious identity and one does not imply the other. They may interact with one another, but these variables are not correlated and are two distinct independent variables. The independent variables are nominal and religious identities are

coded 1-4 for participants (1 for Protestant, 2 for Mormon, 3 for Scientology, 4 for atheist) and 1-4 for candidates (1 for Protestant, 2 for Mormon, 3 for Scientologist, 4 for atheist).

Factorial ANOVA Analyses

The four research questions in the study were tested using four separate 4 X 4 factorial ANOVA analyses, one for each of the dependent variables. An initial series of four separate 4 X 4 factorial analyses (participant religious identity by candidate type) were conducted to evaluate the hypotheses. Voting intention and the three semantic scales were the dependent variables. Each analysis was a 4 (participant religious identity: Protestant [$N = 64$], Mormon [$N = 73$], Scientologist [$N = 69$], atheist [$N = 373$]) X 4 (candidate type: Protestant [$N = 204$], Mormon [$N = 206$], Scientologist [$N = 215$], and atheist [$N = 373$]) factorial ANOVA with one of the four dependent variables and with alpha set at .05.

In each of the four 4 X 4 factorial ANOVAs, significant interactions were found, necessitating a closer look at the independent variables through simple effect analyses. The Bonferroni post hoc correction was selected for follow up to minimize Type I errors given the large number of comparisons that were made. This is because the probability of a false-positive result is more likely with multiple pairwise tests, increasing with each hypothesis tested; the Bonferroni correction will reduce the odds of this occurring, although it may reduce the overall power of the statistical findings.

Research Questions 1 and 2. Research questions one and two were both answered with a 4 X 4 factorial ANOVA with voting intention as the dependent variable.

Research Question 1: Do atheists face greater discrimination when seeking political office than candidates who identify as mainstream Christian (Protestant), non-mainstream Christian (Mormon), or non-Christian (Scientologist) as measured by the voting likelihood scale (Franks & Scherr, 2014), was answered using the main effect analyses of the ANOVA.

Research Question 2: Are participants more likely to vote for a candidate based on ideological similarity, as predicted by social identity theory and measured by the voting likelihood scale (Franks and Scherr, 2014) was answered using the interaction effect analyses of the ANOVA. The complete ANOVA results are presented in Table 3, and a profile plot of candidate type group means x participant religious identity group with the dependent variable of voting intention appears in Figure 1.

Table 3

Religious Identity by Candidate Type for Voting Likelihood

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	η2
Religion	96.754	3	32.251	11.123	<.001	.056
Candidate	130.741	3	43.580	15.030	<.001	.074
Religion x Candidate	339.027	9	37.670	12.992	<.001	.172
Error	1632.411	563	2.899			
Total	15377.000	579				

Figure 1. Voting Likelihood Score Means by Religious Identity and Candidate Type
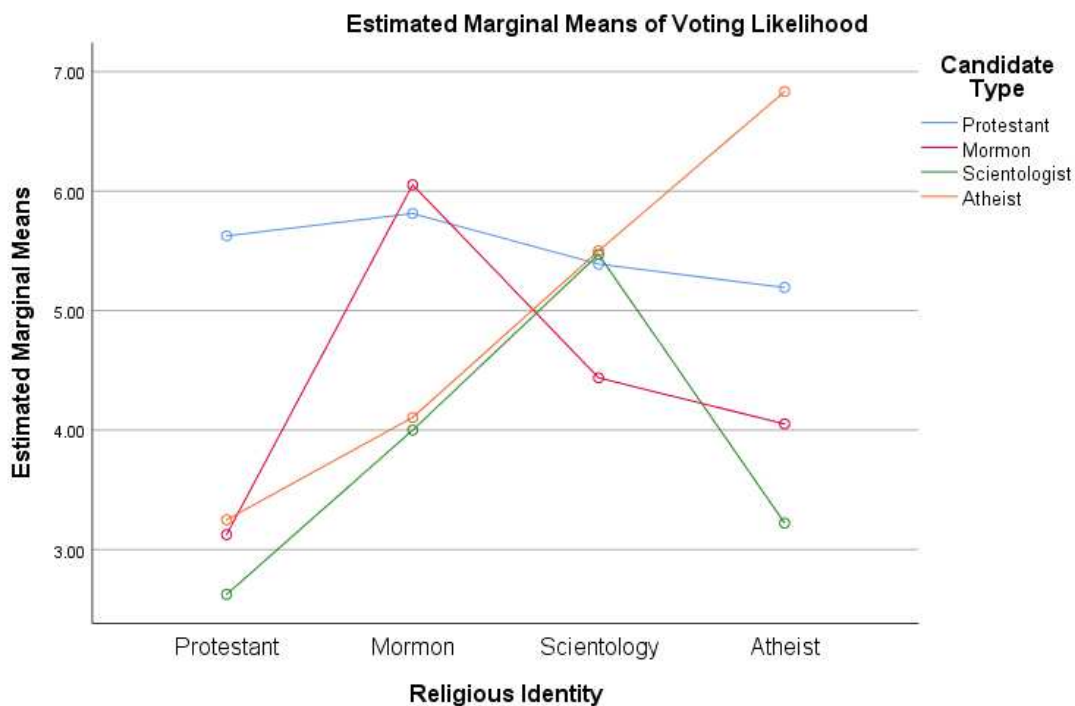
The main effect for participant religious identity was statistically significant and represents a small effect size ($F(3, 563) = 11.123$, $p < .001$, $n^2 = .056$), indicating a significant difference between Protestant ($M = 3.656$, $SE = .213$) Mormon ($M = 4.993$, $SE = .200$) Scientologist ($M = 5.199$, $SE = .205$) and atheist ($M = 4.825$, $SE = .088$) religious identities and participant voting intention. Means plots for religious identity main effect by voting intention are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Means Plots for Voting Likelihood and Religious Identity
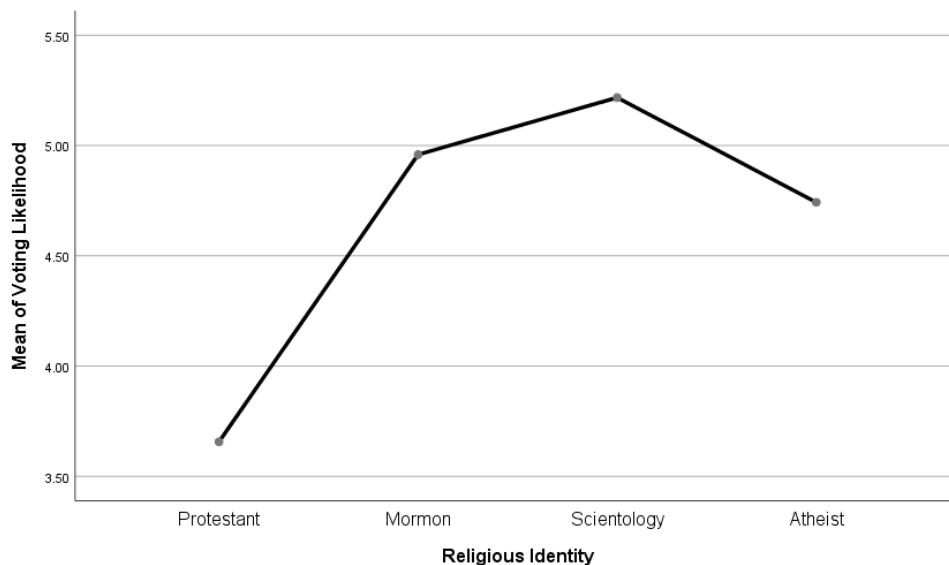
The main effect for candidate type was significant and represents a medium effect size ($F(3, 563) = 15.030$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .074$), indicating a significant difference between Protestant ($M = 5.505$, $SE = .186$) Mormon ($M = 4.417$, $SE = .185$) Scientologist ($M = 3.829$, $SE = .183$) and atheist ($M = 4.922$, $SE = .182$) candidate types and participant voting intention. Means plots for candidate type main effect by voting intention are presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Means Plots for Voting Likelihood and Candidate Type
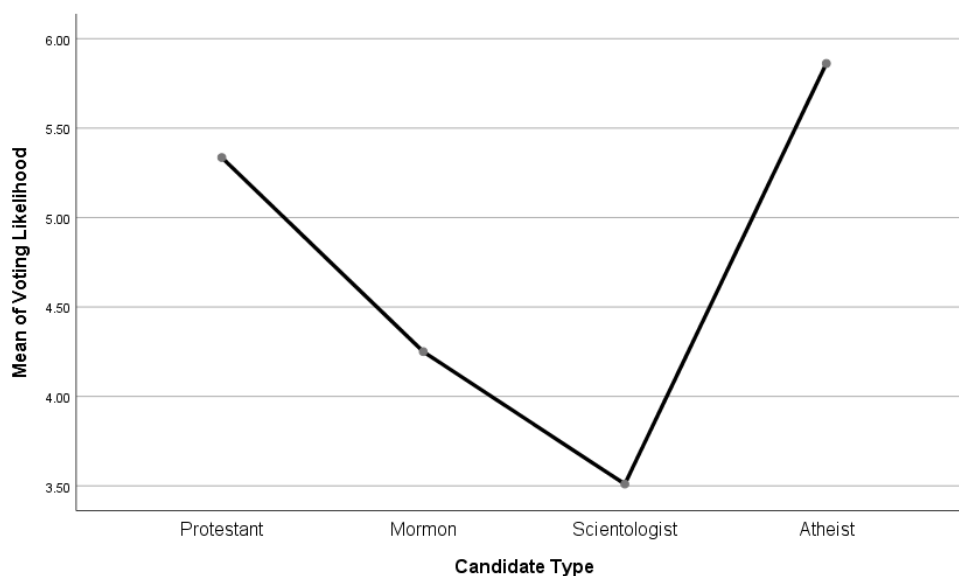
The analysis also showed a significant religion x candidate interaction for voting intention ($F(9, 563) = 12.992$, $p < .001$), which represents a large effect size ($\eta^2 = .172$). An analysis of simple effects showed that there was no statistically significant difference across participant groups voting for the Protestant candidate. When participants were presented with the Mormon candidate, a significant difference was noted for all group comparisons except for Scientologist participants when compared to atheist participants. When participants were presented with the Scientologist candidate, a significant difference was noted for all group comparisons except for Protestant compared to atheist and Mormon compared to atheist participants. When participants were presented with the atheist candidate, a significant difference was noted for all group comparisons except for Protestant compared to Mormon participants. A complete table of comparisons can be found in Table 4.

Table 4

Simple Effect Pairwise Comparisons for Voting Likelihood

Candidate	Comparisons	Mean Difference (I-J)	SE	p	95% CI Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Protestant	Protestant vs. Mormon	-.188	.602	.756	-1.370	.995
	Protestant vs. Scientologist	.236	.585	.687	-.913	1.385
	Protestant vs. Atheist	.431	.461	.350	-.474	1.337
	Mormon vs. Scientologist	.424	.585	.469	-.726	1.573
	Mormon vs. Atheist	.619	.461	.180	-.289	1.524
	Scientologist vs. Atheist	.195	.438	.656	-.666	1.057
Mormon	Protestant vs. Mormon	-2.928*	.578	<.001	-4.062	-1.793
	Protestant vs. Scientologist	-1.313*	.602	.030	-2.495	-.130
	Protestant vs. Atheist	-.927*	.459	.044	-1.829	-.024
	Mormon vs. Scientologist	1.615*	.578	.005	.480	2.750
	Mormon vs. Atheist	2.001*	.427	<.001	1.162	2.840
	Scientologist vs. Atheist	.386	.459	.401	-.517	1.288
Scientologist	Protestant vs. Mormon	-1.375*	.578	.018	-2.510	-.240
	Protestant vs. Scientologist	-2.846*	.593	<.001	-4.011	-1.681
	Protestant vs. Atheist	-.597	.459	.194	-1.498	.304
	Mormon vs. Scientologist	-1.471*	.568	.010	-2.587	-.354
	Mormon vs. Atheist	.778	.426	.069	-.060	1.615
	Scientologist vs. Atheist	2.248*	.447	<.001	1.370	3.126

Atheist	Protestant vs. Mormon	-.855	.578	.139	-1.990	.280
	Protestant vs. Scientologist	-2.250*	.585	<.001	-3.399	-1.101
	Protestant vs. Atheist	-3.583*	.464	<.001	-4.496	-2.671
	Mormon vs. Scientologist	-1.395*	.560	.013	-2.495	-.295
	Mormon vs. Atheist	-2.728*	.433	<.001	-3.578	-1.878
	Scientologist vs. Atheist	-1.333*	.442	.003	-2.202	-4.65

* $p < 0.05$

Pairwise mean comparisons using Bonferroni's post hoc test indicated that religious identity significantly influenced voting intention, depending on the candidate type presented. The post hoc test results are presented in Table 5 and Table 6.

Table 5

Religious Identity by Voting Likelihood Bonferroni Post Hoc Test

Comparisons	Mean Difference (I-J)	SE	p	95% CI Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Protestant vs. Mormon	-1.3027*	.29159	<.001	-2.0747	-.5306
Protestant vs. Scientologist	-1.5611*	.29551	<.001	-2.3435	-.7787
Protestant vs. Atheist	-1.0864*	.23039	<.001	-1.6964	-.4764
Mormon vs. Scientologist	-.2585	.28590	1.000	-1.0154	.4985
Mormon vs. Atheist	.2163	.21793	1.000	-.3607	.7933
Scientologist vs. Atheist	.4748	.22315	.203	-.1160	1.0656

* $p < 0.05$

Table 6

Candidate Type by Voting Likelihood Bonferroni Post Hoc Test

Comparisons	Mean Difference (I-J)	*SE*	*p*	95% CI Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Protestant vs. Mormon	1.0857*	.19967	<.001	.5570	1.6143
Protestant vs. Scientologist	1.8257*	.19869	<.001	1.2997	2.3518
Protestant vs. Atheist	-.5256	.20357	.060	-1.0646	.0133
Mormon vs. Scientologist	.7401*	.19696	<.001	.2186	1.2615
Mormon vs. Atheist	-1.6113*	.20188	<.001	-2.1458	-1.0768
Scientologist vs. Atheist	-2.3514*	.20091	<.001	-2.8833	-1.8194

* p < 0.05

Protestant participants expressed a greater intention to vote for Protestant candidates (*M* = 5.625, *SE* = .426) and the lowest intention to vote for Scientologist candidates (*M* = 2.625, *SE* = .426) with Mormon (*M* = 3.125, *SE* = .426) averaging slightly lower than atheist candidates (*M* = 3.250, *SE* = .426). A means plot for Protestant participant by candidate type for Voting Likelihood can be found in Figure 4.

