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**THROUGHOUT THE GENERATIONS: HOW AGE AND RELIGIOSITY MAY BE
CHANGING OUR VIEWS ON KEY SOCIAL ISSUES**

by

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Senior Honors Project

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Abstract

This study seeks to assess the impact of age and strength of religious affiliation on Americans' opinions on the environment, abortion, homosexuality, and the government in general. Other factors such as income, gender, and education level were also considered because these could have an impact on one's view of certain issues. The interaction of both age and religious affiliation is considered as well to control for individuals of various ages and religiosity levels. This study also aims to find a relationship between age and those four issues listed above as well as education level and religious affiliation. Singling out those variables allows the study to lay a foundation for its more complex hypotheses. The results indicate that while age and religious affiliation were not significant factors in one's viewpoint as strongly as expected, both were significant when determining a participant's view on the environment. Not surprisingly, religious affiliation was a significant factor in determining one's opinion of homosexuality; as strength of religious affiliation increases, a participant is more likely to think homosexuality is wrong sometimes or always wrong. Education level produced significant results for determining opinions on homosexuality as well as abortion. As education level increases, a participant is more likely to think that homosexuality is ok and that a woman having an abortion for any reason is acceptable. Lastly, this study has found that while one's age increases, he or she is slightly more likely to think homosexuality is wrong. Curiously, while it is commonly thought that young Americans hold more liberal views on many issues, it was discovered here that there is virtually no difference in the opinions of old and young Americans on abortion.

Introduction

It has been a general critique of those born between 1980 and 2000, "The Millennials" as they have been named, that they are far less religious than generations before them. This generation does not identify with religion, it does not believe in God, it does not hold Christian values, it does not attend religious services in nearly the same numbers as Americans that have preceded it. These are some of the many behavioral criticisms made against the Millennials. That being said, it is also an observation that this generation is more liberal than earlier generations on many social and political issues ("Religion Among the Millennials," 2010). This study will examine whether evidence exists to support these observations and criticisms. Is the Millennial generation indeed less religious and more liberal than older Americans? If so, does this shift in religiosity impact opinions on key social issues? In order to provide a tentative response to these questions, this project will compare the religious patterns of The Millennials and of older generations and then analyze the effect of religiosity on this group's opinions of abortion, homosexuality, the size of government, and the environment.

Literature Review

There has been a fair amount of research published pertaining to the relationship between religiosity and political views among Americans. However, the information comparing the ideologies of Americans of different ages is not as frequent.

Firstly, the Pew Research Center published an article in 2010 titled “Religion Among the Millennials” in which it discusses the emerging trends in religiosity and ideology in young Americans today. It states that Millennials are less tightly tied to a particular religion than members of Generation X or the Baby Boomer Generation were at the same point in their lives. They also say that religion is less important in their lives than it is to older Americans. “Fewer young adults belong to any particular faith than older people do today. They also are less likely to be affiliated than their parents’ or grandparents’ generations were when they were young” (“Religion Among the Millennials” 2010). Although Millennials may be unaffiliated with a religion, this study discovers that that generation believes in God with the same certainty that those in Generation X did ten years ago, pointing to the possibility that Americans place more importance on religious affiliation as they age (“Religion Among the Millennials” 2010). It could also be that there is a generational difference between Millennials and older generations that could persist as they age. Although the numbers have declined in recent years, another survey from the Pew Research Center shows that 45% of Americans agree that prayer is an important part of their lives, which is down from 55% of Americans in 1999 (“Trends in Attitudes Toward Religion and Social Issues” 2010).

Likewise, Kaleem (2012) notes that the group designated as “nones” or those who have no religious affiliation rose to nineteen percent from fifteen percent in 2007, totaling 46 million Americans. These numbers range across generations including Millennials, Generations X, and

Baby Boomers. However, two thirds of those “nones” said they believe in God, making it seem that affiliating with a religion may simply be dropping in popularity.

While patterns in religious practices are apparent, it is important to note how they affect politics as well. An article about a recent book that focuses on the effects of religion in America discusses the idea that while voters used to vote almost unanimously by their faith category, regardless of how devout they were to that specific religion, today it seems that rather than particular faiths voting for a certain party, the devoutness of one’s faith often determines which way he or she votes, with those most devout tending to vote to the right while the less devout lean towards the left (Stowe 2013).

