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The Impact of Religion on Party Identification in the Americas

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Executive Summary. This *Insights* report asks whether religion is related to the extent to which citizens across the Americas identify with political parties. It does so by examining three components of religious identification: *belonging*, measured by denominational affiliation; *believing*, measured by the importance of religion in one's life; and *behaving*, measured by attendance at church activities. Results show that members of the main religious groups are more likely to identify with political parties than are religious non-identifiers, but there are no significant differences between denominations. Moreover, even after taking religious affiliation into account, *believing* and *behaving* have independent effects on party identification. This indicates that religion affects politics in the Americas by helping citizens engage with party politics.

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Does religion predict whether citizens in the Americas identify with political parties? This question is not trivial given that the region contains one of the highest percentages of Catholic populations around the world, a strong Catholic Church organization, and also high rates of Church attendance among Protestant and Evangelical groups (Hagopian 2009). These factors are politically relevant, especially since several religious divisions are represented in some degree by political parties throughout the Americas (Lipset and Rokkan 1967[1990]; Mainwaring and Scully 2003).

The AmericasBarometer surveys, carried out by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP)¹, involved face-to-face interviews in 26 nations in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as web surveys in the United States and Canada. This yields a total of 43,990 probabilistically selected respondents.² All respondents were asked the following question:

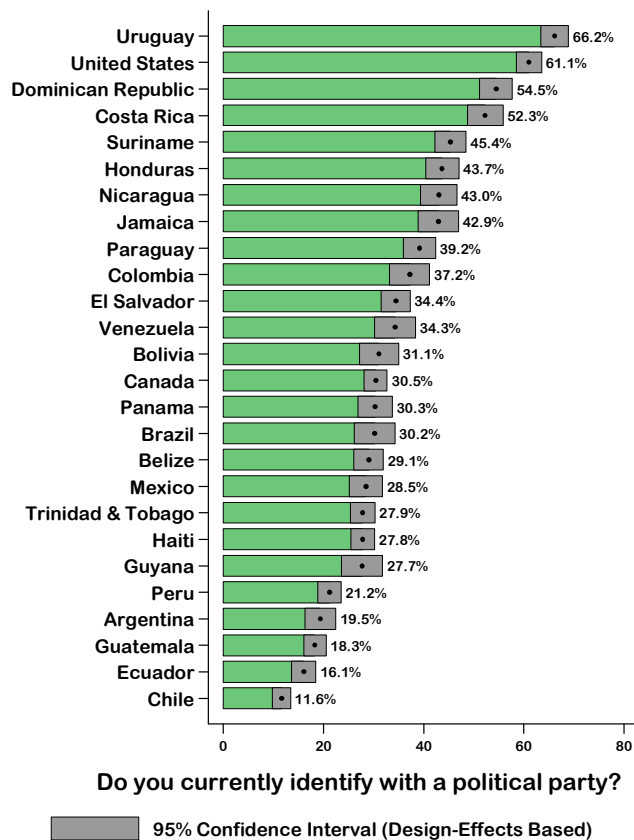
VB10. “Do you currently identify with a political party?”

Responses were bivariate, and recoded here so that ‘0’ indicates “No” and ‘1’ indicates “Yes.”³

Figure 1 shows national percentages for the 26 countries analyzed. Uruguay is the country with the highest level of partisanship at 66.2%, while the average in the Americas is 33.1%. Twelve countries exceed this average, whereas five countries do not even reach 22%: Peru, Argentina, Guatemala, Ecuador, and Chile. In

sum, Figure 1 suggests that there is a great deal of variance in party identification across the Americas.

Figure 1. Party Identification in the Americas, 2010



Source: AmericasBarometer by LAPOP

How Does Religion Relate to Party Identification?

In this *Insights* report, I assess the religious bases of party identification in the Americas, considering three major components of religion: *belonging*, *believing*, and *behaving* (Layman 2001: 55). *Belonging* refers to religious group membership, *believing* speaks to the theological commitment or substantive knowledge in which

¹ Prior issues in the *Insights* series can be found at: <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/studiesandpublications>
The data on which they are based can be found at <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/datasets>

² Funding for the 2010 round mainly came from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Important sources of support were also the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and Vanderbilt University.