*Figure 4.* Means Plots for Protestant Participants by Candidate Type for Voting

Likelihood
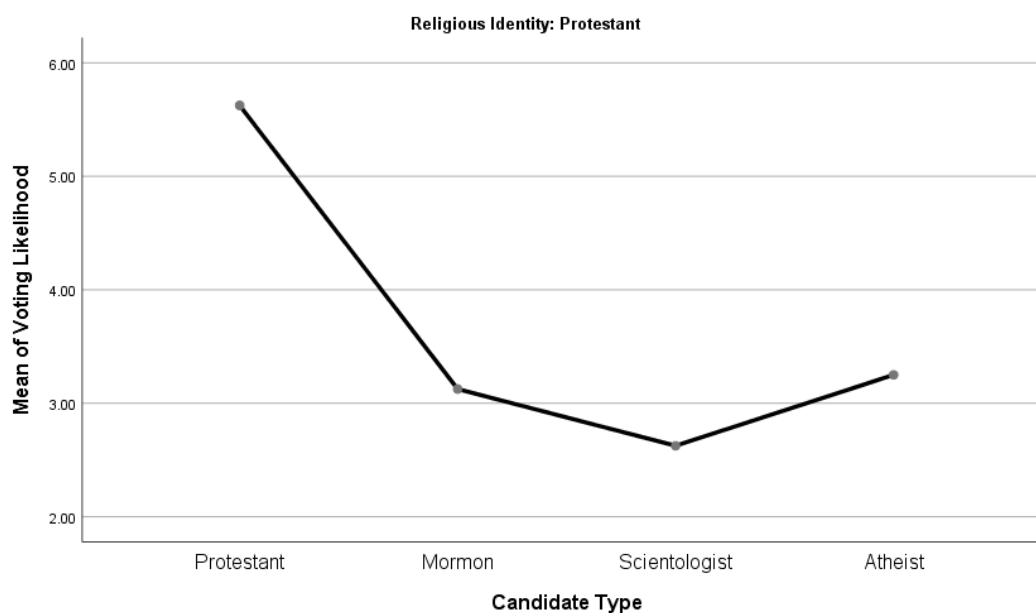
Mormon participants expressed the highest intention to vote for Mormon

candidates ($M = 6.053$, $SE = .391$) with Protestant candidates measuring only slightly

lower than the Mormon candidate ($M = 5.812$, $SE = .426$) and the lowest intention for

Scientologist candidates ($M = 4.000$, $SE = .388$) with atheist candidates only slightly

greater than the Scientologist candidate ($M = 4.000$, $SE = .391$). A means plot for

Mormon participant by candidate type for Voting Likelihood can be found in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Means Plots for Mormon Participants by Candidate Type for Voting

Likelihood
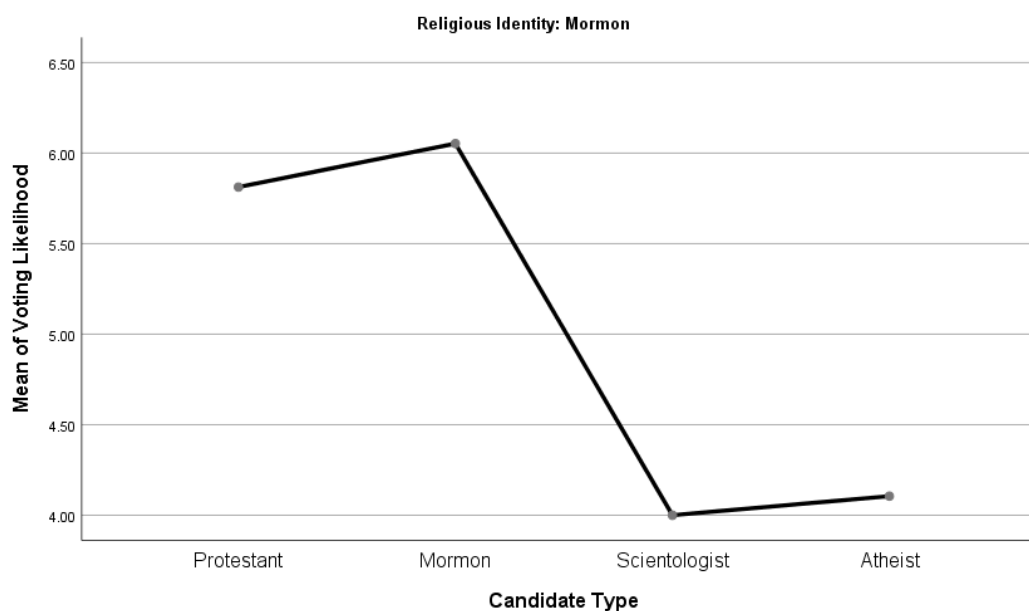
Scientologist participants expressed a slightly higher intention to vote for atheist candidates ($M = 5.500$, $SE = .401$) than Scientologist candidates ($M = 5.471$, $SE = .413$) with Protestant candidates slightly below ($M = 5.389$, $SE = .401$) and the lowest intention to vote for Mormon candidates ($M = 4.437$, $SE = 4.26$). A means plot for Scientologist participant by candidate type for Voting Likelihood can be found in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Means Plots for Scientologist Participants by Candidate Type for Voting

Likelihood
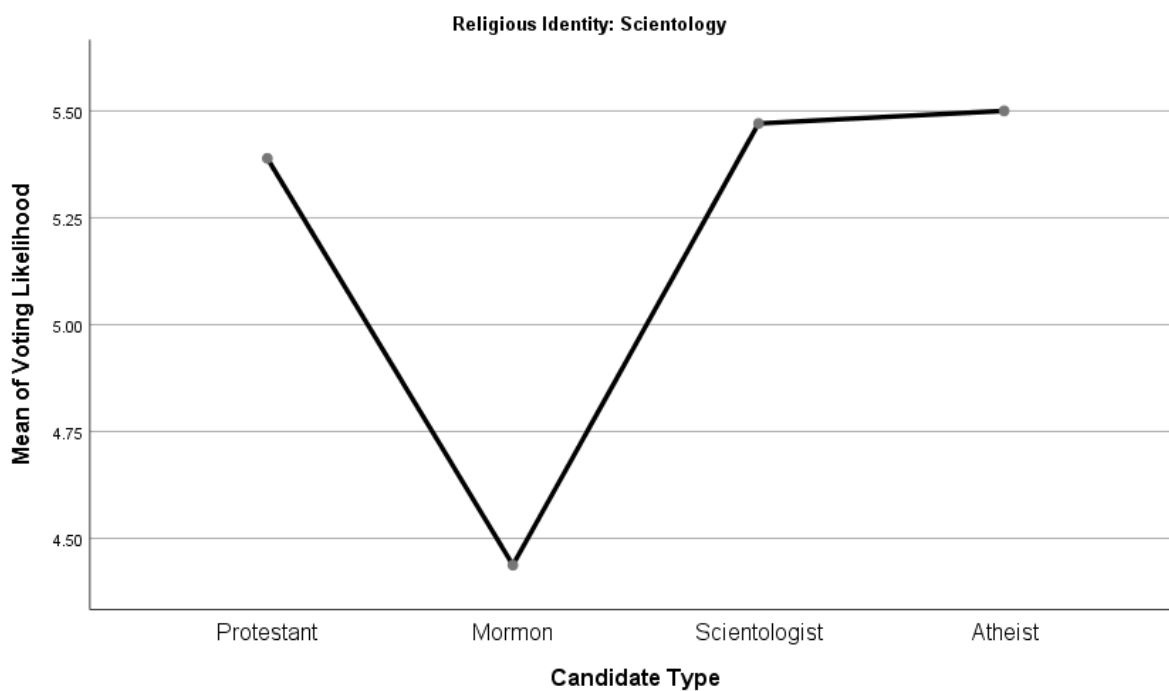
Atheist participants expressed the greatest intention to vote for atheist candidates

($M = 6.833$, $SE = .186$) followed by the Protestant candidates ($M = 5.194$, $SE = .177$) a

lower intention to vote for Mormon candidates ($M = 4.052$, $SE = .173$) and the lowest

intention to vote for Scientologist candidates ($M = 3.222$, $SE = .171$). A means plot for

atheist participant by candidate type for Voting Likelihood can be found in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Means Plots for Atheist Participants by Candidate Type for Voting Likelihood
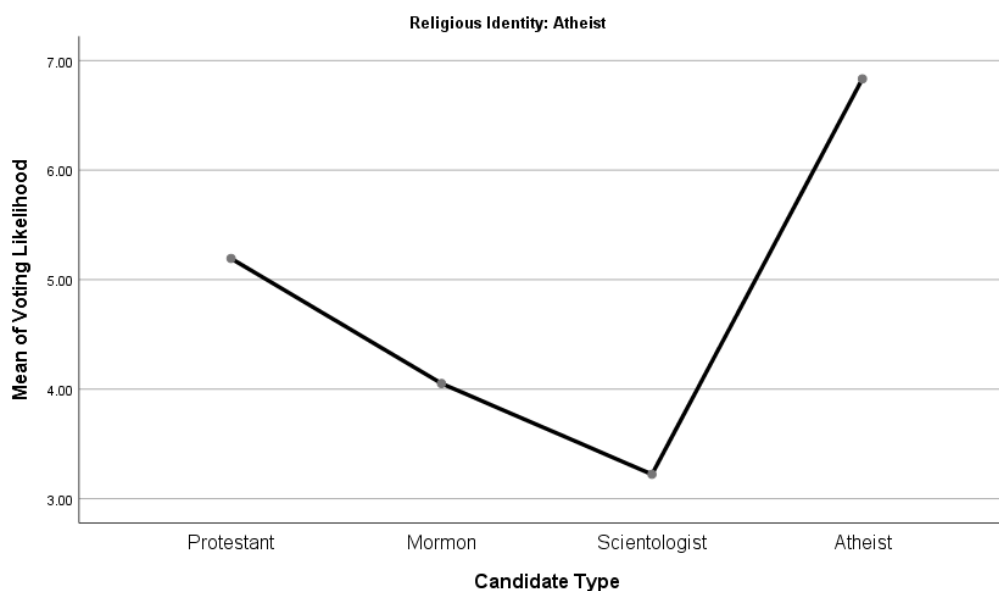
This analysis demonstrated a significant difference for participant voting intention based on candidate-type as measured by the voting likelihood scale (Franks & Scherr, 2014). However, the main effect results for candidate type indicated that the Scientologist and Mormon candidates performed more poorly than the atheist candidate.

As a result of the participant group size disparity, there was concern that the atheist candidate may present more favorably than the candidate would have if the atheist participant group were not disproportionately larger than the other participant groups. However, when an analysis was conducted excluding the atheist participants, the Scientologist (*M* = 4.032, *SE* = .236) and Mormon (*M* = 4.538, *SE* = .238) candidates were still viewed more negatively than the atheist candidate (*M* = 4.285, *SE* = .234) by all groups but their own. Therefore, for research question one, the null hypothesis (Ho1) was not rejected, as atheists do not face greater discrimination when seeking political

office than candidates who identify as mainstream Christian (Protestant), non-mainstream Christian (Mormon), or non-Christian (Scientologist).

For research question two, all of the participant groups demonstrated the highest likelihood to vote for their own candidate type, except Scientologists who favored the atheist candidate slightly more than the Scientologist candidate. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis (Ha2) for research question 2 is accepted; participants are more likely to vote for a candidate based on ideological similarity.

Research Question 3. Are participants more likely to rate a candidate with lower levels of distrust (higher levels of trust) when their ideologies are similar, as predicted by social identity theory and the socio-functional approach, and as measured by the 7-point semantic differential scales (Franks & Scherr, 2014)? This research question was answered with a 4 X 4 factorial ANOVA with distrust as the dependent variable. The complete ANOVA results are presented in Table 7, and a profile plot of candidate type group means by participant religious identity group with the dependent variable of distrust appears in Figure 8. It is important to note that high scores indicate the participant is more likely to trust this candidate while low scores indicate that the participant is more likely to distrust this candidate, with a score of 5 representing a neutral position.

Table 7

Religious Identity by Candidate Type for Trust

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	η2
Religion	41.075	3	13.692	9.077	<.001	.046
Candidate	41.531	3	13.844	9.177	<.001	.047
Religion x Candidate	217.558	9	24.173	16.025	<.001	.204
Error	849.253	563	1.508			
Total	10820.000	579				

*Figure 8.* Trust Score Means by Religious Identity and Candidate Type
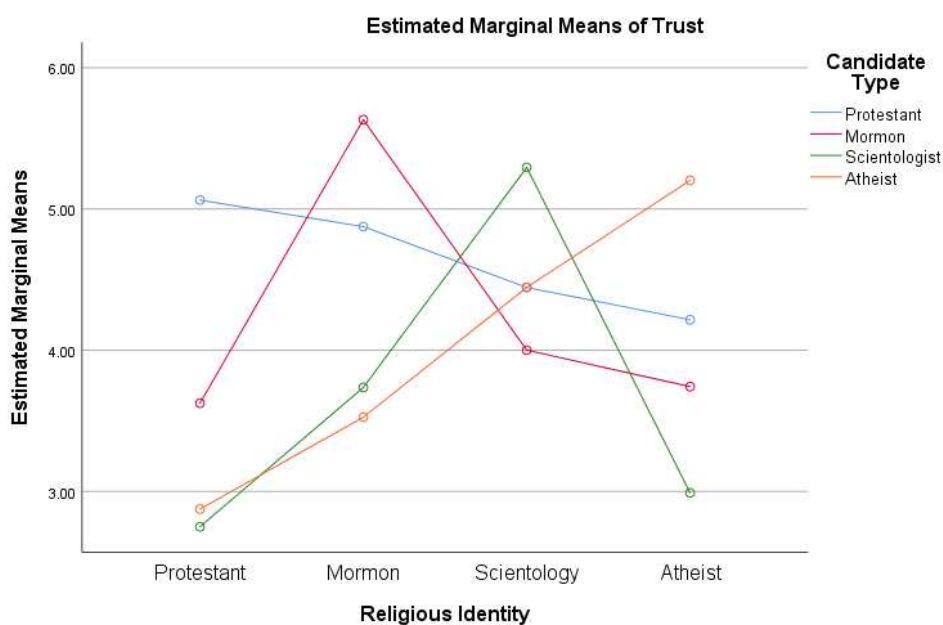
The main effect for participant religious identity was statistically significant and represents a small effect size ($F(3, 563) = 9.077$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .046$), indicating a difference between Protestant ($M = 3.578$, $SE = .154$) Mormon ($M = 4.442$, $SE = .144$) Scientologist ($M = 4.546$, $SE = .148$) and atheist ($M = 4.037$, $SE = .064$) religious identities and participant distrust. Means plots for religious identity effect by distrust are presented in Figure 9.

