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## Has a New Way of Measuring Religion Uncovered a Religious Left?

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# Has a New Way of Measuring Religion Uncovered a Religious Left?

## INTRODUCTION

Research typically reveals that religious voters tend to be conservative and Republican. However, a new survey question used on the American National Elections Study (ANES) was recently developed to separate individualistic Christians from communitarian Christians by asking whether they try more to help others or to avoid sin. Scholars have used the question to claim that religious communitarians lean to the political left. This analysis shows that the new ANES question is correlated with partisan identification, but should not be interpreted as evidence of a religious left.

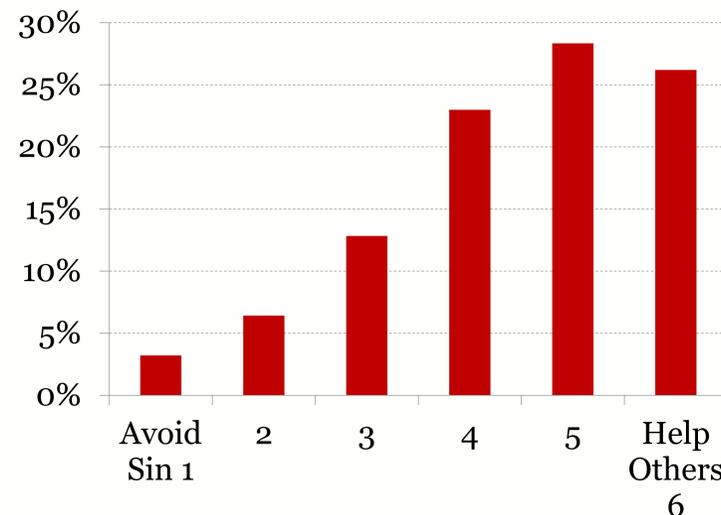
## METHODOLOGY

I replicated the new ANES religiosity question on the Utah Voter Poll, an online representative sample of Utah voters. Using ordinary least squares, I estimate the effect of the question on partisan identification. Then, I employ factor analysis to compare the new ANES question to other measures designed to measure communitarian and individualistic dimensions of religiosity.

## THE NEW ANES QUESTION

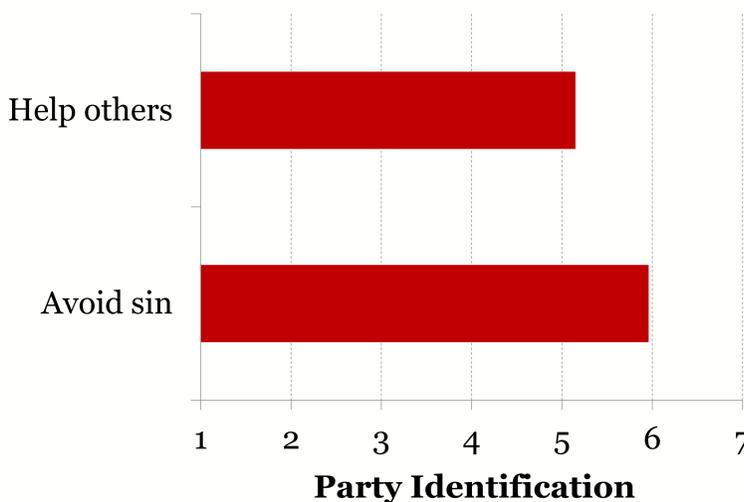
“When you have tried to be a good Christian, which did you try to do more: avoid doing sinful things yourself or help other people?”

### Are Utah’s Christian voters individualists or communitarians?



Source: February 2012 Utah Voter Poll

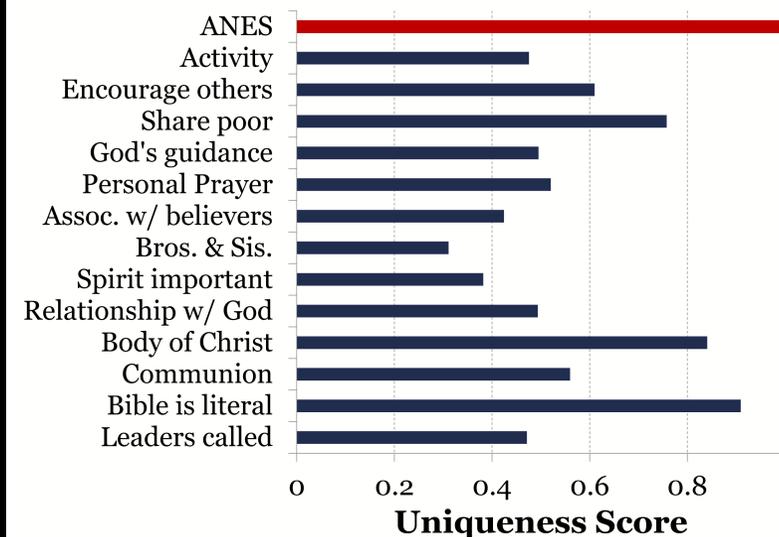
### Are Christians who try more to help others more democratic?



OLS Predicted values displayed while controlling for religion, age, income, education, and gender.  
1: Strong Democrat – 7: Strong Republican.

Source: February 2012 Utah Voter Poll

### Is the new question a religiosity measure?



The values above are rotated uniqueness scores calculated from a factor analysis of religiosity questions. All of the questions load on a single factor with an eigenvalue of 5.8.

Source: February 2012 Utah Voter Poll

## FINDINGS

1. Christian voters in Utah who focus on helping others are about 1 point more Democratic on a 7-point scale than those who emphasize avoiding sin.
2. However, the new ANES question is highly unique from religiosity items. The motivation to help others may not stem from religious commitment.
3. Because the religiosity questions load on a single factor, it appears that individualism and communitarianism are not separate, meaningful dimensions of religiosity.

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