³ The non-response rate across the 26 countries was 2.31%.

people's faith lies, and *behaving* to concrete expressions of religious commitment.

Party identification has been defined as an "individual's affective orientation" to a political party (Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes 1960: 121). While the degree to which this attachment is influenced by factors aside from family socialization is debated, some scholars claim that non-partisan loyalties such as membership in religious groups increase identification with political groups. Examples include Catholics' identification with the Democratic Party in the United States and diverse religious denominations' identification with a variety of political parties across the Americas (Herberg 1955; Converse 1966; Magaloni and Moreno 2003; DeSipio 2007).

Nevertheless, *belonging* is not the only religious measure that explains political behavior; *believing* and *behaving* also explain identification with parties. Regarding *believing*, sacred texts and diverse theological messages received from religious leaders may shape partisanship when religious messages are related to current policy debates (Layman 1997). Regarding *behaving*, religious commitment, attendance of religious services, and religious group involvement also may increase party identification. Religious attendance implies that parishioners meet each other on regular basis, providing opportunities for political deliberation. This could lead to engagement in politics (Converse 1966; Wald, Owen and Hill 1988; Huckfeldt, Plutzer and Sprague 1993; Kaufmann 2004).

In sum, *belonging* has been found to be an important predictor of political behavior, and there are reasons to consider that *believing* and *behaving* are also relevant to the question of identification with political parties (Layman 1997). In short, and not surprisingly, party identification "is strongly correlated with religion" (Fiorina 1981: 254), since religion represents a way to interpret the world.

Measuring Religion and Other Determinants of Partisanship

I tap *belonging* by considering affiliation with four main groups: Catholics, Mainline Protestants, Evangelicals and other religions.⁴ In addition, I measure *believing* using a question regarding the importance of religion in one's life (Layman 2001). Finally, to tap *behaving*, I include attendance of religious meetings such as those sponsored by religious societies and confraternities.⁵

In addition, I estimate an empirical model using cognitive and demographic variables. Regarding cognitive measures, some scholars argue that sophisticated citizens are less likely to be partisans, whereas their less educated fellow citizens tend to rely more on partisanship (Converse 1966; Huber, Kernell and Leoni 2005). Nevertheless, available evidence in Latin America suggests that sophistication, as measured by news media consumption, is a positive predictor of party identification (Pérez-Liñán 2002; Morgan 2007). Finally, strong identification with political and economic ideologies may increase partisanship given that differences between political parties are likely to matter more for those who are more extreme ideologically.⁶

Parishioners meet each other on regular basis, providing opportunities for political deliberation. This could lead to engagement in politics.

⁴ In the 26 countries of this study, 58.8% are Catholic, 8.28% Protestants, and 18.71% Evangelicals. The reference category is comprised of people who do not profess any religion (9.02%). The other religions category includes Latter Day Saints (1.03%), Jehovah's Witnesses (0.30%), Jews (0.19%), Eastern (3.14%), and Native religions (0.53%). For additional details regarding the classification of religious denominations, please see Number 29 of the *Insights Series*.

⁵ In the US and Canada, respondents were not asked whether they attended religious services. The analysis here does not include this variable in order to keep these two countries in the equation. However, prior models considering only Latin America and the Caribbean suggest that weekly and monthly attendance increase partisanship.

⁶ Political ideological intensity is measured using a 10-point scale from left to right (or from liberal to conservative) using a folded variable, in which I calculated the absolute value of the median point of scale (5.5) minus the self-reported placement, i.e. 5.5-1=4.5 and 5.5-10=4.5. For 2 and 9

Regarding demographic factors, variables explaining party identification include gender, since women may be less partisan due to fewer socialization opportunities (Kaufmann 2004); wealth; age, since younger voters are still developing partisanship (Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes 1960); and level of education.⁷

The Religious Bases of Party Identification

In order to test the relationship between religious variables and party identification in 24 countries, I use a logistic regression at the individual level with country fixed effects, while adjusting for the complex survey sample design.⁸ The independent variables of interest are the importance of religion in one's life, attendance of religious meetings, and belonging to three major religious denominations across the Americas: Catholics, Protestants, and Evangelicals.