It is interesting to note, however, that the numbers of those most and least devout to their faiths may be falling. The results of further studies indicate that the Catholic population fell by 700,000 people between 1990 and 2008 (Kosmin and Navarro-Rivera 2012). This shift in religion coincides with shift in political alignment. Generation X once favored the Republican party, but has shifted towards the Democrats in recent years. Also, “nones” were found to support Democrats two-to-one in 2008 when they were once evenly split amongst the two major parties. In addition, religious beliefs within parties have changed over the years. The Pew Research Center declares in a separate study that Republicans express greater religious commitment now than at any time in the past twenty years with Democrats expressing less (“Trends” 2007).

When it comes to specific ideologies, information suggests that there is a slow but steady move away from traditional and conservative social values. The 2007 Pew study states that attitudes towards homosexuality and gay rights are becoming more accepting. Majorities of all religious groups among the Millennial generation favor same-sex marriage. Generally speaking,

Americans with strong religious affiliations who attend services regularly have more negative attitudes towards homosexuality. Those who are slightly religious or not at all religious have more positive views (Craig 2011). Interestingly, a separate study found that while those who regularly attend religious services viewed gay marriage negatively, they viewed adoption by gays and lesbians far more favorably. The same study discovered that “religiosity was more powerful than any other variable included in this study in predicting these attitudes” (Schwartz 2010). It is important to analyze the impact of religiosity on the attitudes of homosexuality and gay rights because religious institutions are the most strongly opposed yet socially influential institutions on this topic.

Attitudes towards another hot-button social issue, abortion, among Millennials proves interesting when religious beliefs are factored in. A study from the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University finds that two-thirds of religiously unaffiliated Millennials say abortion should be legal in all or most cases. However, 51% of Catholic Millennials say it should be illegal in all or most cases. White evangelicals hold the strongest opposition to abortion at 88% (Jones et al 2012). Generally, 21% of Americans say abortion should be legal always and 18% say it should be illegal always, according to the 2009 Gallup survey. That same survey cites the reason for a recent change in abortion views as a larger percentage of Republicans identify themselves as pro-life compared to ten years ago, while there has been no such shift in Democrats. Nevertheless, the Gallup survey found 46% of respondents identifying themselves as pro-choice and 47% as pro-life, which is a recent increase in the latter category (Saad 2009). While some studies say abortion opinion has changed over the years, others say it has stayed the same. A PBS article finds that 63% want to preserve the Roe v. Wade decision. It was 62% ten years ago and 60% twenty years ago. The same article

stated that 47% of respondents view abortion as morally wrong with only 13% viewing it as morally acceptable. Only 38% of Catholic participants wanted to see *Roe v. Wade* overturned. The supervisor of the study says, “Even as we’re seeing a lot of denominational flux and people even striking out independently in the way they think about faith in their lives, their core values when it comes to an issue like that (abortion) are their own and not necessarily determined by their religious associations” (Bowser 2013). Interestingly, there is not evident information regarding public opinion and abortion when controlling for religiosity although it seems like an issue deeply seeded in religion.

The size of the government is a concern for many Americans as many wonder where the responsibility for finding solutions to social problems should lie. In an interesting find, Jones et al (2012) says that 69% of 18-24 year olds believe the government should do more to reduce the gap between rich and poor, yet 56% of that age group said that government has gotten bigger because it is involved in matters that people should solve themselves.

The same publication from the Berkley Center discovered from information gathered in 2007 that more Americans support government intervention on behalf of disadvantaged citizens. While the same survey showed that Americans want to help those in need, still that 69% believe poor Americans have become too dependent on the government (Jones et al 2012).

There is very little information regarding how attitudes on the environment among Millennials compare to those of other generations and whether religious practices influence those attitudes. It is mentioned in the Pew Research Center article that Millennials are more concerned about the environment than their elders, but does not go into much detail. Nevertheless, there is information stating that while Americans claim to be concerned about the environment, they place blame on the government and refuse to take personal responsibility for the current

deteriorating condition. Kamieniecki and Kraft (2013), note that the General Social Survey 1982 - 2010 produced results stating a consistent majority of Americans do not think enough is being spent on improving and protecting the environment. However, in a 2010 Gallup survey, only two percent of respondents noted the environment as an important problem facing the United States. The same book mentions several factors that may influence public opinion on the environment. First, favorable opinion towards improving the environment aligns with favorable economic conditions and is usually the least important issue considered when the economy is poor. Second, opinion on the environment will change in proximity to large natural events such as oil spills and nuclear plant meltdowns. Third, it is thought that public opinion may move in the opposite direction of government action. When little to no attention is being paid to the environment by federal or state governments, public opinion will favor more environmental action. The opposite will occur when the government introduces large amounts of environmental policy in an effort to combat government overreach. Also, the more pro-environmental groups do to stir awareness, the more public opinion will change (Kamieniecki & Kraft 2012).

