

Religion continues to impact voter decision, study finds

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Church attendance in western democracies has declined; yet, a new University of Missouri study shows religious beliefs still influence people at the polls.

Chris Raymond, a graduate instructor of political science in the MU College of Arts and Science, said that many political experts consider voters around the world as "floating without party loyalties," and that [religion](#) does not influence voters. Raymond's new study says religion still has a large impact on how people vote and helps define many of the platforms represented in the party system.

In the study, Raymond compared [church attendance](#) to other categories such as income, union membership and education and found that religion still matters for a sizable number of voters. By comparing the findings of the United Kingdom, the United States and Germany, Raymond discovered that even as the countries had different degrees of religious attendance, the [religious beliefs](#) still had a high level of influence.

The three countries were selected because they each represented a different trend regarding religious voting, or voting based on religious beliefs: people in Germany are perceived to be moving away from religious voting; the United States is experiencing a rise in religious voting; and religious voting in the United Kingdom has held steady. When compared to the 1960s – an era during which experts say voting behaviors began to change – religious voting has shown an "enormous degree of persistence," Raymond said.

"The literature indicated that these countries had become more secular, and scholars have said that religious voting 'no longer mattered,' but this study shows that is not the case," Raymond said. "Regardless of the trends, religiosity remains on par with class issues as far as why people vote. In fact, I argue that religion is No. 2 to social status."

Raymond explains that each country currently has specific political issues that may encourage voting affiliated with religious beliefs. He cites abortion rights in the [United States](#), state funding of churches in the [United Kingdom](#) and issues related to Muslim integration in Germany as primary examples. These issues and their alignment to strong religious beliefs impacts voter turnout, he said. Religious voting also tends to favor conservative parties, because those social values tend to correspond with traditional conservative political values.

"It's important to understand that religion isn't the only factor, but an important one," Raymond said. "This makes sense because as a person with a vote, my religion and my class are how I perceive the world."

The results were published in the journal *Electoral Studies*.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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