Development of Research and Survey

Religion plays a large role in American politicians’ campaigns. We have come to expect campaigners to make reference to their religious views and the media tends to emphasis religious differences in certain elections. Since religion is so much a part of a campaign, we were intrigued and wanted to discover whether a candidate’s religion would be a deciding factor for students’ votes. Likewise, we wished to explore if the ethnicity of a candidate would also play a role. In the last presidential election, the first non-Caucasian president, who campaigned with much student support, was elected. Holding all other variables constant, we wanted to see if knowing solely a candidate’s religion or ethnicity would cause students to vote against said candidate.

Upon beginning our project, we hypothesized that students who were more exposed to people of religions and ethnicities other than their own would be more likely to vote for presidential candidates of diverse religions or ethnicities. Since society generally expects young adults to have nondiscriminatory attitudes, we knew that there would be a potential cause for bias when asking students if they would vote against a candidate because of a particular religion or race.

Example Process

Research Question:
We are looking for evidence of a difference in distributions of perceived importance of religion to the typical American voter, between the groups of individuals for whom religion is relevant to voting decision and those for whom religion is not relevant to voting decision.

H0: the distribution of perceived importance of religion to the typical American voter is homogenous, we summarized the individual’s total relevance of religion as ‘irrelevant’ whereas if responses across the religions were

H1: the distribution of perceived importance of religion to the typical American voter is over lower values for those in the “irrelevant” group than for those in the “relevant” group.

3. Test statistic: t = 3687
4. P-value = 0.0734 (after adjustment for ties)

There was a slightly larger number of students who thought that religious affiliation of a presidential candidate had a “bigger” impact on the typical American voter than does ethnicity, this did not turn out to be a significant result.

Additional comment:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difference in number of responses</th>
<th>Religion has a bigger impact</th>
<th>Ethnicity has a bigger impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No difference</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion has a bigger impact</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Statistical Process

Taking these factors into careful consideration, we developed questions based on responses from a previous survey that we developed last year as part of a Survey Sampling class and discussions we had with several outside sources. A lot of our time was spent writing and rewriting questions to best fit our research goals, especially when it came to determining how to assess students’ exposure to people of different religious and cultural backgrounds. We approached the questions from various viewpoints to iron out and eliminate any wording that could be offensive or misleading. After developing the questions, we put together the survey in Qualtrics (a software program for developing and distributing surveys), filled out Institutional Review Board (IRB) forms and sent out the survey via email to a random sample of 1500 undergraduate students at UW - Eau Claire. We then performed appropriate statistical tests on selected data sets and analyzed the collected data to make inference about our results and answer our original research questions. Our response rate was roughly 10% (9.53%) and the vast majority of respondents completed the entire survey, which allowed us to analyze full data sets.

Conclusions

Research Question: Are students who assess cultural exposure as very important more interested in a “Culture Night” on campus than students who assess cultural exposure as not very important?

Conclusion: (Chi-square test, P-value = 0.033)

Students who deem cultural exposure to be important are more interested in “Culture Night” events offered on campus.

Research Question: Do students who travel outside of the US tend to read or watch international news more often than students who have never been outside of the US?

Conclusion: (Chi-square test, P-value = 0.049)

Students who travel outside of the US tend to seek out international news more often than students who have not traveled outside of the US.

Research Question: Are personal placement on the political spectrum and the relevance of a presidential candidate’s ethnicity dependent on a voter’s decision dependent?

Conclusion: (Chi-square test, P-value = 0.001)

The relevance of a presidential candidate’s ethnicity is dependent on a students’ placement on the political spectrum.

Research Question: Are personal placement on the political spectrum and the relevance of a presidential candidate’s religious affiliation on a voter’s decision dependent?

Conclusion: (Chi-square test, P-value = 0.003)

The relevance of a presidential candidate’s religious affiliation is dependent on a students’ placement on the political spectrum.

Comments (Grouping Responses):

In many of the tests that we performed, we grouped data from the responses in such a way so that the appropriate statistical analysis tests could be used (perhaps by ensuring that the expected counts would be large enough).

For example, one of the questions we used is:

You see a poster in the hallway on the way to class advertising a “Culture Night” on campus. Do you:

• Hardly notice the poster.
• Notice the poster but aren’t interested.
• Read the poster and consider going, you may or may not go.
• Read the poster to get all the details, you will go.

We combined responses to create two groups out of four groups in the following way:

• “Hardly notice the poster” + “Notice but aren’t interested” → “Not interested”
• “Read the poster and consider” + “Get the details, you will go” → “Interested”

Regarding the political spectrum (a scale from 0-120), responses within 10 points on either side of the middle value (60) are considered “center”, those lower than 50 are considered “left” and those higher than 70 are considered “right”.

Conclusion:

Students who are “very interested” in “International exposure” tend to vote for a presidential candidate based solely on religion or ethnicity.