Figure 9. Means Plots for Distrust and Religious Identity
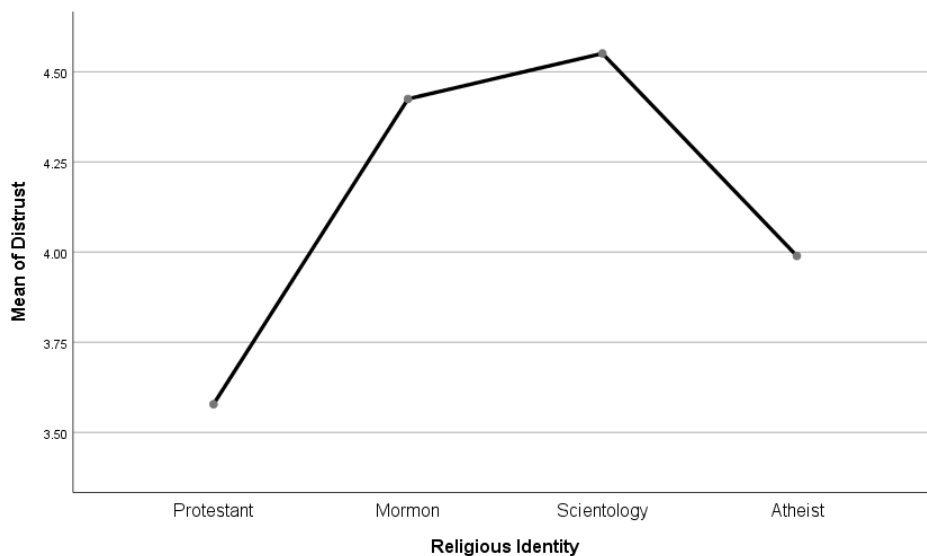
The main effect for candidate type was significant and represents a small effect size ($F(3, 563) = 9.177$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .047$), indicating a difference between Protestant ($M = 4.649$, $SE = .134$) Mormon ($M = 4.250$, $SE = .133$) Scientologist ($M = 3.693$, $SE = .132$) and atheist ($M = 4.012$, $SE = .131$) candidate types and participant distrust. Means plots for candidate type effect by distrust are presented in Figure 10.

Figure 10. Means Plots for Distrust and Candidate Type
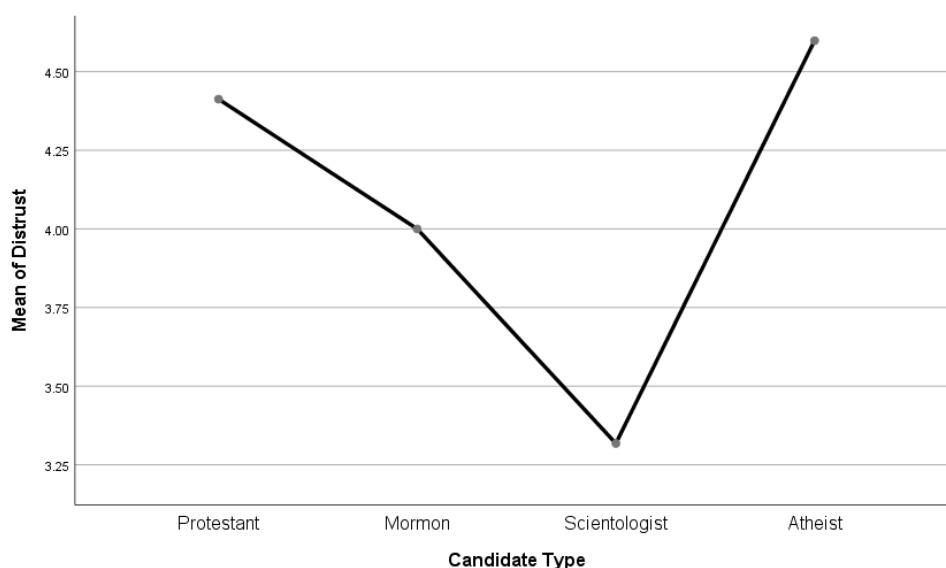
The analysis also showed a significant religion x candidate interaction for trust

($F(9, 563) = 16.025$, $p < .001$) which represents a large effect size ($n^2 = .204$). An

analysis of simple effects showed a statistically significant difference in distrust/trust

scores for Protestant participants compared to atheist participants when presented with

the Protestant candidate. A moderately significant result was also noted for Mormon

participants compared to atheist participants when presented with the Protestant

candidate. When participants were presented with the Mormon candidate, a significant

difference was noted for Protestant compared to Mormon participants, Mormon

compared to Scientologist participants, and Mormon compared to atheist participants.

When participants were presented with the Scientologist candidate, a significant

difference was noted for all comparison groups except Protestant compared to atheist

participants. When participants were presented with the atheist candidate, a significant

difference was noted across all group comparisons except Protestant compared to

Mormon participants. A complete table of comparisons can be found in Table 8.

Table 8

Simple Effect Pairwise Comparisons for Trust

Candidate	Comparisons	Mean Difference (I-J)	*SE*	*p*	95% CI	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Protestant	Protestant vs. Mormon	.188	.434	.666	-.665	1.040
	Protestant vs. Scientologist	.618	.422	.144	-.211	1.447
	Protestant vs. Atheist	.847*	.332	.011	.195	1.500
	Mormon vs. Scientologist	.431	.422	.308	-.398	1.259
	Mormon vs. Atheist	.660*	.332	.048	.007	1.313
	Scientologist vs. Atheist	.229	.316	.469	-.392	.851
Mormon	Protestant vs. Mormon	-2.007*	.417	<.001	-2.825	-1.188
	Protestant vs. Scientologist	-.375	.434	.388	-1.228	.478
	Protestant vs. Atheist	-.117	.331	.724	-.768	.534
	Mormon vs. Scientologist	1.632*	.417	<.001	.813	2.450
	Mormon vs. Atheist	1.889*	.308	<.001	1.284	2.495
	Scientologist vs. Atheist	.258	.331	.437	-.393	.909
Scientologist	Protestant vs. Mormon	-.987*	.417	.018	-1.805	-.168
	Protestant vs. Scientologist	-2.544*	.428	<.001	-3.384	-1.704
	Protestant vs. Atheist	-.240	.331	.469	-.890	.410

	Mormon vs. Scientologist	-1.557*	.410	<.001	-2.363	-.752
	Mormon vs. Atheist	.747*	.308	.015	.143	1.351
	Scientologist vs. Atheist	2.304*	.322	<.001	1.671	2.938
Atheist	Protestant vs. Mormon	-.651	.417	.119	-1.470	.167
	Protestant vs. Scientologist	-1.569*	.422	<.001	-2.398	-.741
	Protestant vs. Atheist	-2.327*	.335	<.001	-2.985	-1.669
	Mormon vs. Scientologist	-.918*	.404	.023	-1.712	-.125
	Mormon vs. Atheist	-1.676*	.312	<.001	-2.289	-1.063
	Scientologist vs. Atheist	-.758*	.319	.018	-1.385	-.131

* p < 0.05

Pairwise mean comparisons using Bonferroni's post hoc test indicated that religious identity significantly influenced distrust, depending on the candidate type presented. The post hoc test results are presented in Table 9 and Table 10.

Table 9

Religious Identity by Trust Bonferroni Post Hoc Test

| Comparisons	Mean Difference (I-J)	*SE*	*p*	95% CI Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Protestant vs. Mormon	-.8465*	.21032	<.001	-1.4032	-.2897
Protestant vs. Scientologist	-.9726*	.21315	<.001	-1.5369	-.4083
Protestant vs. Atheist	-.4112*	.16617	.082	-.8511	-.0288
Mormon vs. Scientologist	-.1261	.20622	1.000	-.6720	.4199
Mormon vs. Atheist	.4354	.15719	.035	.0192	.8516
Scientologist vs. Atheist	.5614*	.16095	.003	.1353	.9876

* p < 0.05

Table 10

Candidate Type by Trust Bonferroni Post Hoc Test

| Comparisons	Mean Difference (I-J)	*SE*	*p*	95% CI Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Protestant vs. Mormon	.4126	.14402	.026	.0313	.7939
Protestant vs. Scientologist	1.0947*	.14331	<.001	.7153	1.4741
Protestant vs. Atheist	-.1860	.14683	1.000	-.5747	.2028
Mormon vs. Scientologist	.6821*	.14206	<.001	.3060	1.0582
Mormon vs. Atheist	-.5985*	.14561	<.001	-.9841	-.2130
Scientologist vs. Atheist	-1.2807*	.14491	<.001	-1.6643	-.8970

* p < 0.05

Protestant participants expressed more trust for the Protestant candidate ($M =$ 5.062, $SE = .307$) followed by the Mormon candidate ($M = 3.625$, $SE = .307$) the atheist candidate ($M = 2.875$, $SE = .307$) and the lowest levels of trust for the Scientologist candidate ($M = 2.750$, $SE = .307$). A means plot for Protestant participant by candidate type for distrust can be found in Figure 11.

Figure 11. Means Plots for Protestant Participants by Candidate Type for Distrust
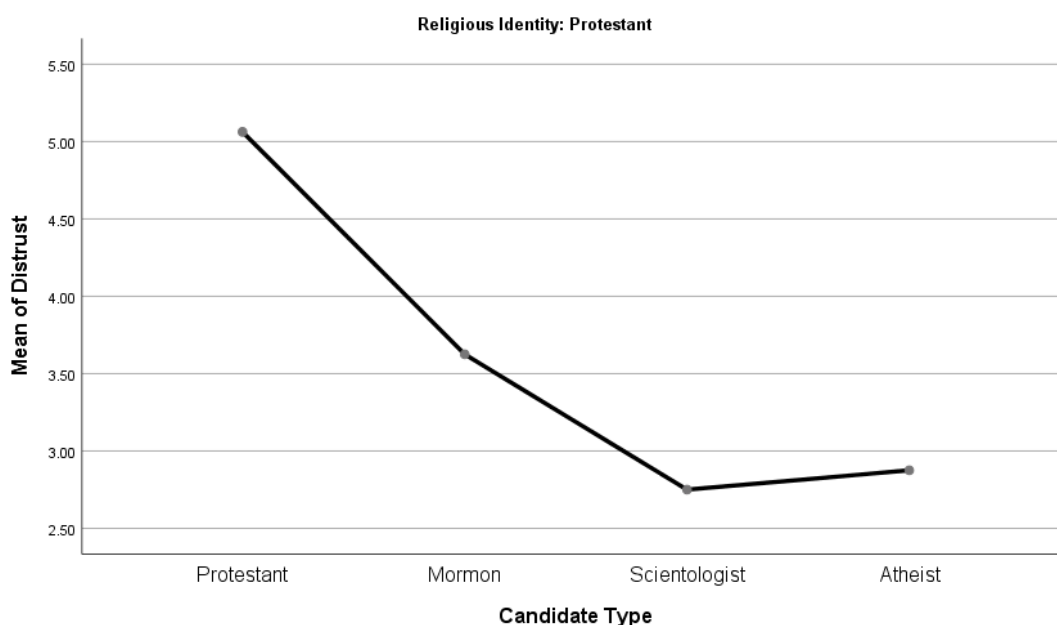
Mormon participants trust the Mormon candidate the most ($M = 5.632$, $SE = .282$) followed by the Protestant candidate ($M = 4.875$, $SE = .307$) the Scientologist candidate ($M = 3.737$, $SE = .282$) and with the lowest levels of trust for the atheist candidate ($M =$ 3.526, $SE = .282$). A means plot for Mormon participant by candidate type for distrust can be found in Figure 12.

Figure 12. Means Plots for Mormon Participants by Candidate Type for Distrust
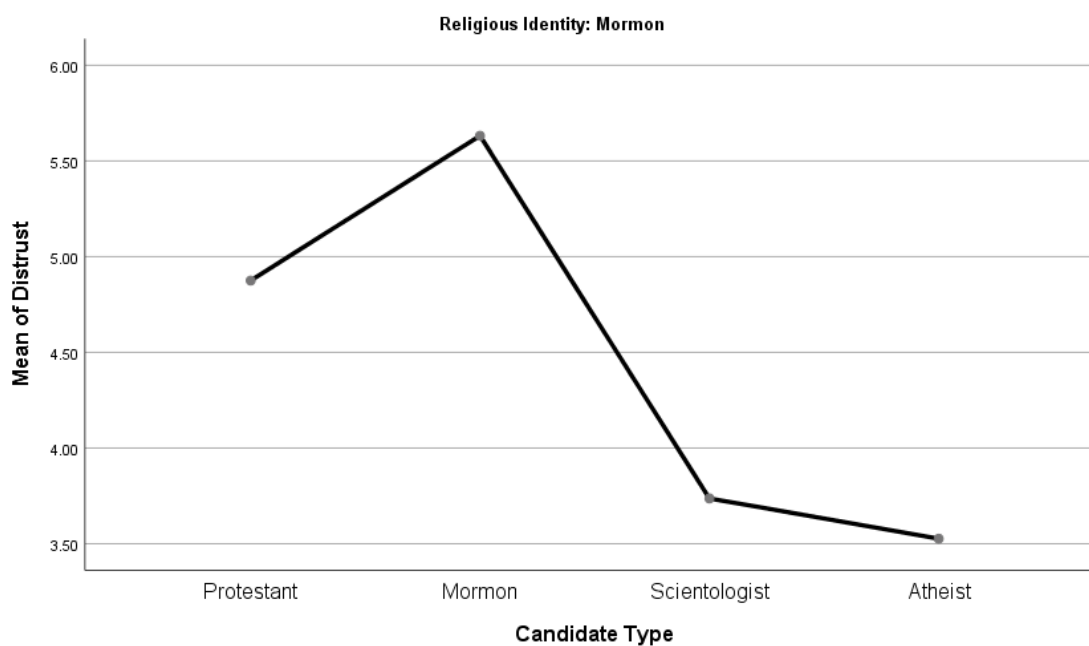
Scientologist participants trust the Scientologist candidate the most ($M = 5.294$, $SE = .298$) followed by the atheist candidate ($M = 4.444$, $SE = .289$), then the Protestant candidate ($M = 4.444$, $SE = .289$) with the lowest levels of trust for the Mormon candidate ($M = 4.000$, $SE = .307$). A means plot for Scientologist participant by candidate type for distrust can be found in Figure 13.