This study will examine the effects of age on environmental public opinion. It is thought that such public opinion is negatively related to age. This may be perhaps because the issue of environmental protection has become socialized within the past thirty years, or it may be because the idea of social change is more relevant and comfortable for younger people than it is for older people. This project will seek out relationships between age, attitudes on the environment, and religiosity. Likewise, attitudes about the size and role of the government have been mentioned in several of these articles but have not been tied in with religious affiliation, which will be another goal of this thesis. Opinions of abortion and homosexuality are thoroughly tied to religion in much of this literature, however it will be further analyzed here how those opinions have

changed with those in the Millennial generation coming of age. There is plenty of literature discussing the changing mindset of younger generations and comparing them to those of their elders. However, the goal of this study is to add the factor of religiosity into the mix. While the Millennials have been pinned for not being as religious or devout as older Americans, religiosity or lack thereof still impacts the political ideologies of many young citizens.

It is suspected that, as a whole, Millennials will have more liberal mindsets than older Americans towards homosexuality, abortion, the environment, and the size of government. Nevertheless, it is predicted that Millennials with strong religious affiliations will have similar conservative views to their older counterparts, especially towards abortion. Attitudes on the environment and size of the government under the umbrella of religiosity have not been explored thoroughly, so that will be another addition to the literature that this thesis will make.

Methodology

The dataset used in this study is called the General Social Survey: 2012. It was selected because of its comprehensive nature and timeliness.

Bivariate correlations were used to compare all variables with each other to see if a relationship existed between the two. This was implemented to form a foundation for the rest of the research and to give a general overview of how certain factors such as age and education might influence opinions on the various dependent variables. Ordered probits were then used as a means of analysis in order to determine the relationship between the dependent variables and a variety of independent variables. This form of testing was used because it is an appropriate causal model for ordinal dependent variables. It is an ordinal variable with four to six categories.

To measure religious intensity, an ordinal variable was used with values ranging from 1: very strong to 4: no religion. This variable was recoded into RELBIG from the original variable

of RELITEN. Age is analyzed on scale from 18 to 80 and over. Gender is an ordinal variable coded 1 for male and 2 for female. Income is also measured on a scale from less than \$1,000 to \$25,000, with most participants falling into the latter category. To measure opinion on the environment, an ordinal variable was used with values ranging from 1: too much is being done to protect or improve the environment to 3: too little is being done. This variable was also re-coded into ENVIRBIG with increased support for the environment being associated with higher numbers. Viewpoints on abortion were measured using an ordinal variable with values ranging from 0: no, it is not ok for a woman to have an abortion for any reason to 1: yes, it is ok. This variable was titled ABORTALL, which was recoded from ABANY. Opinions on homosexuality were measured from 1: it is always wrong to 4: it is always ok. Views on the government were measured using an ordinal variable named HELPNOT ranging from 1: the government should do more to help the American people to 5: the government does too much to help the American people. Lastly, the variable YRINTERACT was created as an interaction term multiplying the effects of age (a continuous variable) against the effects of religious affiliation because it is assumed that as age increases, so does religious affiliation. Thus higher values of YRINTERACT denote older and more religious respondents.

Results

Table 1: Correlation of Age, Education Level, Gender, Income, and Religious Affiliation

	Age	Highest Year of School Completed	Gender	Total Family Income	Strength of Affiliation	Abortion if Woman Wants for Any reason	Homosexuality
Age	1	-.049*	.046	.026	-.171*	.070*	-.171*
Highest Year of School Completed	-.049*	1	-.053*	-.119*	.045*	-	-
Gender	.046*	-.053*	1	.013	-.037	-	-
Total Family Income	.026	-.119*	.013	1	-.015	-	-
Strength of Affiliation	-.171*	.045*	-.037	-.015	1	-	-

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

Age and Homosexuality

This hypothesis was tested in order to determine whether this dataset aligned with much of the literature that claims young Americans are much more liberal on the matter of homosexuality than older Americans. This was done using a simple bivariate correlation with the variables AGE and HOMOSEX (Table 1). The resulting coefficient was -.170 with a significance level of .01, which means that there is a one percent chance these results came from random variation. The coefficient can be interpreted to mean as age increases, opinions of homosexuality decrease. Remember that HOMOSEX is coded with 1 equaling “wrong” and 4 equaling “not wrong.” The results of this simple test would agree with much of the literature, that younger Americans do have more liberal, accepting views of homosexuality than older Americans. However, when a causal model controlling for other possible variables is used

(Table 2), it was discovered that even though the correlations were statistically significant, once education was controlled for, it became clear that it was a selection effect. Younger Americans are generally more educated, and more educated Americans are more accepting of homosexuality.

