



Religion and Perception: The Association Between Religious Preference and Satisfaction with Government Spending on Law Enforcement



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Introduction

- 63% of Americans believe churches and other houses of worship should keep out of political matters, and 37% believe religious organizations have too much influence over politics (Pew Research Center, 2019).
- While a majority of Americans believe religion should play little part in political decisions, religious identity is a strong predictor of attitudes toward public policies (AP-NORC, 2018).
- While perceptions of religious influence on politics is trending downward, its impact is still significant (Pew Research Center, 2019).
- Between 1971 and 2021, the amount of city budgets spent on law enforcement and policing grew by 19% (Beck, 2024).
- My study aims to fill this gap in the literature by assessing the relationship between religion and federal spending on law enforcement.

Research Questions

- Is religious preference significantly associated with satisfaction with government spending on law enforcement?
- Does this relationship between religious preference and government spending on law enforcement hold independently of political standing?

Methods

Sample

- Respondents (n=3,535) were drawn from the 2021 General Social Survey (GSS), a nationally representative sample of the civilian, non-institutionalized population of the United States.

Measures

- Each respondent self-assessed their religious affiliation via the GSS questionnaire. Three religious groups were recorded: Non-religious (n=1,121), Protestant (n=1,590), and Catholic (n=824). All other responses were omitted from the study due to limited sample size.
- Satisfaction with government spending on law enforcement was self-assessed, where possible responses included: "We are spending too much/too little/about the right amount on law enforcement."

Results

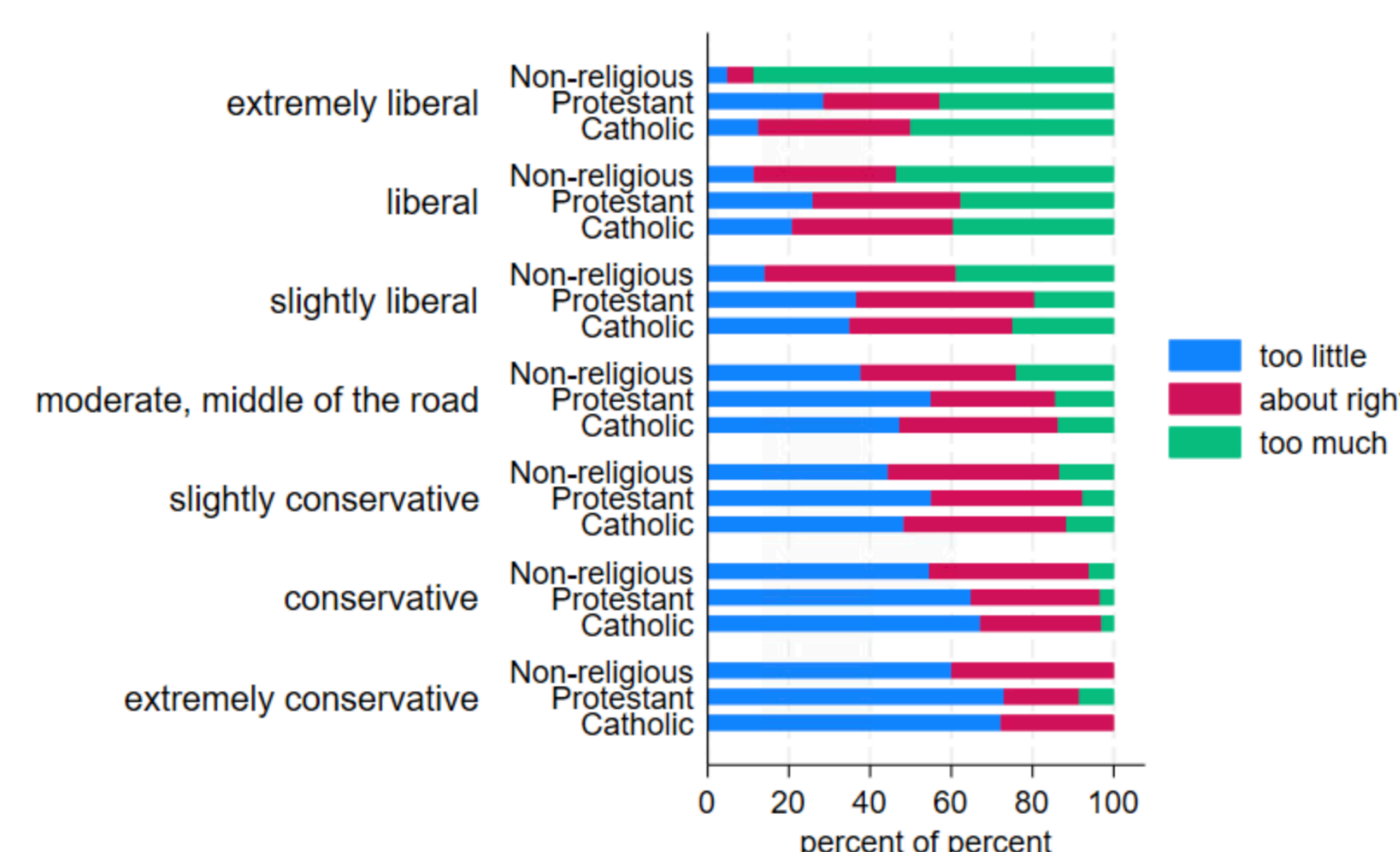
Univariate

- 22.43% responded that we are spending too much, 41.88% responded that we are spending too little, and the remaining 35.69% responded that we are spending about the right amount on law enforcement.