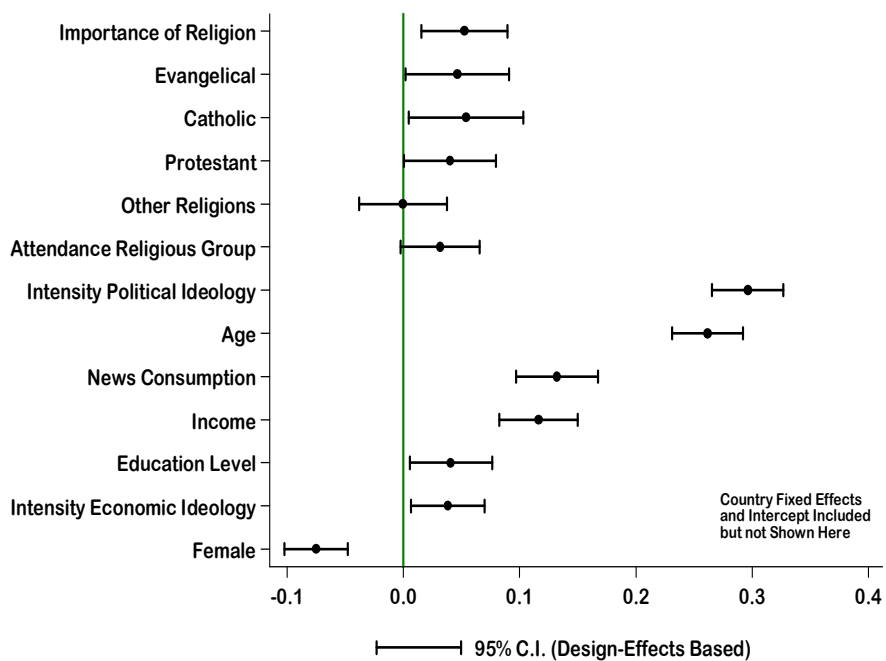
The significance of the variables in the model is graphically represented in Figure 2 (fixed country effects and intercept are excluded from the graph, but available in the report appendix).

ideological intensity is 3.5, for 3 and 8 it is 2.5, for 4 and 7 it is 1.5, and for 5 and 6 it is 0.5. Regarding intensity of economic ideology, I use nationalization versus privatization of the most important industries and enterprises of the country. The original scale runs from 1 to 7 and it was folded using 4 as median point.

⁷ This model does not include size of the place of residence or peasant status in order to keep Canada and the US in the equation. However, prior models only considering Latin America and the Caribbean suggest that the impact of rural areas and peasants on partisanship is positive.

⁸ This model and all the additional models mentioned in this *Insights* report exclude Haiti and Chile in order to prevent unexpected effects from earthquakes that occurred on January 12 and February 27, respectively, before the AmericasBarometer surveys were conducted.

Figure 2. Religious Bases of Party Identification in the Americas, 2010



Source: 2010 AmericasBarometer by LAPOP; 24 countries
26,866 respondents; F=57.8; Goodness-of-fit (McFadden)=0.09

Statistical significance is captured by a confidence interval that does not overlap the vertical "0" line (at 0.05 or better). The dot represents the predicted impact of each variable. When it falls to the right of the vertical "0" line, it implies a positive relationship; when it falls to the left, it indicates a negative contribution.

In general, religious factors are positively related to partisanship. These factors include *belonging*, measured using three main religious groups; *believing*, measured using the importance of religion; and *behaving*, measured using attendance of religious groups.

The substantive effect of *belonging* alone is not large. However, it is important to recognize not only that religious denominations are positively related to party identification as expected, but also that *believing* and *behaving* positively predict partisanship across religious denominations.

For example, estimating the predicted probabilities from the logistic model, among Catholics with lower levels of attendance and for whom religion is less important, the probability of identifying with a political party is around 32%. Among Catholics with higher levels of attendance and for whom religion is more important, the probability of identifying with a political party is 38%. This means that the combination of the importance of religion and attendance in church groups increases party identification among Catholics by 6 percentage points.

Among Evangelicals, varying church group attendance and the importance of religion, the predicted probabilities range from 33% to 39%. Similarly, for Protestants the predicted probabilities range from 33% to 39%. In sum, lower levels of attendance of religious groups and lower levels of importance of religion are related to lower levels of partisanship across three main religious denominations.