Age and Abortion

This hypothesis was created as a further test to determine the impact of age on a respondent's view of abortion. Some recent research has claimed that young Americans hold very similar views on the subject to those of older Americans. A bivariate correlation including the variables of age and ABANY produced a coefficient of .070 and a significance of .012 meaning that there is a 1.2 percent chance the results came from random variation (Table 1). While the coefficient is positive, which would indicate that as age increases, so does a conservative view of abortion, it is a very small coefficient. Being as close to zero as the resulting coefficient is, the relationship between age and opinion on abortion is close to nonexistent. This would support the recent literature that states young Americans and old Americans hold intriguingly similar views on this issue.

Table 2: Effect of Religious Affiliation and Age on Key Issue Positions

Dependent Variables (Standard Error)				
	Support for the environment	Support for government's involvement	Support for abortion	Support for homosexuality
Independent Variables				
Age	-.014* (.006)	.003 (.004)	.009 (.006)	-.008 (.005)
Religious affiliation	-.216* (.094)	-.001 (.071)	-.108 (.095)	-.259* (.084)
YRINTERACT	.003 (.002)	.0007 (.001)	-.004 (.002)	-.0005 (.002)
Gender	-.326 (.077)	-.138* (.058)	.123 (.074)	.028 (.066)
Education level	-.001 (.009)	.025* (.009)	.052 (.009)	.085 (.011)
Income	-.002 (.002)	.0009 (.001)	-.0002* (.002)	.00006* (.002)
	Prob > chi2 = .0005 n = 968	Prob > chi2 = .0009 n = 1331	Prob > chi2 = .0000 n = 1243	Prob > chi2 = .0000 n = 1284

* p<.05

Youth and Religious Affiliation

The first hypothesis states that young Americans are less religious than older Americans. This hypothesis is important to analyze in order to lay an initial foundation for the rest of the study. Further hypotheses will test whether certain opinions on social issues are influenced by age and religiosity, so it is also important to measure their influence on each other.

Two variables exist within the dataset pertaining to religiosity, so bivariate correlations were run with each compared to age to see if the results were similar. Indeed, when age was correlated with strength of affiliation, there was a -.171 coefficient along with a .000 p value (Table 1). A negative coefficient here states that as age increases, religious affiliation increases and become stronger.

Another correlation was run with a variable measuring whether the respondent considered himself or herself a religious person. Similar results were found with a coefficient of $-.174$ and a p value of $.000$, meaning that as age increases, a person will consider himself or herself more religious.

Nevertheless, as addressed above, most literature has found that religious affiliation is what has changed most recently among younger Americans. “Millennials are significantly more unaffiliated than members of Generation X were at a comparable point in their life cycle and twice as unaffiliated as Baby Boomers were as young adults” (“Religion” 2010). There is a growing number of those who may consider themselves religious but do not associate with a particular faith. Strength of religious affiliation was chosen for the rest of the study because affiliation would more accurately measure the strength or weakness of religiosity amongst the public.

Youth, Religiosity, and the Environment

This hypothesis states that young Americans with a strong religious affiliation will have more liberal views on the environment than older Americans who consider themselves to be religious. Unfortunately, testing this statement was not as simple or straightforward as the previous one. This will be the first instance in which an ordered probit is used.

It is hypothesized that as age and religiosity increase, a participant is more likely to think too much is being done to improve and protect the environment. When the ordered probit was run, ENVIRBIG was entered as the dependent variable with age, religious affiliation, YRINTERACT, gender, income, and education levels. The last three variables were entered into the ordered probit in order to control for other possible effects on the dependent variable. As

evidenced in the overall model fit chart (see table 2), the overall ordered probit had a $\text{prob} > \chi^2$ value of .0005 meaning that it is significant. However, the only two independent variables that had a p value of .05 or lower were age and religious affiliation. Both produced negative coefficients. Therefore, as age increases, more are likely to think that too much is being done to improve and protect the environment. Likewise, the stronger the religious affiliation, the more one is likely to think that too much being done to improve and protect the environment.