Figure 13. Means Plots for Scientologist Participants by Candidate Type for Distrust

Atheist participants trusted the atheist candidate the most ($M = 5.202$, $SE = .134$) with the Protestant candidate coming next ($M = 4.215$, $SE = .127$) followed by the Mormon candidate ($M = 3.742$, $SE = .125$) with the lowest levels of trust for the Scientologist candidate ($M = 2.990$, $SE = .123$). A means plot for atheist participant by candidate type for distrust can be found in Figure 14.
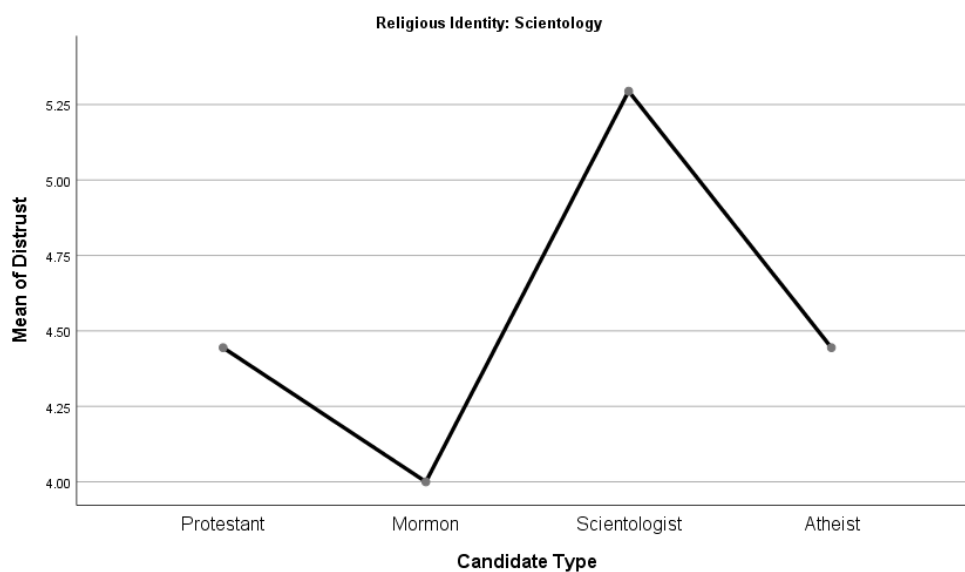
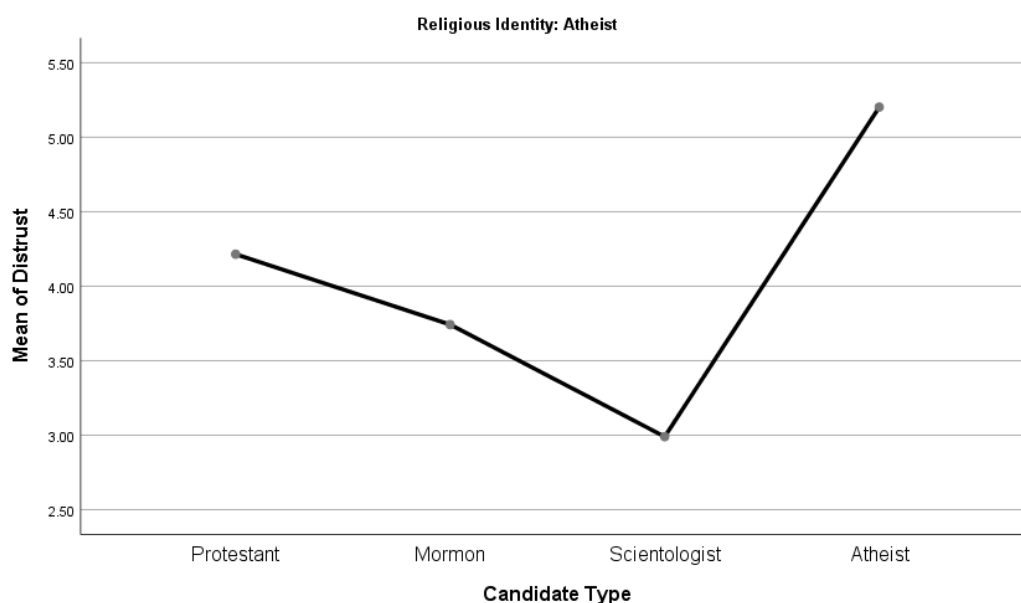*Figure 14.* Means Plots for Atheist Participants by Candidate Type for Distrust

This analysis demonstrated that all participants viewed the ideologically similar candidate the most trustworthy, therefore the alternative hypothesis (Ha3) for research question 3 is accepted: Participants will be more likely to rate a candidate with lower levels of distrust (higher levels of trust) when their ideologies are similar, as predicted by social identity theory and the socio-functional approach, as measured by the 7-point semantic differential scales (Franks & Scherr, 2014).

Research Question 4. Are participants more likely to rate a candidate with lower levels of disgust when their ideologies are similar, as predicted by social identity theory and the socio-functional approach, as measured by the 7-point semantic differential scales (Franks & Scherr, 2014)? This research question was answered with a 4 X 4 factorial ANOVA with disgust as the dependent variable. The complete ANOVA results are presented in Table 11, and a profile plot of candidate type group means by participant religious identity group with the dependent variable of disgust appears in Figure 15.

Table 11

Religious Identity by Candidate Type for Disgust

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	η2
Religion	35.947	3	11.982	9.342	<.001	.047
Candidate	29.637	3	9.879	7.702	<.001	.039
Religion x Candidate	187.041	9	20.782	16.203	<.001	.206
Error	722.105	563	1.283			
Total	12552.000	579				

Figure 15. Disgust Score Means by Religious Identity and Candidate Type
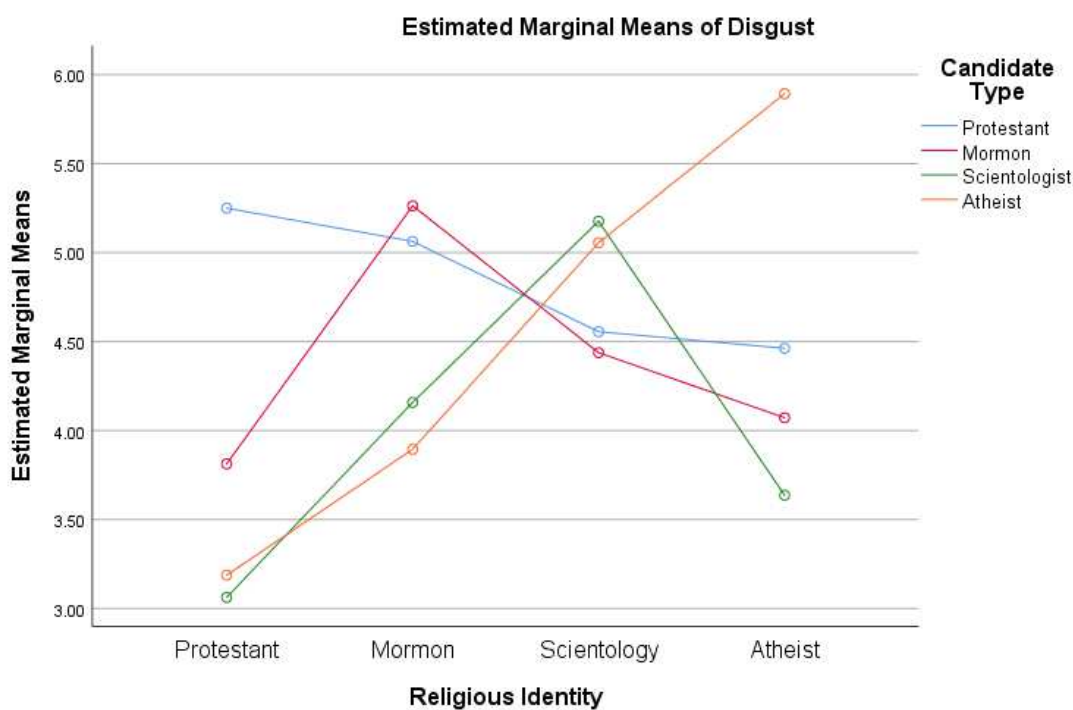
The main effect for participant religious identity was statistically significant and represents a small effect size ($F(3, 563) = 9.342$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .047$), indicating a difference between Protestants ($M = 3.828$, $SE = .142$), Mormons ($M = 4.595$, $SE = .133$)

Scientologists (*M* = 4.806, *SE* = .137) and atheists (*M* = 4.516, *SE* = .059). Means plots

for religious identity main effect by disgust are presented in Figure 16.

Figure 16. Means Plots for Disgust and Religious Identity
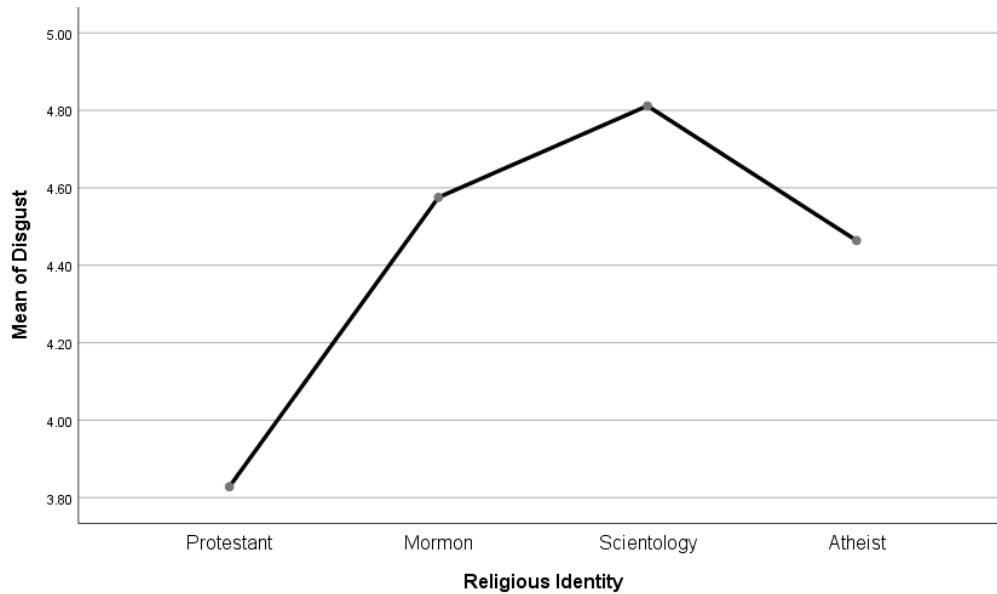
The main effect for candidate type was significant and represents a small effect

size (*F*(3, 814) = 12.617, *p* < .001, η^2 = .044), indicating a difference between Protestant

(*M* = 4.833, *SE* = .124) Mormon (*M* = 4.396, *SE* = .123) Scientologist (*M* = 4.008, *SE* =

.121) and atheist (*M* = 4.508, *SE* = .121) candidate types. Means plots for candidate type

main effect by disgust are presented in Figure 17.

Figure 17. Means Plots for Disgust and Candidate Type
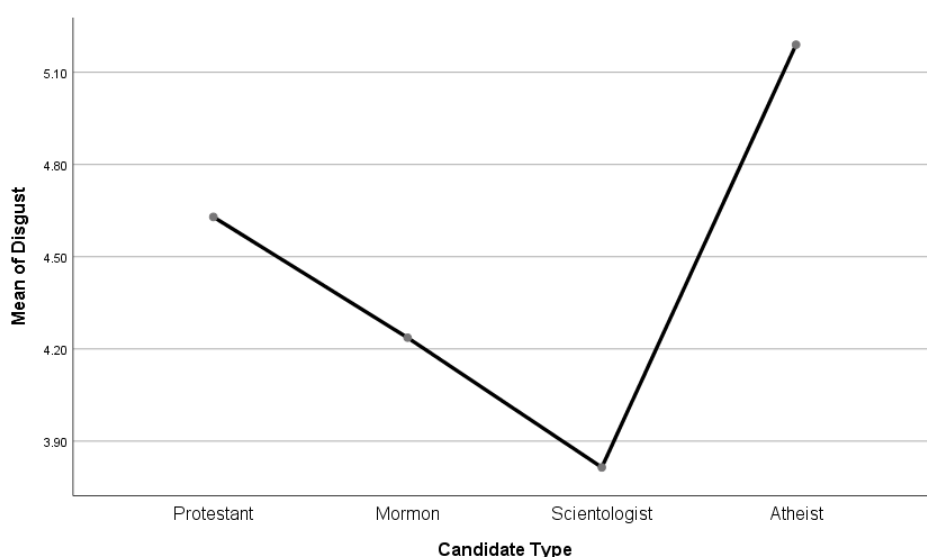
The analysis showed a significant religion x candidate interaction for disgust ($F(9,$ 563) = 16.203, $p < .001$), which represents a large effect size ($n^2 = .206$). An analysis of simple effects showed that when participants were presented with a Protestant candidate, a statistically significant difference in disgust scores was observed for Mormon compared to atheist participants. No statistically significant difference in disgust scores was found across all other participant group comparisons for the Protestant candidate. When participants were presented with the Mormon candidate, a significant difference was noted for Protestant compared to Mormon participants, Mormon compared to Scientologist participants, and Mormon compared to atheist participants. When participants were presented with the Scientologist candidate, a significant difference was noted for all participant group comparisons except for Protestant compared to atheist participants and Mormon compared to atheist participants. When participants were presented with the atheist candidate, a significant difference was noted for all group

comparisons except Protestant compared to Mormon participants. A complete table of

comparisons can be found in Table 12.

Table 12

Simple Effect Pairwise Comparisons for Disgust

Candidate	Comparisons	Mean Difference (I-J)	*SE*	*p*	95% CI	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Protestant	Protestant vs. Mormon	.188	.400	.640	-.599	.974
	Protestant vs. Scientologist	.694	.389	.075	-.070	1.459
	Protestant vs. Atheist	.788*	.307	.010	.186	1.390
	Mormon vs. Scientologist	.507	.389	.193	-.257	1.271
	Mormon vs. Atheist	.600	.307	.051	-.002	1.202
	Scientologist vs. Atheist	.093	.292	.749	-.480	.666
Mormon	Protestant vs. Mormon	-1.451*	.384	<.001	-2.205	-.696
	Protestant vs. Scientologist	-.625	.400	.119	-1.411	.161
	Protestant vs. Atheist	-.260	.306	.396	-.860	.341
	Mormon vs. Scientologist	.826*	.384	.032	.071	1.580
	Mormon vs. Atheist	1.191*	.284	<.001	.633	1.749
	Scientologist vs. Atheist	.365	.306	.232	-.235	.966
Scientologist	Protestant vs. Mormon	-1.095*	.384	.005	-1.850	-.341
	Protestant vs. Scientologist	-2.114*	.394	<.001	-2.889	-1.339
	Protestant vs. Atheist	-.574	.305	.061	-1.173	.026

	Mormon vs. Scientologist	-1.019*	.378	.007	-1.761	-.276
	Mormon vs. Atheist	.522	.284	.067	-.036	1.079
	Scientologist vs. Atheist	1.540*	.297	<.001	.956	2.124
Atheist	Protestant vs. Mormon	-.707	.384	.066	-1.462	.048
	Protestant vs. Scientologist	-1.868*	.389	<.001	-2.632	-1.104
	Protestant vs. Atheist	-2.705*	.309	<.001	-3.312	-2.099
	Mormon vs. Scientologist	-1.161*	.373	.002	-1.892	-.429
	Mormon vs. Atheist	-1.998*	.288	<.001	-2.563	-1.433
	Scientologist vs. Atheist	-.837*	.294	.005	-1.415	-.260

* $p < 0.05$

Pairwise mean comparisons using Bonferroni's post hoc test indicated that religious identity significantly influenced disgust, depending on the candidate type presented. The post hoc test results are presented in Table 13 and Table 14.