Finally, the cognitive and demographic variables behave as expected. Intensity of political and economic ideologies, news consumption, age, income, and levels of education have a positive impact on party identification, whereas female gender has a negative impact on partisanship.⁹

Political Implications

This *Insights* report shows that religious *belonging*, *believing*, and *behaving*, measured by membership in religious denominations, the importance of religion in one's life, and religious group involvement, are positive predictors of partisanship in the Americas. It does so using an empirical model which considers for the very

⁹ I ran additional models using country level variables, such as the effective number of political parties (Laakso and Taagepera 1979) and fragmentation of the party-system (Rae and Taylor 1970) in the prior legislative election. However, only the effective number of political parties (N) came close to statistical significance ($p > 0.11$; the relationship is negative).

first time practically all of the Americas. While the analysis is constrained in its ability to demonstrate a causal connection, theory combined with the empirical evidence reported here supports the conclusion that religious affiliation, importance of religion, and religious participation increase partisanship.

High levels of partisanship are usually considered indicators of healthy democracies; however, intense partisanship during contested elections could decrease willingness to accept the final result (Medina, Ugues, Bowler and Hiskey 2010). Thus, party identification is not always a positive indicator of democratic attitudes, and religious activation of partisanship in a "culture war" over moral values could increase social divisions (Layman 1997; Hetherington 2001; Magaloni and Moreno 2003; Hagopian 2009).¹⁰

In sum, an active role of religion could activate partisanship in the Americas. Arguably, religion could also influence the ideological orientation of parishioners' party identifications,

encouraging them to identify with the left or the right wing of the political spectrum. That relationship, however, would be the topic of another *Insights* report. For now, this evidence suggests that religion influences partisanship in the Americas.

Theory and empirical evidence support the conclusion that religious affiliation, importance of religion, and religious participation increase partisanship.

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¹⁰ This model does not include measures related to moral traditionalism, such as attitudes towards gays' political rights and opinions about gay-marriage, in order to keep Canada and the US in the equation, since such questions were not asked in these countries. However, my expectation based on extant literature already discussed is that moral traditionalism would increase party identification.

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Appendix. Party Identification in the Americas, 2010

Independent Variables	Coef.	Std.Err.	t
Importance of Religion	0.05	0.02	2.8
Evangelical	0.05	0.02	2.1
Catholic	0.05	0.02	2.1
Protestant	0.04	0.02	2.0
Other Religions	-0.0005	0.02	-0.02
Attendance to Religious Groups	0.03	0.02	1.8
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Political Ideological Intensity (Left vs Right)	0.30	0.02	18.9
News Consumption	0.13	0.02	7.4
Age	0.26	0.02	16.9
Income	0.12	0.02	6.7
Education	0.04	0.02	2.3
Economic Ideological Intensity (Nationalization vs. Privatization)	0.04	0.02	2.4
Female	-0.08	0.01	-5.4
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Mexico	-0.31	0.02	-14.3
Guatemala	-0.37	0.02	-16.6
El Salvador	-0.25	0.02	-14.1
Honduras	-0.17	0.02	-8.1
Nicaragua	-0.14	0.02	-6.5
Costa Rica	-0.14	0.02	-6.4
Panama	-0.29	0.02	-13.2
Colombia	-0.21	0.02	-9.2
Ecuador	-0.61	0.03	-19.6
Bolivia	-0.34	0.03	-11.0
Peru	-0.38	0.02	-17.8
Paraguay	-0.21	0.02	-9.2
Brazil	-0.33	0.03	-10.5
Venezuela	-0.25	0.03	-10.2
Argentina	-0.33	0.02	-14.5
Dominican Republic	-0.11	0.02	-5.3
Jamaica	-0.20	0.02	-8.3
Guyana	-0.34	0.03	-11.4
Trinidad and Tobago	-0.32	0.02	-14.4
Belize	-0.30	0.02	-13.0
Suriname	-0.20	0.03	-7.6
United States	-0.09	0.02	-4.9
Canada	-0.30	0.02	-17.2
Intercept	-0.61	0.02	-30.8

Source: 2010 Americas Barometer by LAPOP; 24 countries; 26,866 respondents

Goodness of fit (McFadden)= 0.09; F= 57.8; Country of reference: Uruguay.

Coefficients and standard errors were estimated based on variation between 128 primary sampling units via survey logistic regression.