Further analysis was done on those variables to assess the magnitude of impact on the dependent variable by varying their values from -1 to +1 standard deviation while holding all other variables at their means. The mean for age is 48 with the standard deviation being 18. Holding all other variables at their mean, what is the change in probability that a respondent will be most supportive of the viewpoint that too much is being done to improve and protect the environment as age varies from age 30 (-1 sd) to age 66 (+1 sd) standard deviation? At age 66, the mean comes out to be .164. At age 30, the mean comes out to be .069. These numbers can be interpreted to mean that an older person is about 10% more likely to support the viewpoint that too much is being done to improve and protect the environment.

The same was done with religious affiliation because it also showed to be significant in the initial ordered probit. RELBIG's mean is valued at 2.86 and its standard deviation is 1.124. At +1 standard deviation, religious affiliation is 1.748 and the probability of being most supportive of the view that too much is being done to protect and improve the environment is .0712. At -1 standard deviation, religious affiliation is 3.984 and probability of being most supportive of a conservative view on the environment is .161. These numbers mean that as the religious affiliation of a respondent becomes stronger, he or she is about 9% more likely to support the viewpoint that too much is being done to improve or protect the environment.

Unfortunately, the interaction variable was not significant in this analysis meaning this specific variation of the hypothesis is not supported by the data. It is supported that younger Americans have more liberal views on the environment and so do those that have a weaker religious affiliation. However, because the interaction term that accounted for both age and religious affiliation was insignificant, it cannot be demonstrated that young religious Americans have more liberal views on the environment.

Youth, Religious Affiliation, and Homosexuality

This hypothesis focuses on the matter of homosexuality and states that young Americans with a weak religious affiliation will have more liberal views on homosexuality than others. The dependent variable used in this instance is HOMOSEX. The same independent variables will be used as in the previous hypothesis. Again, an ordered probit will be the means of analysis because the dependent variable is of a categorical nature and not a real number.

The overall model using this dependent variable produced a prob $>$ chi2 of .0000, which means the results are significant and valid. Once again, the results can be observed in the overall model fit chart (Table 2), however, only RELBIG and EDUC turned out to be significant in this test. RELBIG's coefficient was negative meaning that as religious affiliation grows stronger, opinion of homosexuality decreases and aligns more closely with "always wrong." EDUC's coefficient was positive, which can be interpreted as the more education one has, the higher one's opinion will be of homosexuality equating to "wrong only sometimes" or "not wrong at all."

Similar to the previous hypothesis, both independent variables that tested significantly for having an impact on opinions of homosexuality will be analyzed further. What is the probability

of a respondent believing that homosexuality is always wrong while adjusting RELBIG from +1 and -1 standard deviation and holding all other variables at their means. The mean for RELBIG is 2.86, and the standard deviation is 1.124. While holding all other variables at their mean, when RELBIG was -1 standard deviation, the mean was .321. When RELBIG was +1 standard deviation, the mean was .544. As might be expected, the change in means signifies that as strength of affiliation increases, a respondent is about 20% more likely to hold the viewpoint that homosexuality is always wrong as opposed to someone of weaker religious affiliation.

Level of education was also of significant impact in this ordered probit. The mean of the EDUC variable is 13.57. The standard deviation is 3.66. Again the question will be, holding all other variables at their means, what is the probability that a respondent will be most supportive of the belief that homosexuality is always wrong as we vary EDUC from -1 to +1 standard deviation. With EDUC at -1 standard deviation of 9.91, the mean is .553. With EDUC at +1 standard deviation of 17.23, the mean is .311. Analysis says that a more educated respondent will be 24% more likely to agree that homosexuality is wrong only sometimes or not wrong at all.

Unfortunately, neither YRINTERACT nor AGE produced significant results, and thus did not support the hypothesis. Nevertheless, both religious affiliation and education were found to have a relationship with views of homosexuality.

Youth, Religiosity, and the Government

This hypothesis reads that young Americans of weak religious affiliation have more liberal views on the role of government than other Americans. In this instance, holding liberal views on the government would mean that an individual believes the federal government should

do more to help the American people and become more involved helping the public meet its needs.