Table 13

Religious Identity by Disgust Bonferroni Post Hoc Test

Comparisons	Mean Difference (I-J)	SE	p	95% CI Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Protestant vs. Mormon	-.7472*	.19393	<.001	-1.2607	-.2338
Protestant vs. Scientologist	-.9835*	.19654	<.001	-1.5038	-.4631
Protestant vs. Atheist	-.6357*	.15323	<.001	.2338	1.2607
Mormon vs. Scientologist	-.2363	.19015	1.000	-.7397	.2672
Mormon vs. Atheist	.1115	.14494	1.000	-.2722	.4953
Scientologist vs. Atheist	.3478	.14842	.117	-.0452	.7407

* p < 0.05

Table 14

Candidate Type by Disgust Bonferroni Post Hoc Test

Comparisons	Mean Difference (I-J)	SE	p	95% CI Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Protestant vs. Mormon	.3929*	.13280	<.001	.0413	.7445
Protestant vs. Scientologist	.8148*	.13215	<.001	.4649	1.1647
Protestant vs. Atheist	-.5604*	.13539	<.001	-.9189	-.2019
Mormon vs. Scientologist	.4219*	.13100	.008	.0751	.7687
Mormon vs. Atheist	-.9533*	.13427	<.001	-1.3088	-.5978
Scientologist vs. Atheist	-1.3752*	.13363	<.001	-1.7290	-1.0214

* p < 0.05

Protestant participants were the most disgusted by the Scientologist candidate (M = 3.063, SE = .283) with the atheist candidate faring only slightly better (M = 3.188, SE = .283); the Mormon candidate was not viewed as appealing but more so than the previous two candidates (M = 3.812, SE = .283), and the Protestant candidate was viewed as the most appealing candidate by Protestant participants (M = 5.250, SE = .283). A means plot for Protestant participant by candidate type for disgust can be found in Figure 18.

Figure 18. Means Plots for Protestant Participants by Candidate Type for Disgust
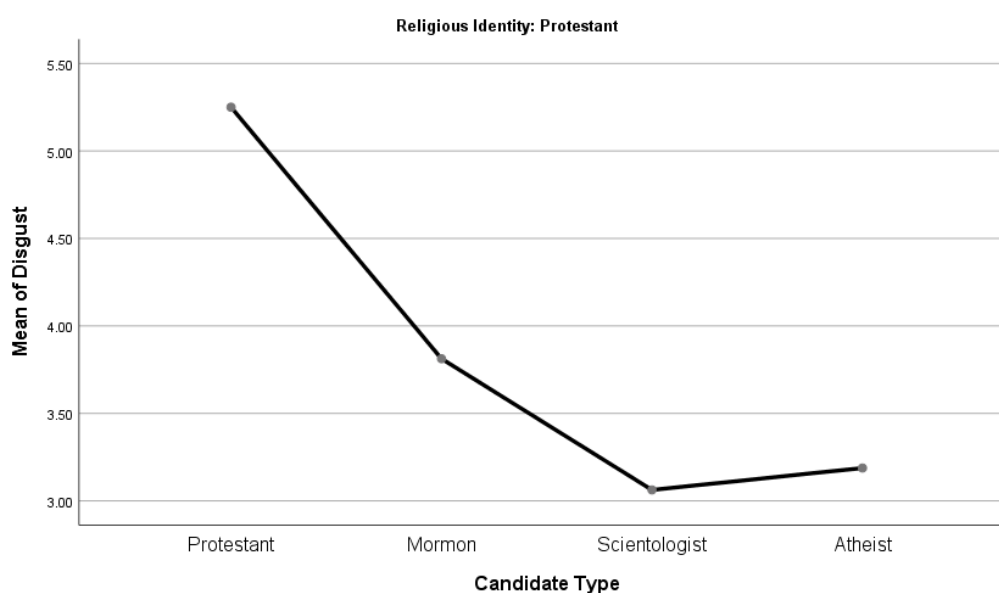
Mormon participants viewed the atheist candidate with the most disgust (M = 3.895, SE = .260) with the Scientologist candidate scoring as less disgusting but still highly unappealing (M = 4.158, SE = .260), while the Protestant candidate was viewed as slightly appealing (M = 5.063, SE = .283) and the Mormon candidate was viewed as

highly appealing (*M* = 5.263, *SE* = .260). A means plot for Mormon participant by candidate type for disgust can be found in Figure 19.

Figure 19. Means Plots for Mormon Participants by Candidate Type for Disgust
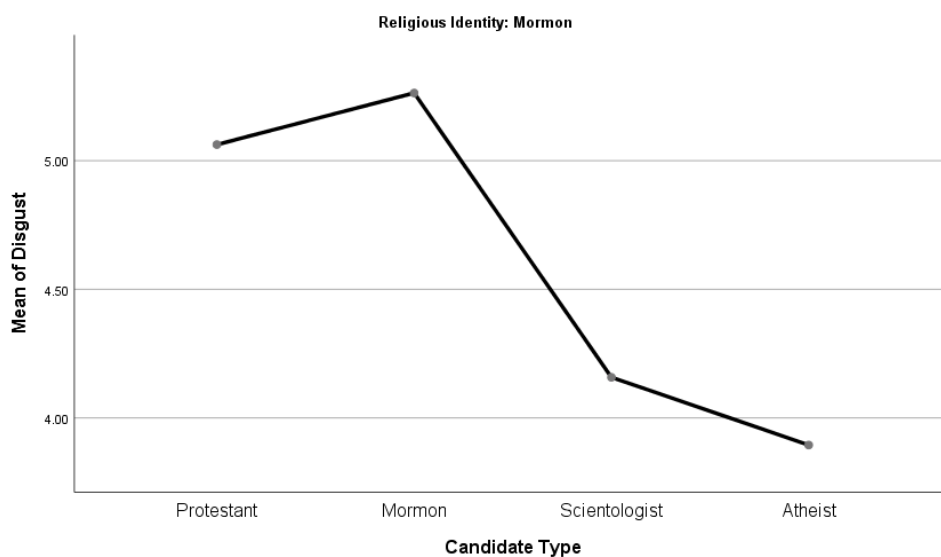
Scientologist participants rated the Mormon candidate as the least appealing (*M* = 4.438, *SE* = .283) followed by the Protestant candidate (*M* = 4.556, *SE* = .267), the atheist candidate (*M* = 5.056, *SE* = .267), and the Scientologist candidate as the most appealing (*M* = 5.176, *SE* = .275). A means plot for Scientologist participant by candidate type for disgust can be found in Figure 20.

Figure 20. Means Plots for Scientologist Participants by Candidate Type for Disgust
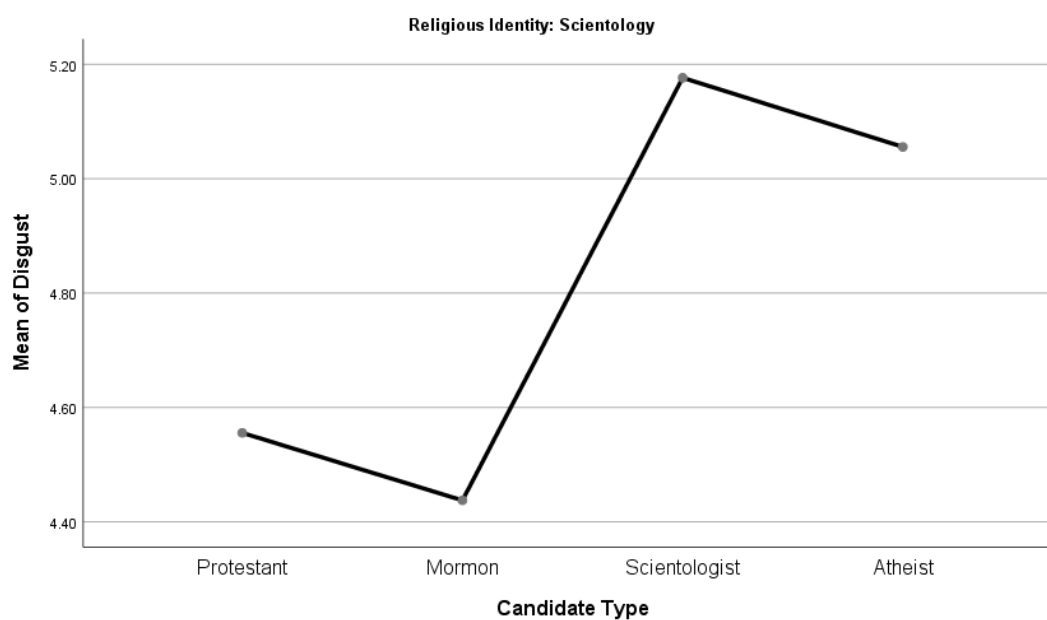
Atheist participants viewed the atheist candidate as highly appealing (*M* = 5.893, *SE* = .124) followed by the Protestant candidate (*M* = 4.462, *SE* = .117) the Mormon candidate (*M* = 4.072, *SE* = .115), and the Scientologist candidate was rated as highly disgusting to atheist participants (*M* = 3.636, *SE* = .114). A means plot for atheist participant by candidate type for disgust can be found in Figure 21.

Figure 21. Means Plots for Atheist Participants by Candidate Type for Disgust
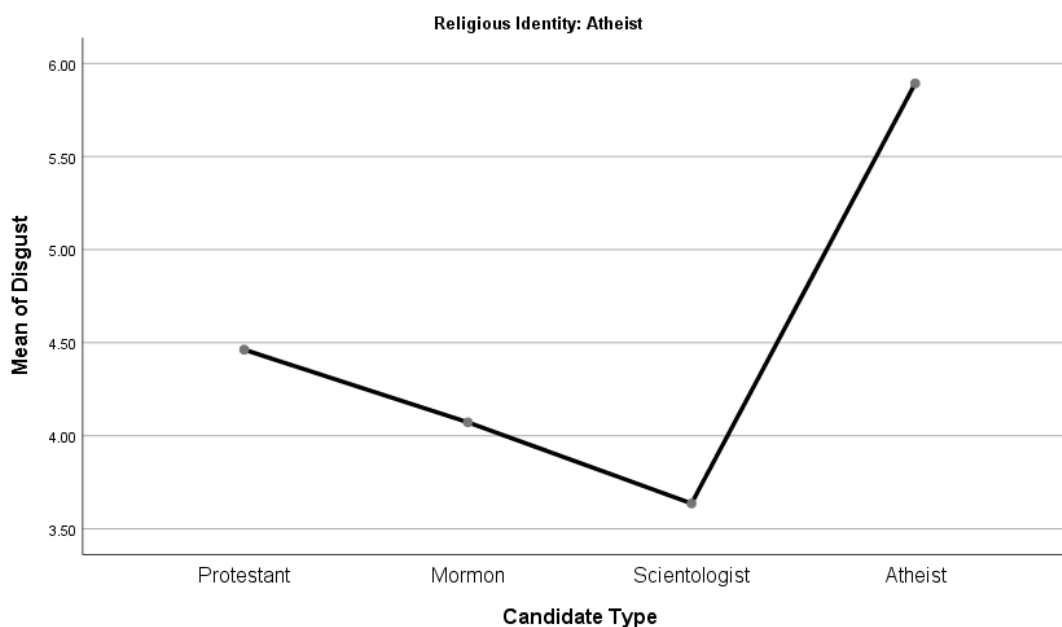
This analysis demonstrated a significant difference in participant disgust levels based on participant religious identity and candidate type as measured by the 7-point semantic differential scale for disgust (Franks & Scherr, 2014). Therefore, the alternative hypothesis (Ha4) for research question 4, i.e., participants will be more likely to rate a candidate with lower levels of disgust when their ideologies are similar, as predicted by social identity theory and the socio-functional approach, is accepted.

Research Question 5. Are participants more likely to rate a candidate with lower levels of fear when their ideologies are similar, as predicted by social identity theory and the socio-functional approach, as measured by the 7-point semantic differential scales (Franks & Scherr, 2014)? This research question was answered with a 4 X 4 factorial ANOVA with fear as the dependent variable. The complete ANOVA results are

presented in Table 15, and a profile plot of candidate type group means by participant

religious identity group with the dependent variable of fear appears in Figure 22.

Table 15

Religious Identity by Candidate Type for Fear

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	η2
Religion	41.063	3	13.688	9.607	<.001	.049
Candidate	25.315	3	8.438	5.923	.001	.031
Religion x Candidate	175.880	9	19.542	13.717	<.001	.180
Error	802.097	563	1.386			
Total	11379.000	579				

Figure 22. Fear Score Means by Religious Identity and Candidate Type
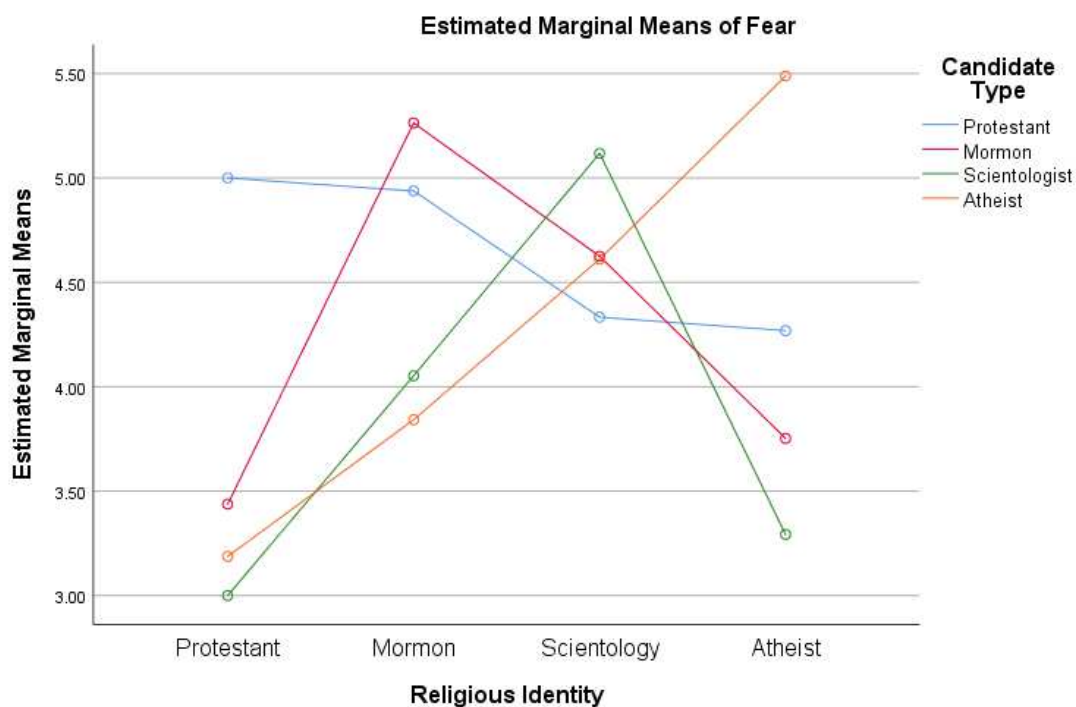
The main effect for participant religious identity was statistically significant and

represents a small effect size ($F(3, 563) = 9.607$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .049$), indicating a

difference between Protestants ($M = 3.656$, $SE = .149$) Mormons ($M = 4.524$, $SE = .140$) Scientologists ($M = 4.672$, $SE = .144$) and atheists ($M = 4.201$, $SE = .062$). Means plots for religious identity main effect by fear are presented in Figure 23.

