

The Association Between Identification With a Protestant Denomination and Voter Turnout in the 2016 Presidential Election



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Introduction

- Individuals who are religiously affiliated and regularly attend church tend to have higher rates of voter turnout. (Smith 400)
- Many churches providing opportunities for civic engagement via distributing campaign literature, voter guides, and lobbying
- Many religious beliefs intersect with cultural political life, especially on issues important to the Christian Right like abortion and gay marriage (Calfano 333)
- There is wide variation in the political beliefs between different denominations of Protestantism. Some congregations emphasize political involvement more than others by tying religious beliefs to political issues, driving voter turnout. (Beyerlein 235)
- While the association between regular church attendance is well established, particularly among Evangelical Protestants, less is known about the political differences between Fundamentalist and Non-Fundamentalist Protestants. (Zakallah, 2013)

Methods

Sample

- Adult respondents belonging to a Protestant Denomination (n=1025) surveyed by the General Social Survey (GSS) in 2018.
- The GSS is a nationally representative sample of non-institutionalized, English and Spanish speaking adults in the U.S.

Measures

- Fundamentalism was evaluated through current, voluntary personal identification, coded dichotomously ("Do you consider yourself somewhat, very or not Fundamentalist?") "Somewhat" and "very" were aggregated in coding
- Voting behavior was evaluated through voluntary identification ("Do you remember voting in the 2016 Presidential Election between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump?" "Did you vote for Clinton or Trump?")
- Participants were asked for religious identification. Participants were then asked for exact denomination (coded here as Methodist, Episcopalian, Baptist, or Lutheran.)

Research Questions

- Did affiliation with a Protestant denomination influence voter participation in the 2016 Presidential Election?
- How did fundamentalism, regardless of denomination, affect this association?

Results

Univariate

- 25% of respondents identified as Fundamentalist.
- 16.78% of respondents identified as Black, and 72.23% as white. 10.49% were categorized as another race.
- 32.19% of respondents did not vote. Of those that did, 36.23% voted for Clinton, 27.39% voted for Trump, and 4.13% supported another candidate.

Bivariate

- Chi-Square analysis showed that **Fundamentalist Christians were significantly more likely to vote in the 2016 Presidential Election** than non-Fundamentalists. 74.9% of Fundamentalists surveyed voted, compared to 68.6% of non-Fundamentalists, $\chi^2=7.01$, 1df, $p<.05$.

Multivariate

- Non-Fundamentalists experienced significantly lower rates of voter turnout (OR=.33, $p<.05$).
- Respondents' race did not appear to moderate the relationship between denomination and voter participation. Among **Protestant identified individuals, there was no significant relationship between race and voter turnout, after controlling for denomination.**
- Compared to Baptists, Episcopalians (OR=9.8, $p<.001$), Lutherans (OR=2.87, $p<.05$), and Methodists (OR=4.27, $p<.001$) are significantly more likely to vote. This model controls for Fundamentalist identification. (Figure 2)

