



The Association Between Religion and Optimism About the Future

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Introduction

- Religion is associated with the frequency with which young adults consider the future. This is then related to their outlook on life and their mental health (Desmond & Kraus, 2023).
- Because many belief systems have some element of "god-mediated control" or the presence of god as a guiding or controlling force in life. Religious practitioners tend to have more general optimism if they have a stronger belief in god-mediated control (Krause & Hayward, 2014).
- Sometimes, religions are able to create a feeling of hope within their practitioners through practices and teachings such as meaning making, the concept of god as the final judge, ideas of predestination, or promises of an afterlife (Bennet, 2011)
- While variations of these general associations have been explored, I am focusing on frequency of service attendance as a potential marker for religiosity.

Research Question

- Is there an association between religion and optimism about the future?
- Is the association between religion and optimism stronger when measured by service attendance or religious denomination?

Methods

Sample

- Respondents (n=2,294) were drawn from the 2012 Outlook on Life Survey (OOL).
- The data was collected through a web-based survey
- Respondents are US citizens 18 years of age or older
- The respondents were separated into four groups: African American/Black males, African American/Black females, White/other race males, and White/other race females

Measures

- Service attendance is a categorical variable separated into 6 categories: never, yearly, a few times a year, monthly, weekly, and more than once a week.
- Optimism is a categorical variable which was condensed into two categories with 1 being optimistic and 0 being not optimistic (a combination of respondents who are either pessimistic or neither optimistic nor pessimistic).
- Religion is a categorical variable containing 13 religious denominations.

Results

Univariate

- The breakdown of respondents' service attendance are as follows:
 - 17.99% Never, 14.41% Yearly, 17.90% A Few Times a Year, 10.34% Monthly, 23.61% Weekly, and 15.74% More Than Once a Week
- 54.71% of respondents indicated that when they think about the future, they are optimistic.

Bivariate

- While examining the association between optimism and religious service attendance, a chi-squared test revealed that service attendance frequently was associated with optimism (X-squared = 48.352, df = 5, p-value = 3.01e-09).
- Post hoc comparisons of service attendance and optimism revealed that higher rates of optimism were seen in groups that had higher service attendance in comparison to no service attendance (no attendance compared to those who attended more than once a month, and once yearly attendance compared to those who attended services more than once a week), however in all other comparisons, optimism was statistically similar.
- When examining the association between optimism and religious denomination, a chi-squared test revealed that denomination was also associated with optimism (X-squared = 21.263, df = 12, p-value = 0.04666).