Figure 23. Means Plots for Fear and Religious Identity
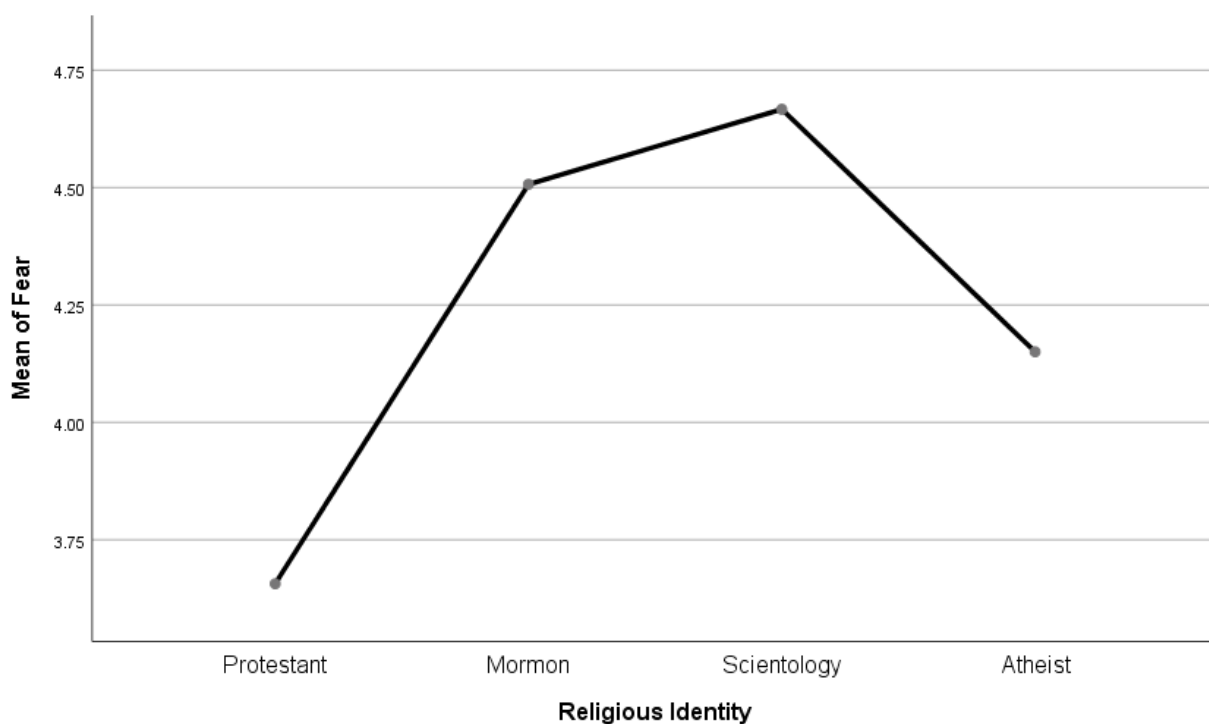
The main effect for candidate type was significant and represents a small effect size ($F(3, 563) = 5.923$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .031$), indicating a difference between Protestant ($M = 4.635$, $SE = .131$) Mormon ($M = 4.270$, $SE = .129$) Scientologist ($M = 3.866$, $SE = .128$) and atheist ($M = 4.282$, $SE = .128$) candidate types. Mean plots for candidate type main effect by fear are presented in Figure 24.

Figure 24. Means Plots for Fear and Candidate Type
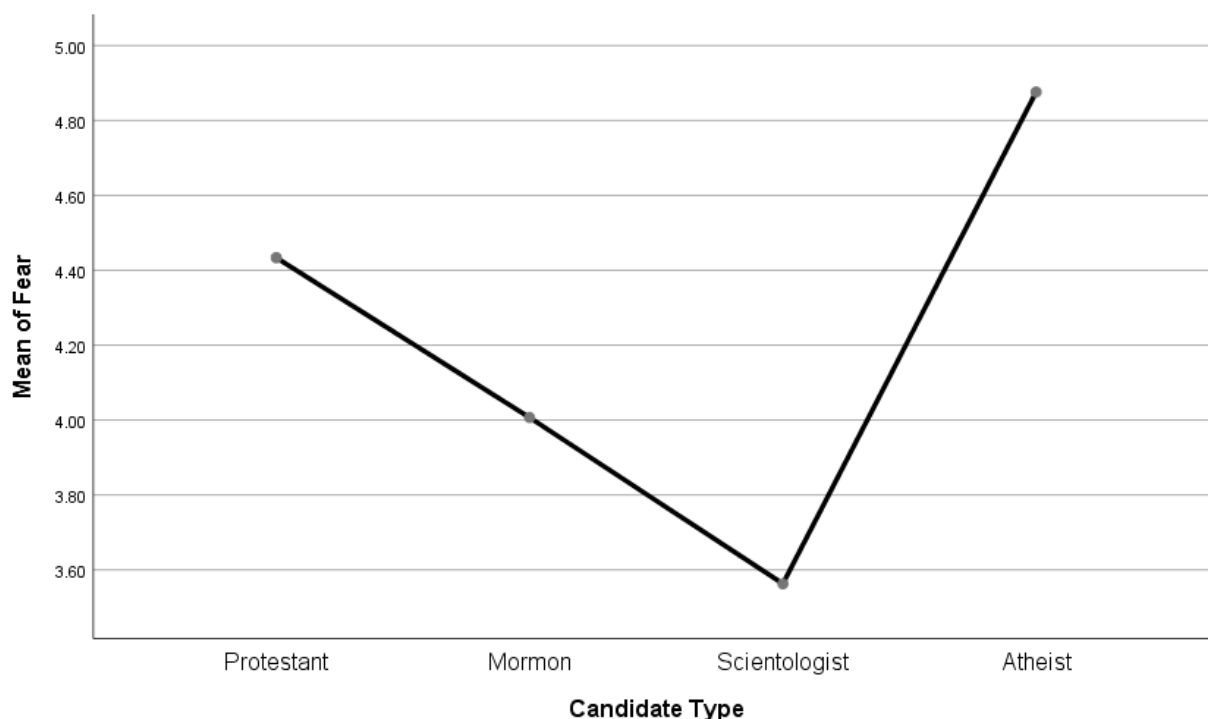
The analysis showed a significant religion x candidate interaction for disgust (F(9, 563) = 13.717, p <.001), which represents a large effect size (n^2 = .180). An analysis of simple effects showed that when participants were presented with a Protestant candidate, a statistically significant difference in fear scores was observed for Protestant compared to atheist participants and Mormon compared to atheist participants. No statistically significant difference in fear scores was found across all other participant group comparisons for the Protestant candidate. When participants were presented with the Mormon candidate, a significant difference was noted for Protestant compared to atheist participants and Mormon compared to Scientologist participants. When participants were presented with the Scientologist candidate, a significant difference was noted for all group comparisons, except Protestant compared to atheist participants. When

participants were presented with the atheist candidate, a significant difference was noted

for Protestant compared to Mormon participants and Mormon compared to Scientologist

participants. A complete table of comparisons can be found in Table 16.

Table 16

Simple Effect Pairwise Comparisons for Fear

Candidate	Comparisons	Mean Difference (I-J)	*SE*	*p*	95% CI	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Protestant	Protestant vs. Mormon	.063	.422	.882	-.766	.891
	Protestant vs. Scientologist	.667	.410	.105	-.139	1.472
	Protestant vs. Atheist	.731*	.323	.024	.097	1.366
	Mormon vs. Scientologist	.604	.410	.141	-.201	1.410
	Mormon vs. Atheist	.669*	.323	.039	-.034	1.303
	Scientologist vs. Atheist	.065	.307	.834	-.539	.668
Mormon	Protestant vs. Mormon	-1.826*	.405	<.001	-2.621	-.696
	Protestant vs. Scientologist	-1.188*	.422	.005	-2.016	-.359
	Protestant vs. Atheist	-.315	.322	.328	-.948	.318
	Mormon vs. Scientologist	.638	.405	.116	-.157	1.434
	Mormon vs. Atheist	1.511*	.299	<.001	.922	2.099
	Scientologist vs. Atheist	.872*	.322	.007	.240	1.505
Scientologist	Protestant vs. Mormon	-1.053*	.405	.010	-1.848	-.257
	Protestant vs. Scientologist	-2.118*	.416	<.001	-2.934	-1.301

	Protestant vs. Atheist	-.293	.322	.363	-.925	.339
	Mormon vs. Scientologist	-1.065*	.398	.008	-1.848	-.282
	Mormon vs. Atheist	.760*	.299	.011	.172	1.347
	Scientologist vs. Atheist	1.825*	.313	<.001	1.209	2.440
Atheist	Protestant vs. Mormon	-.655	.405	.107	-1.450	.141
	Protestant vs. Scientologist	-1.424*	.410	.001	-2.229	-.618
	Protestant vs. Atheist	-2.301*	.326	<.001	-2.940	-1.661
	Mormon vs. Scientologist	-.769	.393	.051	-1.540	.002
	Mormon vs. Atheist	-1.646*	.303	<.001	-2.242	-1.050
	Scientologist vs. Atheist	-.877*	.310	.005	-1.486	-.268

* $p < 0.05$

Pairwise mean comparisons using Bonferroni's post hoc test indicated that religious identity significantly influenced fear of a candidate, depending on the candidate type presented. The post hoc test results are presented in Table 17 and Table 18.

Table 17

Religious Identity by Fear Bonferroni Post Hoc Test

Comparisons	Mean Difference (I-J)	*SE*	*p*	95% CI Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Protestant vs. Mormon	-.8506*	.20439	<.001	-1.3918	-.3094
Protestant vs. Scientologist	-1.0104*	.20714	<.001	-1.5589	-.4620
Protestant vs. Atheist	-.4939*	.16149	.014	-.9215	-.0663
Mormon vs. Scientologist	-.1598	.20041	1.000	-.6904	.3708
Mormon vs. Atheist	.3567	.15276	.119	-.0477	.7612
Scientologist vs. Atheist	.5165*	.15642	.006	.1024	.9307

* p < 0.05

Table 18

Candidate Type by Fear Bonferroni Post Hoc Test

Comparisons	Mean Difference (I-J)	*SE*	*p*	95% CI Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Protestant vs. Mormon	.4268*	.13996	.014	.0562	.7974
Protestant vs. Scientologist	.8707*	.13928	<.001	.5019	1.2394
Protestant vs. Atheist	-.4423*	.14270	.012	-.8201	-.0645
Mormon vs. Scientologist	.4438*	.13806	.008	.0783	.8094
Mormon vs. Atheist	-.8692*	.14151	<.001	-1.2438	-.4945
Scientologist vs. Atheist	-1.3130*	.14083	<.001	-1.6859	-.9401

* p < 0.05

Protestant participants viewed the Scientologist candidate as the most threatening (M = 3.000, SE = .298) with the atheist candidate slightly less threatening (M = 3.188, SE = .298) followed by the Mormon candidate (M = 3.438, SE = .298), scoring the Protestant candidate as more comforting (M = 5.000, SE = .298). A means plot for Protestant participant by candidate type for fear can be found in Figure 25.

Figure 25. Means Plots for Protestant Participants by Candidate Type for Fear
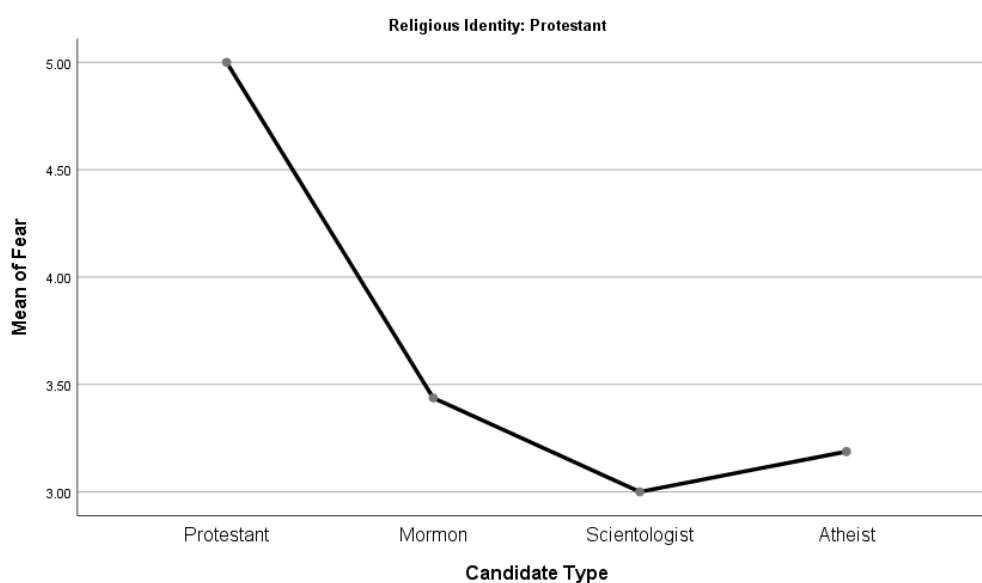
Mormon participants viewed the atheist candidate as the most threatening (M = 3.842, SE = .274) followed by the Scientologist candidate (M = 4.053, SE = .274) then the Protestant candidate (M = 4.938, SE = .298) and the Mormon candidate viewed as the most comforting (M = 5.263, SE = .274). A means plot for Mormon participant by candidate type for fear can be found in Figure 26.

Figure 26. Means Plots for Mormon Participants by Candidate Type for Fear
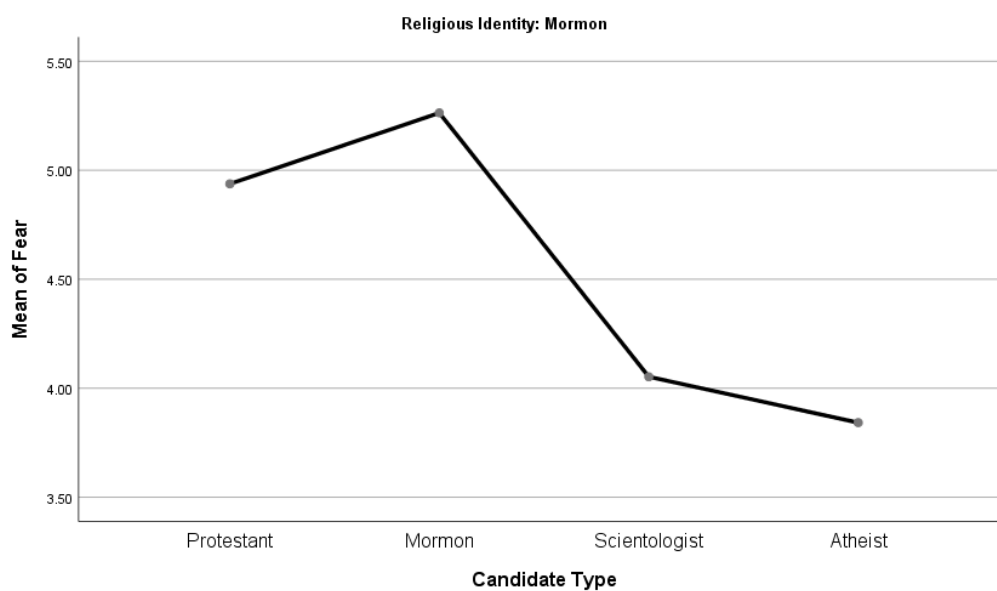
Scientologist participants scored the Protestant candidate as the most threatening of the four (*M* = 4.333, *SE* = .281) followed by the Mormon candidate (*M* = 4.625, *SE* = .298) then the atheist candidate (*M* = 4.611, *SE* = .281) and the Scientologist candidate scoring as the most comforting option (*M* = 5.118, *SE* = .289). A means plot for Scientologist participant by candidate type for fear can be found in Figure 27.