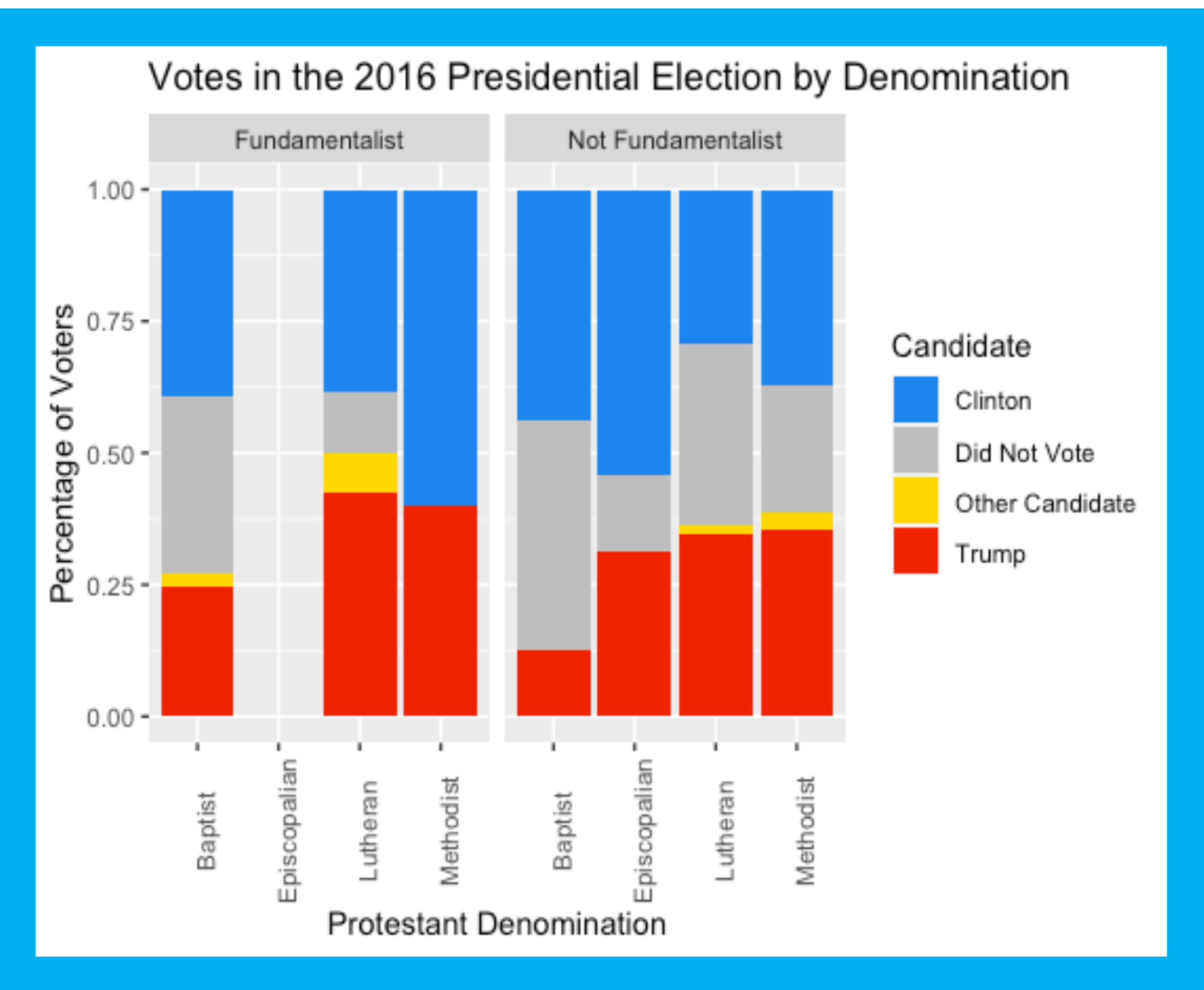


Figure 1. Voter Participation in the 2016 Presidential Election by Protestant Denomination and Identification with Fundamentalism. Source: GSS

Multivariate (cont.)

- As demonstrated in Figure 1, the logistic regression in Figure 2 is complicated slightly by religious differences between Christian Fundamentalism and Episcopalians. **Despite this, probability of voter participation remained comparatively high among Episcopalians.**
- Rates of uncertainty surrounding probability of voter participation remained high (Figure 2), however **significant patterns of voter turnout across denominations emerge.**