Bivariate

- A Chi-squared test revealed that among American adults, religious preference (collapsed into non-religious, Protestant, and Catholic) and satisfaction with government spending on law enforcement were significantly associated, $\chi^2=39.25$, $p<0.001$. Post hoc comparisons of satisfaction with government spending on space exploration by religious preference revealed a significant association between the non-religious group when compared to the Protestant and Catholic groups ($p<0.001$), but no significant association between the Protestant and Catholic groups ($p>0.05$).

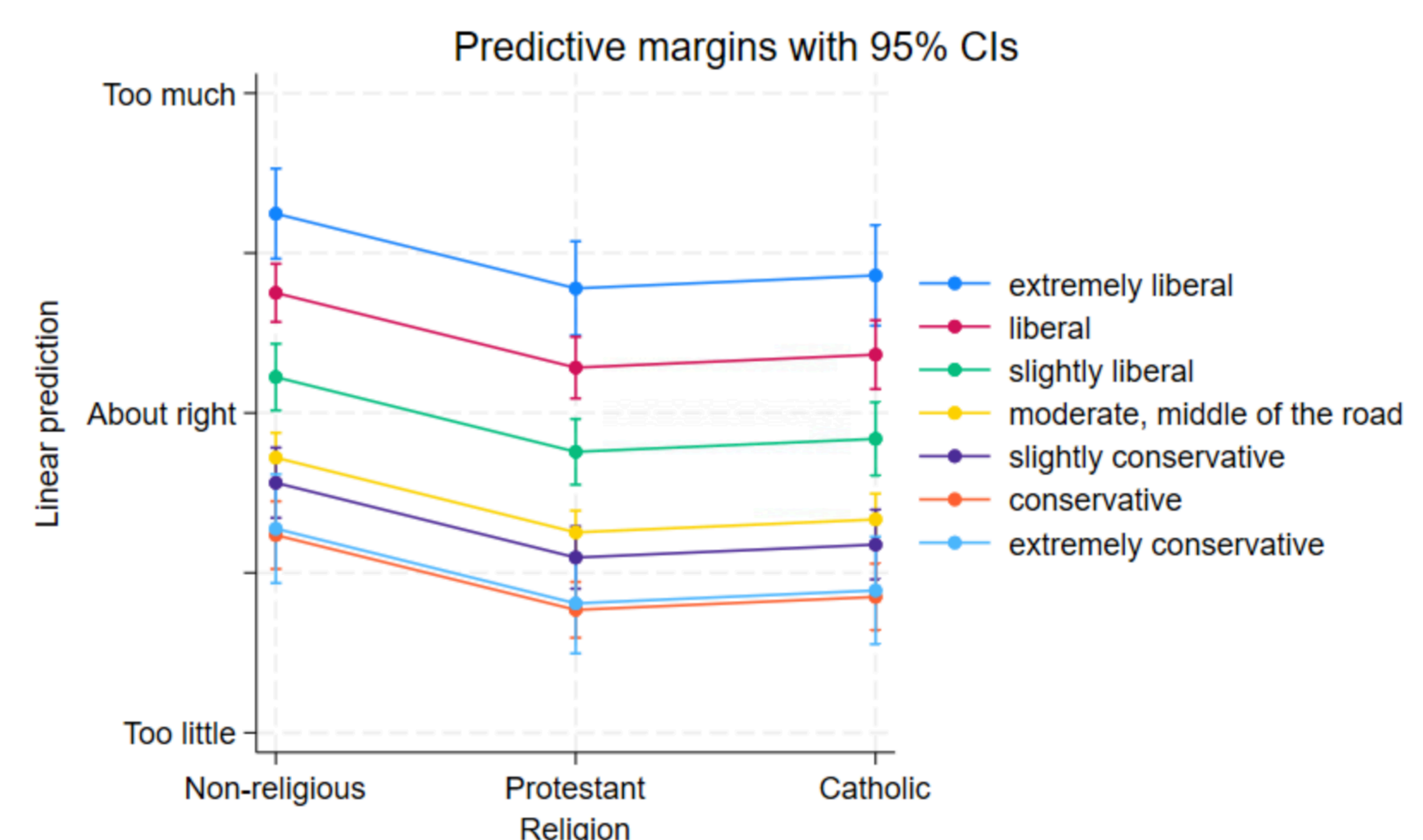
Figure 1. Attitudes toward Government Spending on Law Enforcement, Controlled by Political Views



Multivariate

- After controlling for political views, measured on a 7-point self-assessment scale ranging from "extremely liberal" to "extremely conservative," the multiple linear regression indicates a significant relationship (Figure 1). The relationship holds ($p<0.05$) after controlling for age, a variable associated with law enforcement satisfaction ($p<0.001$).
- Political views is a statistically significant moderator among most respondents in the Protestant group, but fails to meet the significance threshold of $\alpha=0.05$ for American adults of other religious preferences.
- The linear regression plot below (Figure 2) illustrates how religion and political views may help predict whether a respondent believes too much, too little, or about the right amount is being spent on law enforcement.

Figure 2. Linear Prediction of Satisfaction with Law Enforcement Spending on the Basis of Religious Preference and Political Views



Discussion

- Religious preference plays a major role in shaping attitudes toward federal spending on law enforcement.
- Policymakers should consider and address the distinct preferences of religious groups so that political initiatives can better navigate polarized public opinions.
- Limitations include limited data with just three religious groups and the validity of self-assessments, especially on a 3-point scale
- Future research should focus on expanding the scope of the study, incorporating other religions, particularly those better represented by people of color.
- How might these relationships change over time and across varying political climates?