Figure 27. Means Plots for Scientologist Participants by Candidate Type for Fear
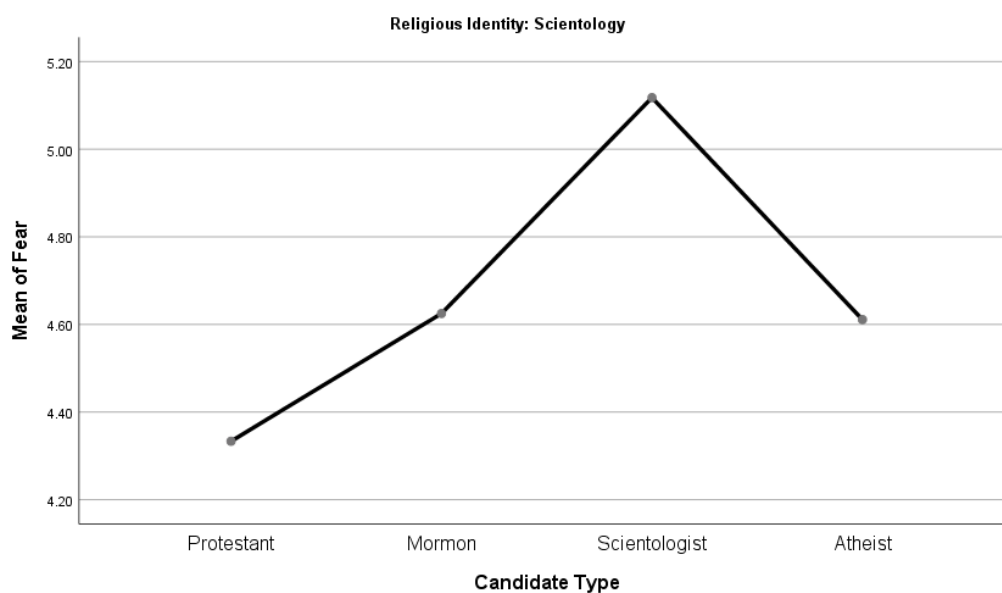
Atheist participants scored the atheist candidate as the most comforting ($M =$ 5.488, $SE = .130$) followed by the Protestant candidate ($M = 4.269$, $SE = .124$) then the Mormon candidate ($M = 3.753$, $SE = .121$) with the Scientologist candidate being scored as the most threatening ($M = 3.293$, $SE = .120$). A means plot for atheist participant by candidate type for fear can be found in Figure 28.

Figure 28. Means Plots for Atheist Participants by Candidate Type for Fear
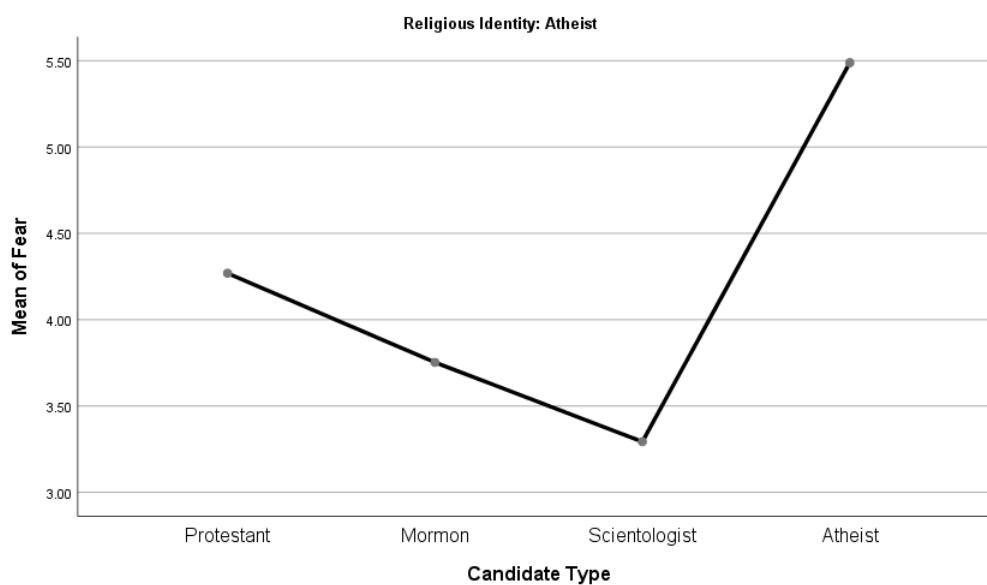
This analysis demonstrated a significant difference in participant fear levels based on participant religious identity and candidate type as measured by the 7-point semantic differential scale for fear (Franks & Scherr, 2014). Therefore, the alternative hypothesis (Ha5) for research question 5: Are participants more likely to rate a candidate with lower levels of fear when their ideologies are similar, as predicted by social identity theory and the socio-functional approach, and as measured by the 7-point semantic differential scales (Franks & Scherr, 2014) is accepted.

Summary

Four separate 4 X 4 factorial ANOVAs were conducted to determine if atheists faced greater levels of discrimination when seeking public office than candidates with other religious affiliations; the emotional underpinnings of the potential discrimination was also examined. The independent variables in each analysis showed a significant interaction effect, demonstrating that while atheists are viewed less favorably by

mainstream religious groups, Scientologists are in some cases viewed just as poorly or worse. Consistent with social identity theory, groups typically showed more preference and more positive emotional ratings for groups who were ideologically similar. Chapter 5 will provide an interpretation of the findings, a discussion of the possible implications for social change, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The aim of this study was to assess the comparative electability of atheist political candidates with candidates from other nontraditional religious backgrounds (i.e., Mormon and Scientologist) using multiple factorial ANOVA analyses. Previous research has found that atheists are heavily discriminated against, especially when running for office, and that the only candidates that may face worse discrimination when running for office are those often labeled as belonging to a cult (Cragun et al., 2012a; Lalich, 2009; Olson, 2006). The results demonstrated that participants were more likely to vote for candidates who shared similar religious affiliations and felt stronger negative emotions toward candidates the more dissimilar they were to the participant. While participants did not always rate the atheist candidate as the least favorable among candidate options, simple effects analysis suggested that candidates of nonmainstream religious affiliations (i.e., Mormon and Scientologist) would face greater challenges seeking public office than candidates belonging to mainstream religious groups (i.e., Protestant). This chapter interprets these findings, the limitations of the study, future research recommendations, and the implications for positive social change.

Interpretation of the Findings

The data collected and analyzed for this study not only helped support past research but also provided new insight into directions for future research. Each participant was presented with one of four political candidates, selected randomly; all four political candidates were identical, differing only in their religious affiliation.

Because of the mainstream acceptance of Protestantism, the Protestant candidate was

expected to be viewed favorably across all groups and served as a control for the study

(Gervais, 2013; Gervais, 2014; Gervais et al., 2011). The atheist candidate was not

expected to be viewed favorably, as research on atheists has found that the majority of

people do not view atheists as trustworthy or moral (Gervais, 2013; Gervais, 2014;

Gervais et al., 2011). The Scientologist candidate was also not expected to be viewed

favorably as this minority religious group is often referred to pejoratively by outsiders as

a cult (Doherty, 2014; Gilbert, 2016; McAllister, 2013; Thurm, 2015). The term cult is

used pejoratively to demean smaller religious groups whose practices are outside the

mainstream (Olson, 2006). Expectations for the Mormon candidate were unclear, as

despite outgroup labeling of Mormons as a cult, Mormons are still considered a Christian

denomination, albeit a small, fringe one (Baker & Campbell, 2010; Smith, 2014; Smith,

2016).

Previous research has shown that atheists are highly discriminated against, but

few studies have examined the comparative favorability for political office of other fringe

religious groups often labeled "cult" (e.g., Scientologists and Mormons (Greig, 2017;

Harrison, 2015). This study is informed by social identity theory, which posits that

groups are an important source of self-esteem and pride, giving individuals a sense of

belonging; however, this also often creates an "us" versus "them" mentality where

individuals categorize people based on group membership, in this case, religious

affiliation (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The result of this

ingroup/outgroup thinking is that ingroup members stereotype outgroups, exaggerating

their differences while ignoring their similarities (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). As such, the similarity of the participant to the candidate was expected to play a role in the scores the candidate received as predicted by social identity theory. The use of religious identities in this study likely primed participants'' religious group identity, making it that participants would identify with and therefore prefer similar candidates while exaggerating differences among dissimilar candidates (Ben-Bassat & Dahan, 2012; Tajfel, 1970).

Using a 9-point voting likelihood scale (1=no chance, 9=100% likely), candidates were rated by the participant based on their likelihood to vote for the candidate. Feelings of distrust, disgust, and fear evoked by the candidate were measured using a 7-point scale for each emotion with 1 reflecting threat, distrust, or disgust and 7 reflecting comfort, trust, and appeal felt by the participants. The voting likelihood score provides a measure to determine discrimination toward a specific religious identity, while the emotional scores provide additional insight into emotional reactions experienced by participants toward the respective candidates.

Political Discrimination toward Non-Mainstream Candidates

Across all participant groups, non-mainstream candidates consistently scored lower on voter preference measures when candidates and participants were ideologically dissimilar. Only the Protestant candidate was scored over the point of neutrality across all participant groups, while the Scientologist candidate was the lowest scoring candidate for all groups except for the Scientologist participants. All other ideologically dissimilar candidates were rated below the point of neutrality across all participant groups. The

preference for candidates similar to themselves was expected and provides support for social identity theory. However, social identity theory fails to account for some of the nuance in the data, such as why the Scientologist participants did not prefer their own candidate to the atheist candidate. System justification theory, which posits that individuals are likely to have negative views toward their own groups to maintain the status quo (i.e., maintain equilibrium), may provide one explanation, but that does not account for why the Scientologist participants preferred the atheist candidate to the mainstream Protestant candidate (Jost, 2011).

In a political setting, where groups whose values differ are competing for dominance (i.e., political power to set the national norms), it is expected to find ingroup favoritism, and as such, groups outside of the mainstream will struggle to achieve political success (Dunkel & Dutton, 2016; Greenwald & Pettigrew, 2014; Johnson, Rowatt, & LaBouff, 2012). With this in mind, social dominance theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) complements social identity theory and helps explain the phenomenon of ingroup power structures. This theory posits that inequalities between groups are maintained through institutional discrimination to maintain a social hierarchy, protecting the power of those who already have it (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Future studies may want to examine how these theories may further explain political discrimination across religious identities in the political arena.

Ideological Similarity, Voter Preference, and Emotional Measures

Participant groups typically favored their own ideologically similar candidate, with the Scientologist participants being the exception. The emotional measures (i.e.,

trustworthy, fear, and disgust) that accompanied the voter preference scale provided key insight into why voters may have chosen to rate the candidate as they did. For example, Protestant participants viewed the Scientologist candidate as the least trustworthy, and only the Protestant candidate was rated higher than the point of neutrality on the trustworthy scale. Overall, however, trust measures trended low across most candidates, with only the ideologically similar candidate per the participant group scoring over the point of neutrality for each candidate group, although the Protestant candidate trended higher overall across all groups. This could suggest overall low trust for nonmainstream candidates ideologically dissimilar across participant groups, or it possibly demonstrates low trust for political candidates, generally. Further research is necessary to examine which, or if, distrust for nonmainstream candidates and distrust for political candidates in general interact to lower trust even further.

Fear and disgust measures were more varied, with greater peaks and valleys across all groups, suggesting that these emotions waxed and waned depending on which participant/candidate groups were compared. Protestant and atheist participants viewed the Scientologist candidate as the most disgusting and toward whom they felt the most fearful, while the Mormon participants viewed the atheist with the most disgust and fear. The Scientologist participants viewed the Mormon candidate as the most disgusting but expressed no fear of any of the candidates, as all scored above the point of neutrality. However, for the other groups, it appeared that participant disgust and fear were often similarly scored for each candidate group, suggesting that these two emotions may be highly correlated, while trust appeared to be the strongest predictor of voting preference.

The socio-functional approach to prejudice states that specific emotions underlie and elicit corresponding prejudicial responses (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005). Findings from this study supported all socio-functional hypotheses such that participants expressed distrust, disgust, and fear for all ideologically dissimilar political candidates based on nothing more than religious identity. However, despite the data collected within this study, the emotional measures are still vague in their prejudicial predictions for dissimilar candidates, in that emotional responses were all negative, but not necessarily predictive in exactly what emotional responses corresponded with each participant to candidate pairing. As such future studies need to place a greater focus on methods of examining how these emotions elicit different responses toward political candidates to provide further clarity. One method of doing this could be to use an adjective checklist as a follow up measure to the presentation of different religious candidates, to determine which emotional words participants are more likely to choose. However, despite the limitations of the scope of this study, the underlying emotional measures were still clearly associated with voter preferences toward similar and dissimilar candidates, based on religious identity.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to English speaking US residents of legal voting age with Internet access. Participants also had to find the study through Reddit or Facebook, limiting generalizability. Demographic data were collected to help ensure the variability of the sample; however, there were numerous demographic groups who were under or overrepresented. For example, less than 4% of participants were under 20, less than 9%

were over 60, and 78% were white. The use of a between-groups rather than a within-groups design also limits the study, because participants rated only one of four candidate options, their preferences were not comparative.

The socio-functional approach to prejudice as well as social identity theory were selected as the most appropriate frameworks for this study. However, other frameworks have provided insight into the complexity of anti-atheist sentiment and prejudice, meaning the findings here are limited to the explanatory efficacy of the theories that were used. For example, social dominance orientation has been linked to many forms of discrimination based on social hierarchies attempting to maintain the status quo (Feather & McKee, 2012). Moreover, the values-conflict hypothesis has been used to explain anti-atheist prejudice as atheists are viewed as a threat to the values of mainstream religious believers who consider them immoral and view them with disgust (Cook, Cottrell, and Webster, 2015). Additionally, this study was conducted utilizing a self-report survey, meaning that participants' responses may reflect social desirability bias. Social desirability bias occurs when participants respond in ways they believe will be viewed favorably rather than risking an honest response that could be viewed negatively (Garcia & Gustavson, 1997). Response bias may also occur when respondents select choices based on what they believe the researcher is trying to find (Garcia & Gustavson, 1997). Furthermore, participant responses may vary depending on numerous outside factors, such as mood at the time the survey was completed. Survey responses were also limited to those individuals who opted to complete the survey, which may differ from those who opted not to participate (Garcia & Gustavson, 1997).