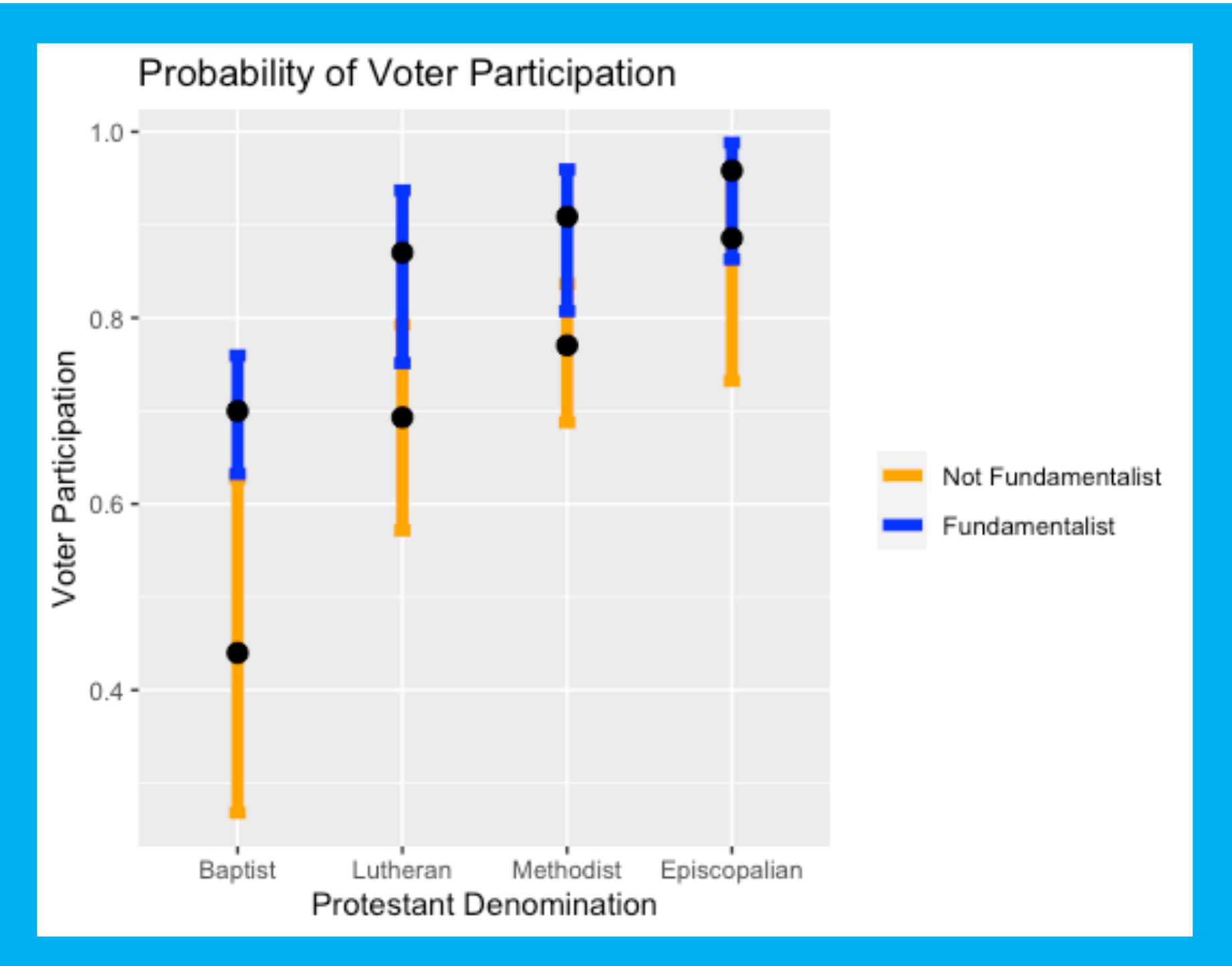


Figure 2: Probability of Voter Participation in the 2016 Presidential Election by Identification with Fundamentalism and Protestant Denomination

Discussion

- Protestant denomination and Fundamentalism appear to influence voter turnout more than support for a specific presidential candidate (see figure 2).
- Voter turnout differences between specific denominations, such as Methodist and Lutheran, as opposed to Methodist and Baptist vary.
- Voter participation rates of Fundamentalist Christians are complicated by identification with one denomination, particularly Baptist Protestants.
- This information might complicate overarching narratives surrounding the Christian Right.
- Further research is needed to determine geographic influences on voter participation, as well as political involvement by various specific churches and religious movements within Protestantism, such as Southern Baptism.
- Further research is needed to determine emerging patterns in voter behavior that span beyond one Presidential election.

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Calfano, R., and Djupe P. (2009) God Talk: Religious Cues and Electoral Support. *Political Research Quarterly*, 62(2) 329-339.
Smith, L., and Walker, L. (2013) Belonging, Believing, and Group Behavior: Religiosity and Voting in American Presidential Elections. *Political Research Quarterly*, 66(2), pp. 399-413, doi:10.1177/1065912912443873.
Zakallah, M. (2003). The Rise of Christian Fundamentalism in the United States and the Challenge to Understand the New America. *Islamic Studies*, 42(3), 437-486. Retrieved May 4, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20837287>