The dependent variable used to test this statement is HELPNOT, which measures respondents' answers to the question, "Some people think that the government in Washington is trying to do too many things that should be left to individuals and private businesses. Others disagree and think that the government should do even more to solve our country's problems. Still others have opinions somewhere in between. Where would you place yourself on this scale?" The scale reads 1 = government should do more, 3 = agree with both, and 5 = government is doing too much.

Just like the other hypotheses, this one requires an ordered probit because of the variables' categorical nature. Table 2 states that the prob > chi2 weighed in at .0009 meaning that the ordered probit itself is significant. Interestingly, gender and education level were the only significant independent variables. GENDER1 had a coefficient of -.138 and standard error of .058, and EDUC had a coefficient of .025 with a standard error of .009. Since GENDER1 is coded 1 for males and 2 for females, the results here mean that females are more likely to support the government doing more to meet the needs of the people and males are more likely to support the opposite. In terms of education, the coefficient of .025 would signify that as education level increases, one is more likely to think the government does too much.

These two independent variables will be adjusted +1 and -1 standard deviation while all other variables are held at their means to analyze what the change in probability is that a respondent will be supportive of the view that the government does too much. Although GENDER1 has a mean and standard deviation, the variable was analyzed as being either male or female for ease of interpretation. When running the model with a male variable, the mean was

.192. With a female variable, the mean was .162. The difference in means is only .03, which is relatively negligent. It can thus be interpreted to mean that while men are slightly more likely to agree with the viewpoint that the government does too much, there is very little difference between the sexes.

Education level was the other significant variable influencing opinion on the government. It holds a mean of 13.57 and a standard deviation of 3.66. When EDUC is -1 standard deviation at 9.91 (equivalent of a high school dropout), the mean is .159. When the standard deviation is +1 at 17.23 (equivalent to some graduate school), the mean is .198. Much like GENDER1, the difference between means is very small at .04 and cannot really be considered as a factor in this model. So unlike the initial coefficients indicated, while there is a small increase in probability that a respondent with a higher level of education will support the view that the government does too much, the probability is not much higher than a respondent of less education.

Just like the other tests, the interaction term YRINTERACT did not test significantly. Unfortunately, neither did AGE. Therefore, it cannot be demonstrated that a young non-religious American holds different viewpoints on the government than an older American. While the mean differences between GENDER1 and EDUC are not substantial enough to discuss, it is interesting to note that gender differences and educational level have very little impact on this issue.

Youth, Religious Affiliation, and Abortion

The last hypothesis states that young Americans of strong religious affiliation will have similar views on abortion to young Americans of weak religious affiliation. An ordered probit was used to test this hypothesis as well. The dependent variable used was ABANY, which asked

respondents if an abortion was acceptable if the woman wanted one for any reason. For ease of interpretation, this variable was recoded as ABORTALL so as to avoid potentially confusing coefficients. This new variable is coded as 0 = no and 1 = yes. The initial model run produced a $\text{prob} > \chi^2$ of .0000 meaning that it is significant.

The only variable to show significance was education level, which had a coefficient of .052 and a standard error of .009. Because it is positive, the relationship implied is that as a respondent's education level increases, he or she is more likely to think that a woman having an abortion for any reason is acceptable. By adjusting this variable's standard deviation, the probability of a respondent believing that a woman having an abortion for any reason is wrong can be determined.

EDUC has a mean of 13.57 and a standard deviation of 3.66. Holding all other variables at their means, when EDUC is -1 standard deviation at 9.91, the mean is .629. When EDUC is +1 standard deviation at 17.23, the mean is .479. It implies that a respondent at an educational level similar to the +1 standard deviation value will be about 15% more likely to think that a woman having an abortion for any reason is acceptable compared to a respondent at an education level similar to the -1 standard deviation value.

Interestingly, age, religious affiliation, and YRINTERACT were not significant enough to consider as possible influencing factors on the opinion of abortion. So, there is no support for this hypothesis. However, it was determined that educational level is an influencing factor when it comes to opinions on abortion, those with more education having more liberal views on the matter than those with less.

Discussion

Initially, because several of the hypotheses included the terms such as “young non-religious Americans” or “older religious Americans,” an interaction term was created to assess the effects of a combination of age and religiosity. Creating such a term also accounted for the effect these variables would independently have on the dependent variables. As was done in the beginning, these two variables were correlated and a relationship was discovered in that as age increases, so does strength of religious affiliation. Having such a relationship exist is another reason for creating the interaction term, YRINTERACT. Unfortunately, YRINTERACT did not test significantly at the .05 level in any of the ordered probits, so could not be considered in further analysis. It was found that older Americans held a certain view or more religious Americans held another view, but not an older religious American.