Recommendations

The data from this study presents new and exciting insight into not only anti-atheist prejudice in politics, but also other overlooked religious minority groups and the emotions that underlie people's perceptions of them. While participants in this study were given only a single candidate to rate, future studies could present multiple candidates and allow participants to rank order each candidate in terms of preference. Rather than narrowly focusing on only three minority and one mainstream religious groups, future studies could use the same research method but include other group, e.g., Catholics (a mainstream Christian denomination), and Wiccans and other pagan religions currently gaining popularly in the US (Pew Research Center, 2014b). Islam may also be of interest given the political tensions involving Muslim immigrants (Ghumman & Ryan, 2013; Hauslohner, 2017; Khera & Smith, 2017; Taras, 2013). It may also be worth exploring perceptions of groups carrying other nonreligious labels, such as agnostic, to determine what, if any, differences exist; for example, research suggests that agnostic is perceived as a "softer" label than atheist (Anderson, 2015; Cragun et al., 2012b).

During the data collection phase, many participants sent emails discussing their own views on the research as it was presented. Many of the atheist participants took umbrage with the classification of atheism as a religion. The demographic question was a pre-generated one provided by *Survey Monkey*; however, many atheists believed atheism is the absence of a religion rather than a religion. Yet, it was still of interest that so many atheists felt it important to express their disagreement with this classification. Furthermore, the survey presented more than a single nonreligious option (i.e., atheism,

agnosticism, no religion) and there were several respondents who identified more closely as agnostic or nonreligious than atheist. Previous research has suggested this is due to the stigma surrounding the label of atheism (Cragun et al., 2012a); however, future research may want to consider the perceptions associated with each of these labels, what they may mean to people, and if each experiences prejudice differently. Future research may also want to examine the ways atheists, in particular, self-identify and the importance of distinguishing themselves from a religion, per se.

Many emails were also received from individuals identifying as Christian who took issue with the survey, claiming they felt paranoid about its purpose. Some of the emails expressed concern that the data would allow Russia to gain more information on the US while other emails suggested that the scales were unfair because individuals could not rate the candidates with the information presented. This is noteworthy given that all the emails from individuals taking issue with some aspect of the survey had been asked to rate one of the less traditional candidates (e.g., Scientologist or atheist). Many of these individuals opted not to participate for fear that the study was simply going to make them "look bad," which would only occur if the individual felt negatively toward the candidate to begin with. Future research may want to examine Christian participants' reluctance to participate in a political survey, including their concerns over being perceived poorly for having participated.

Future studies could also examine religious prejudice in politics through other religious constructs (e.g., intrinsic or extrinsic orientation) where intrinsic religious orientation is belief in living by the letter, i.e., doctrinaire, while extrinsic religious

orientation implicates personal motives that lie outside of religion such as social acceptance (Allport & Ross, 1967). Studies have found that each is associated with different types of discrimination; exploring this in the context of the current study may provide new insight into religious discrimination in politics (Allport & Ross, 1967; Herek, 1987).

Studies have also found that priming analytic thinking increased acceptance of secular ideas and reduced prejudice towards atheists (Franks, 2017; Franks & Scherr, 2017) and that voting location may sway individuals to vote more or less secularly (Berger, Meredith, & Weaver, 2008; Eidelman, Crandall, Goodman, & Blanchar, 2012; Franks & Scherr, 2017; Greene, Morelli, Lowenberg, Nystrom, & Cohen, 2008; Mani, Mullainathan, Shafir, & Zhao, 2013). For example, voting at a church might prime an individual to vote more conservatively, whereas voting at a school is more likely to elicit secular votes. Future studies could use a format similar to this study in a real-world polling setting to determine if voting location also plays a role in bias toward candidates based on religious identity.

This study found that Scientologists viewed the atheist candidate more favorably than their own candidate. Research has suggested that even atheists are prejudiced against other atheists, owing to negative perceptions that pervade US culture (Gervais et al., 2017). As such, future research may want to examine if the "cult" label has permeated US culture to the degree that even Scientologists view other Scientologists negatively. Furthermore, it was found that Protestants reported the most fear toward all candidates except their own. Future studies may want to examine this further, to

determine if this trend continues to grow as privileged groups become less privileged and diversity among political powerholders continues to grow. It is worth investigating if fear of losing majority status contributes to Protestants' discrimination toward minority groups in the political arena and if this is related to increased diversity in the contemporary US (Sandstrom, 2017).

Implications for Social Change

This study not only demonstrated that atheists are viewed poorly compared to a more mainstream candidate, but also demonstrated how poorly minority religious groups are viewed. The literature to date, combined with this study implies that groups labeled "cult" are viewed poorly. These findings offer insights into the disparity in political representation for these groups. Just as the Black Lives Matter movement has sparked the current national conversation about racial inequality, likewise a conversation about proportional political representation for all religious affiliations may be a step toward achieving that end. Research has suggested that exposure minimizes prejudice towards atheists (Gervais, 2011; Harms, 2011). Contact theory suggests that once people are exposed to and interact with an otherwise unfamiliar group, their familiarity increases and with it an understanding that the similarities are greater than their differences; this contact has been found to reduce negative preconceptions that support prejudice (Gervais, 2011; Harms, 2011). Moreover, just awareness that the group is more commonplace than previously believed, and therefore not so "fringe," can have a similar impact in reducing prejudice toward the group; however this is dependent on other factors as well, such as whether the group may be viewed as a threat (Gervais, 2011; Harms, 2011).

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the comparative electability of atheist political candidates with candidates from traditional and other nontraditional religious backgrounds and to examine the emotions that may underlie perceptions of these candidates. Findings demonstrated that while atheists did tend to score more negatively (i.e., more fear, distrust, disgust), the Scientologist candidate overall fared the worst in nearly all emotional measures as rated by ideologically dissimilar participants. With greater understanding of the issues both atheists and nontraditional candidates face, measures can be implemented to alleviate the discrimination these candidates face in an attempt to increase equal and diverse representation in political office. Some examples may include removing religious institutions as voting locations, as research suggests bias is higher in these locations and impacts how individuals may vote (Berger, Meredith, & Wheeler, 2008). Greater access to voting at home through mail may also alleviate location bias to some extent. Political debates should focus on candidate policy and debate rules should avoid a candidate's religious beliefs as a litmus test for qualification. Government offices might stop using religious books to swear elected officials in to office and instead use the US constitution or a book of laws so that religious identity is not highlighted. These steps may help alter the way people look at candidates and their religious identities and in time reduce prejudiced attitudes; doing so may increase equal and diverse representation in political office.

Lastly, findings from this study suggest that different religious groups elicit different emotional reactions contingent on relatedness to that group. Emotions (e.g.,

distrust) can be a knee-jerk reaction that precludes thoughtful consideration of what a dissimilar group actually represents. To that end, greater contact/exposure to dissimilar groups would create opportunities to discover and embrace their similarities thereby suspending prejudicial perceptions that had once made exposure to each impossible. As long as mainstream religious groups by virtue of their numbers, maintain power in Congress, religious bias will likely continue to pervade lawmaking, marginalizing anyone who does not subscribe to those beliefs.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

Evaluating Political Candidates Study

Be part of an important study evaluating political candidates

- ➤ Are you 18 years of age or older?
- ➤ Do you live in the United States?

If you answered YES to these questions, you may be eligible to participate in a political research study.

The purpose of this research study is to evaluate political candidates to determine how much information is necessary to form accurate impressions.

This study is being conducted online via Survey Monkey.

Please visit https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/RH55BV7 for more details and to participate.

Thank you for your time and involvement!

Appendix B: Letter of Permission

LAKE SUPERIOR
STATE UNIVERSITY

Andrew S. Franks, PhD
Assistant Professor of Psychology
Lake Superior State University

17 October 2017

Dear Colleagues,

This letter constitutes my approval for Brittany Bullock-Escobedo to utilize versions of materials that I developed in the process of conducting the research detailed in the following source:

Franks, A. S. & Scherr, K. C. (2014). A socio-functional approach to prejudice at the polls: Are atheists more politically disadvantaged than Blacks and gays? Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 44, 681-691. DOI: 10.1111/jasp.12259.

Sincerely,

Andrew S. Franks, PhD

Appendix C: Protestant Candidate Description

John is a 39-year-old Protestant male running for the U.S. House of

Representatives. He is married and has two children age 6 and 3. After graduating from

law school, he spent 10 years working as an assistant district attorney. In his spare time

he enjoys outdoor activities like hiking, kayaking, and skiing. His political agenda

prioritizes the economy, health care, and education.

Appendix D: Mormon Candidate Description

John is a 39-year-old Mormon male running for the U.S. House of

Representatives. He is married and has two children age 6 and 3. After graduating from

law school, he spent 10 years working as an assistant district attorney. In his spare time

he enjoys outdoor activities like hiking, kayaking, and skiing. His political agenda

prioritizes the economy, health care, and education.

Appendix E: Scientologist Candidate Description

John is a 39-year-old Scientologist male running for the U.S. House of Representatives. He is married and has two children age 6 and 3. After graduating from law school, he spent 10 years working as an assistant district attorney. In his spare time he enjoys outdoor activities like hiking, kayaking, and skiing. His political agenda prioritizes the economy, health care, and education.

Appendix F: Atheist Candidate Description

John is a 39-year-old atheist male running for the U.S. House of Representatives. He is married and has two children age 6 and 3. After graduating from law school, he spent 10 years working as an assistant district attorney. In his spare time he enjoys outdoor activities like hiking, kayaking, and skiing. His political agenda prioritizes the economy, health care, and education.

Appendix G: Disgust Scale

7-Point Semantic Differential Scale: Disgust

Disgusting ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Appealing

Appendix H: Distrust Scale

7-Point Semantic Differential Scale: Distrust

Untrustworthy ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Trustworthy

Appendix I: Fear Scale

7-Point Semantic Differential Scale: Fear

Threatening ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Comforting

Appendix J: Voter Likelihood Scale

Voter Likelihood Scale

What is the likelihood you would vote for the candidate?

No Chance   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   100% Likely

Appendix K: Pilot Study For Semantic Differential Scales (Franks & Scherr, 2014)

"*Items for pilot study to confirm appropriateness of semantic differential scales. Numbers in parentheses represent frequencies for each response.*

1. How would you rate "appealing" as an antonym for "disgusting"?

A. Not at all acceptable as an antonym for "disgusting." (0)
B. Inadequate. Much better choices exist. (0)
C. Adequate, but not nearly ideal. (1)
D. It works quite well, but there may be better choices. (18)
E. Ideal. (1)

2. When a person is described simply as "threatening," which type of threat are you most likely to think that person poses (select only one)?

A. A threat to take money or personal property that is rightfully yours or deny you access to money or property that is rightfully yours. (0)
B. A threat to your physical well-being through direct violence (e.g., assault, battery, or an attempt on your life). (18)
C. A threat of contamination through transmission of disease. (0)
D. Something else. (2)

*Although there may not be full agreement on the best antonym for disgust—Jon Haidt (2003), for example, suggested a concept known as "elevation" as an opposite to moral disgust—we felt that lay participants would recognize "appealing" as an antonym to "disgusting" within the context of this research. Further, although "threat" may apply to a variety of potential harms within the socio-functional framework, we felt that lay participants would consider another person "threatening" because that person could cause them violent physical harm. Both of these assumptions were supported by the results of a two-item pilot survey distributed to 20 undergraduate research assistants naïve to the purposes of the current study."

Appendix L: Informed Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study about your impressions of a political candidate based on the amount of information that is presented. The researcher is inviting all United States citizens of legal voting age (18) capable of reading in English to the study. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Brittany Escobedo, a doctoral student at Walden University.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to determine how much information is necessary for voters (participants) to form accurate impressions of political candidates. Data collected from this confidential survey will be used for completion of a Ph.D. in Social Psychology at Walden University.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:
- You will be asked to review a description that may vary in length and content on a political candidate, and assess your intention to vote for the candidate.
- You will be asked to assess how the candidate makes you feel and provide three short answers on a scale.
- The survey in total should take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
This study is voluntary. You are free to accept or turn down the invitation. If you decide to be in the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may answer only the questions you feel comfortable answering, and you may stop at any time. If you do participate, **completion and return of the survey indicates your consent to the above conditions.**

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as stress or becoming upset. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing.

There are no risks or benefits to you in participating in this survey. The research benefit will allow researchers to understand voter's political preferences based on how candidates present themselves.

Privacy:

Reports coming out of this study will not share the identities of individual participants. Details that might identify participants, such as the location of the study, also will not be shared. Even the researcher will not know who you are. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purpose outside of this research project. Data will be kept secure by password protection on the researcher's computer and on the Survey Monkey website. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:
You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via email. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call the Research Participant Advocate. Walden University's approval number for this study is **03-28-18-0504647** and it expires on **March 27, 2019.**

Please print or save this consent form for your records.

Obtaining Your Consent

If you feel you understand the study well enough to make a decision about it, please indicate your consent by clicking the link below.

Please do not put your name on this form. The survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Any questions or concerns should be directed to the principal investigator, Brittany Escobedo.

Thank you for your time.
Sincerely,

Brittany Escobedo,
Walden University, School of Psychology

By clicking the link below, I confirm that I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement, and possible risks and inconveniences have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand that I can discontinue participation at any time. My consent also indicates that I am at least 18 years of age. [Please feel free to print a copy of this consent form.]

☐ I agree to participate (link to survey)   ☐ I decline (link to close webpage)

Appendix M: Debriefing Form

Thank you for participating in this study! We hope you enjoyed the experience. This form provides background about our research to help you learn more about why we are doing this study. Please feel free to ask any questions or to comment on any aspect of the study.

You have just participated in a research study conducted by Brittany Escobedo.

You were told that the purpose of this study was to determine how much information is necessary for voters (participants) to form accurate impressions of political candidates. In actuality, we were interested in different reactions from participants to different religious affiliations of political candidates, to determine if religious affiliation affects the electability of non-Christian candidates. To protect the integrity of this research, we could not fully divulge all the details of this study at the start of the procedure.

As you know, your participation in this study is voluntary. If you so wish, you may withdraw after reading this debriefing form, at which point all records of your participation will be destroyed.

Again, we thank you for your participation in this study. I request that you do not discuss this project with others until after they have had the opportunity to participate. Prior knowledge of the questions asked during the study can invalidate the results. I greatly appreciate your cooperation.

You may print and keep a copy of this debriefing for your records.

If you have questions now about the research, please ask. If you have questions later, please e-mail Brittany Escobedo or if you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call the Research Participant Advocate. If, as a result of your participation in this study, you experienced any adverse reaction, please contact the Walden University IRB.

Thank you again for your participation,

Brittany Escobedo
Walden University, School of Psychology