Figure 1. Service Attendance and Optimism

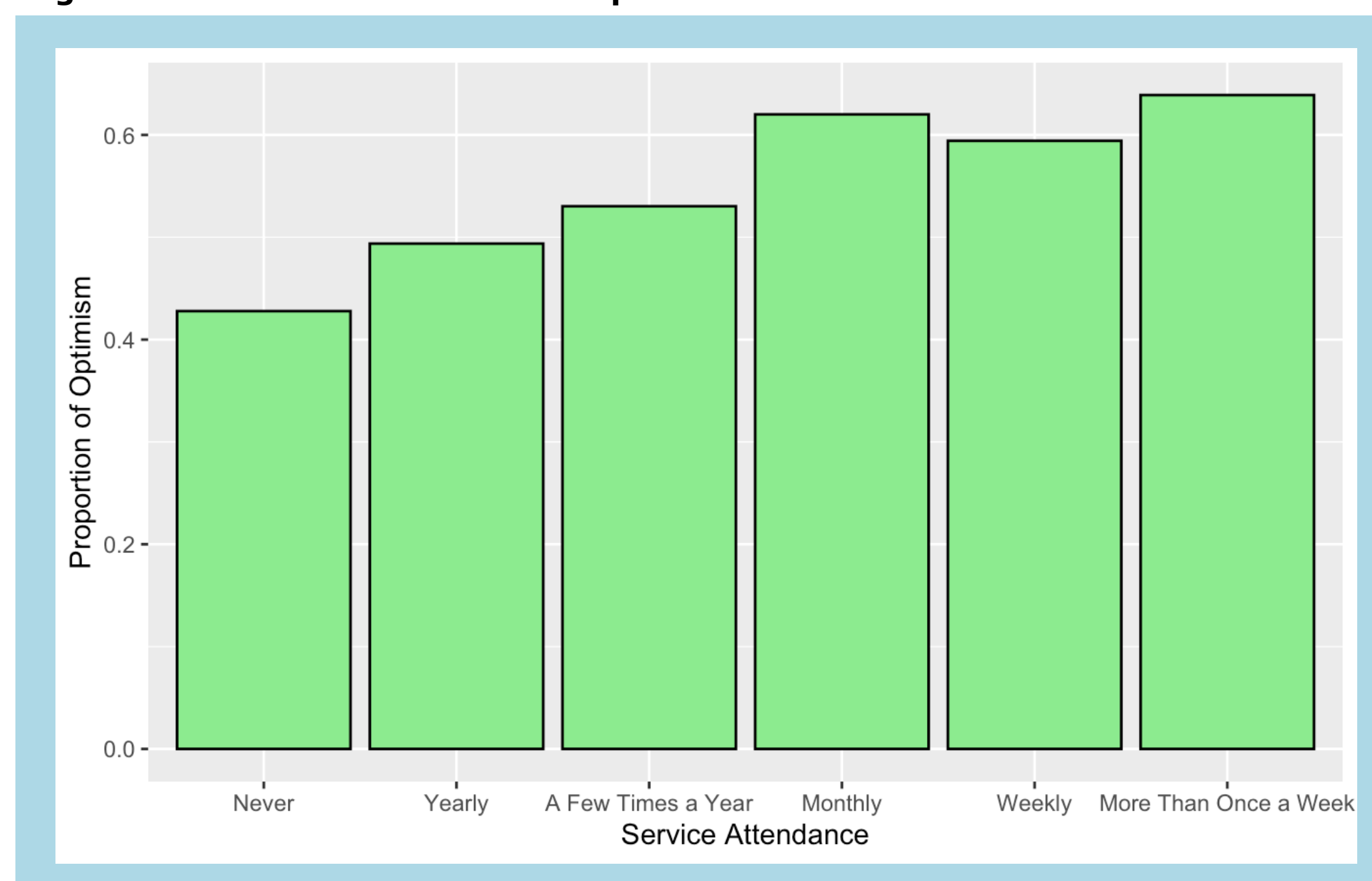
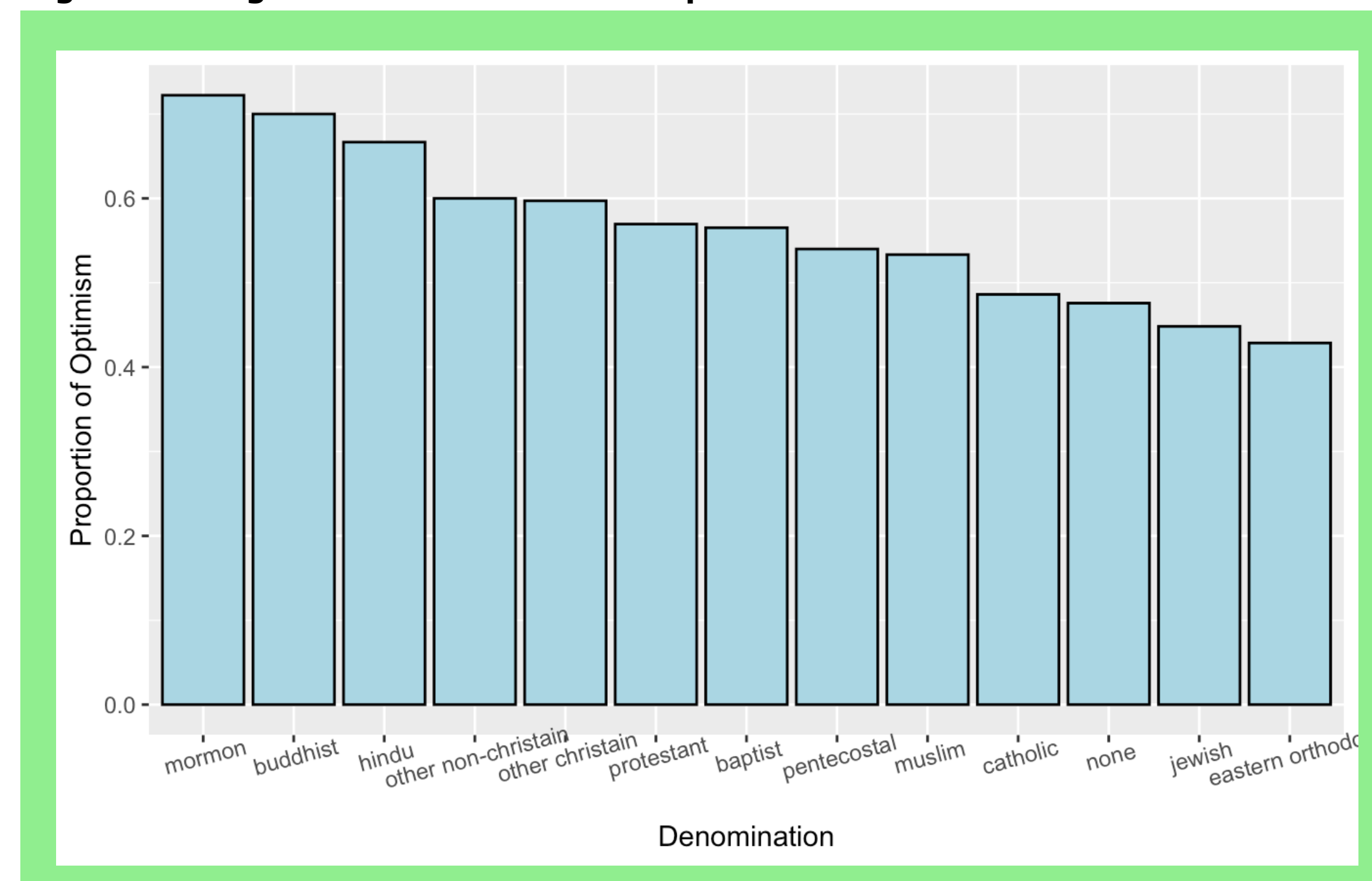


Figure 2. Religious Denomination and Optimism



Multivariate

- By running a logistic regression with optimism as a response variable and both service attendance and religious denomination as explanatory variables, the regression shows that while denomination and optimism are significantly associated, service attendance and optimism have a stronger association.

Discussion

- Regardless of religious denomination, generally more frequent service attendance, leads to more likelihood of optimism about the future.
- While religious denomination is associated with optimism, service attendance is a stronger explanatory variable.
- Religious scholars or those studying sociology or psychology of religion may find this useful in that the data seems to suggest that specific religious doctrine or teaching based on denomination seems to have less impact than pure quantity of time spent attending religious services.