Likewise, although age and religious affiliation were significant factors in some of the hypotheses, they did not have nearly the same effect as was initially thought. Both substantially impacted opinions on the environment, which is curious because religiosity is not often called into question in environmental debates. Although, in this instance, the mean difference in religious affiliation was so slight, it can hardly be considered. The fact that older people were more likely to agree with the viewpoint that too much is being done to protect and improve the environment could simply be a reflection on generational priorities. Older Americans, sixty-six and older, are probably not used to environmental issues being of national or international importance and probably do not see the issue as of great consequence in comparison to other matters.

Religious affiliation also proved significant in its impact on opinions of homosexuality. The effect was as predicted, that as strength of affiliation increases, one is more likely to think

that homosexuality is always wrong. This is seen constantly in the debate on gay marriage, adoption rights, and homosexuality as a practice. The most common opposition to homosexuality is that it goes against the traditional marriage as described in the Bible. It is interesting to note that although this is not a surprising finding, it cannot be assumed that because a respondent claimed strong religious affiliation, that it was an affiliation to Christianity or any belief system that would take offense to homosexuality. Perhaps, regardless of the faith, one with a strong religious tie will have more conservative views on the topic than those that claim no religious affiliation.

One variable that was not hypothesized about that proved to impact several theories was educational level. Although it proved significant as a factor in opinions on government actions, the change in probability was not enough to take it into deep consideration. It also influenced opinions on abortion and homosexuality, showing that the higher the level of education of a respondent, the more likely he or she was to have a more liberal view. It could be in some cases, that changed opinions on certain issues, which are often attributed to youth, could be attributed to education levels as the youth tend to have more education. These results are fitting with much of the literature that exists in regards to political orientation and outside variables. Those with higher education, especially college and graduate degrees, are generally more liberal than those with high school or lower level educations. With more education, comes more information. It can be assumed that said information will lead to open-mindedness or at least an awareness of various sides to the same issue.

In more simple analyses, it was found that as age increases, opinions on homosexuality are likely to become more conservative. As is commonly perceived, the movement for gay rights and gay marriage has only gained significant momentum within the last decade or so,

meaning that older Americans may not be used to the idea or have instilled values in contradiction with homosexuality. Younger Americans are more aware of the movement and accustomed to the issues and debates at stake. As gay marriage is being approved state-by-state, younger people will be less likely to view it as abnormal or wrong.

Lastly, it is mentioned in some recent research that while some may think younger Americans have much more liberal views on abortion than older Americans, the views have actually not changed very much throughout the generations. While the results showed a slight relationship between age and views on whether a woman should be able to have an abortion for any reason, the coefficient was too close to zero to be of real import. Reasons behind this lack of change may simply be the long-standing existence of the abortion debate. Older Americans would have strong opinions on this issue from the women's movements in the 1960's and the *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1972. Recent elections have focused on women's reproductive rights, bringing younger Americans into the conversation as well. Since there has been little progress and few laws made concerning abortion within the past few decades, sentiments are not likely to change. Unlike the gay rights movement, which has gained momentum and has achieved great feats, the abortion debate has been at a standstill for years and will likely continue in the same manner.

Limitations

The failure of the YRINTERACT term to produce any significant results also failed to produce support for those hypotheses in which it was used. The number of dependent variables that were able to be used was restricted because the General Social Survey: 1972 - 2012 did not ask the same questions in all years, leaving some categories blank in 2012, which was the year

tested in all hypotheses. For example, HOMOCHNG was a variable which asked respondents whether they thought homosexuality was inherent in a person or a lifestyle choice. This issue is raised quite often in the gay rights movement and needs to be analyzed with timely statistics to get a better grasp on how that viewpoint may be changing with younger generations. Likewise, a two abortion variables that measured whether respondents thought it should be legal if the mother's health is endangered or whether it should be legal at all returned no results when tested in the year 2012. Both are vital questions that need to be included to completely understand the opinions on abortion and their potential to change.

Dealing with such a large dataset makes it difficult to narrow down the results and control for certain variables at certain times. Hopefully future analyses can use similar questions within a recent timeframe to capture the impact of factors such as religious affiliation and age on various ideologies.

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