

THE MORMON DILEMMA: CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF ANTI-MORMONISM IN THE 2012 ELECTIONS

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DRAFT: Future versions may contain revisions. Comments welcome.

Introduction

The victory of Mitt Romney in the 2012 Republican primary has convinced many observers that Romney's Mormon religion is now irrelevant to his electoral chances. While his campaign is wary of ever discussing Romney's religion, GOP activists urge Romney to "own" his Mormonism, and leaders of major conservative Christian groups claim that Romney's Mormonism is not a problem for them (Romano 2012, Walker 2012). The thesis that Mormonism does not matter seems to have found some empirical support in a recent online survey experiment (Chingos and Henderson 2012), though other survey experiments conducted with random national samples have found the opposite (Campbell, Green and Monson 2012). Romney received a rousing reception from an evangelical audience when he delivered a commencement address at Jerry Falwell's Liberty University in May 2012; he described himself as a Christian rather than a Mormon. Does Romney's success in the 2012 primary really mean that religious identity has melted away as an issue?

In this paper I argue that aversion to Mormons is still an important force in American public opinion, and one that seriously affects Romney's chances even if he ultimately overcomes it. I broadly follow the example set by Kinder and Dale-Riddle (2011), who warn against interpreting victories by minority candidates as a sign that long-standing social divisions have been "transcended." Barack Obama's election did not signal "the end of race" in American politics; race was deeply implicated throughout the 2008 campaign, and he won with a surprisingly low number of white voters. Similarly, John F. Kennedy won the 1960 election with a record low percentage of Protestant votes. Rather uniting the various religious and cultural factions within the Republican Party, Romney's victory actually laid bare stark divides in Christian identity politics that were more important and persistent than the supposed gulf between the Tea Partiers and the moderates. In the same way that

Obama's race divided the Democratic base and prolonged the 2008 primary (Jackman and Vavreck 2010), Romney's unorthodox religion helped prolong and embitter the 2012 Republican contest to the extent that it may have damaged his chances in the general election.

Having escaped the Republican primaries, Romney's religiosity now feeds into an even greater national divide. As Putnam and Campbell (2010) show, for the last thirty years religious conservatives of many denominations have coalesced politically against an equally diverse alliance of religious liberals and secularists, a realignment popularly known as the "culture war." Denominational differences (such as the traditional Catholic/Protestant cleavage) have become less relevant to politics than adherence to religious orthodoxy and traditionalism versus religious modernization and accommodation with secular culture. Issues such as abortion and same sex marriage have created a sharp "God gap" between the parties. Increasingly, liberals and religious non-traditionalists see Mormons as a part of the orthodox coalition with evangelicals and conservative Catholics. They believe Mormon politicians harbor authoritarian social agendas and an irrational hostility to science and reason. Mormons are in a uniquely awkward position, regarded by secular liberals as hardcore religious conservatives but seen as possible heretics by other religious conservatives. Romney's Mormonism could have the effect of arousing the anger of liberal Democrats while suppressing the enthusiasm of conservative Republicans.

Previous scholarship has established the existence of antipathy to Mormons based on perceived religious differences (Penning 2009, Benson Merrolla and Geer 2011, Campbell, Green and Monson 2011) but there has so far been relatively little attention given to the role of politico-religious culture war in the Mormon dilemma. To explore the interaction between traditional, conservative Christian distrust of Mormons and the more

recent liberal and secular ambivalence towards them, I proposed a series of items relating to Mormons and religious politics for the American National Election Studies Evaluation of Government and Society Study. These items were accepted via the online commons system and included on the EGSS 4 survey, which went into the field to about 1300 participants at the end of February 2012. They included questions about whether respondents regarded Mormons as Christians, whether they would be more or less likely to vote for a Mormon, whether they could identify the religions of Presidential candidates, a Mormon feeling thermometer, and a question about whether they thought America's laws should be based on Christian principles. These, along with some other related questions devised by the ANES investigators, form the empirical basis of this paper.

This paper proceeds in four parts. First, I explore the prevalence and the sources of negative attitudes towards Mormon candidates, evaluating the roles of both secular liberal antipathy and religious conservative distrust. I find that both play major roles, though it is the former that has increased heavily over the last five years. Second, I explore whether respondents' attitudes towards Mormons affect their attitudes towards Romney. The evidence in this section suggests that Romney's religion is a highly salient factor in respondents' evaluation of him, even more so than factors such as party identification and ideology.

Third, I draw on data about how respondents voted or planned to vote in the primaries to assess whether anti-Mormon attitudes played any role in the prolonged contest. Logistic analysis of vote choice indicates that feelings about Mormons played a significant role in the likelihood of voting for Romney, along with more generalized feelings about religious outsiders such as Obama. Finally, I examine whether ambivalence to Mormons is likely to affect Romney's chances in the general election. This is difficult to assess, but

analysis of which voters conservative declare themselves undecided or unlikely to vote in an Obama/Romney contest shows that anti-Mormonism has at least some role in dampening Republican enthusiasm for Romney, which could prove dangerous in close election contests. In both analyses of vote choice, it appears that feelings about Mormons are a more powerful deterrent for conservatives than other usually cited factors such as Romney's insufficient commitments to social conservatism or small government.

Sources of anti-Mormon prejudice

The well-known scholar of religion Phillip Jenkins once declared anti-Catholicism “the last acceptable prejudice” in the United States (Jenkins 2003). Fifty years of survey data suggests anti-Mormonism is a much better candidate for this title. In June 2011, Gallup released the results of a survey showing that 22% of respondents would not vote for their party's Presidential candidate if that candidate was a Mormon. This number has changed little since 1967, when Gallup first started asking the question and 17% said they would not vote for a Mormon. Mormons are the only group for whom reluctance to vote has actually *increased* over the last fifty years. According to the author of the Gallup report, “the last time as many as 22% of Americans said they would not vote for any of these groups was 1959 for Catholics, 1961 for Jews, 1971 for blacks, and 1975 for women. . . . Opposition to voting for each of these has since tapered off to single digits.” (Saad 2011).

The persistence of this anti-Mormonism in surveys even as other forms of prejudice evaporates shows that if anti-Mormonism is not more widespread than other prejudices, it is certainly more socially acceptable. The well-documented social desirability effect that suppresses prejudicial answers about candidates from other groups (see e.g. Streb et al 2008) does not seem to matter so much for Mormons. Survey respondents are relatively

comfortable with telling an interviewer that they would not be willing to vote for a Mormon. This section of the paper explores the sources of this socially acceptable prejudice, which enjoys unusual public visibility because of its acceptability.

I posit that in the United States today there are two likely reasons why survey respondents would express aversion to voting for a Mormon candidate. First, many liberals associate Mormonism with repressive and authoritarian religiosity. Second, many conservatives do not accept Mormons' self-identification as Christians. I explain both of these hypotheses in more detail below. As a first look at the evidence, Table 1 shows the percentages of respondents who say they would be "less likely" to vote for a Mormon from a Pew survey in 2007 and an ANES survey in 2012, with respondents split up by political ideology and religion:

[Table 1 about here]

Table 1 shows that the number of survey respondents saying they would be less likely to vote for a Mormon has risen significantly in the last five years, by between about 4% and 13% taking into account margins of error in both polls. When respondents are divided into different religious and political categories, it seems that most of this increase in aversion to voting for Mormons has taken place on the liberal and secular sides of American culture. While the number of evangelicals saying they would be less likely to vote for a Mormon has dropped slightly (though not significantly) and the number of conservatives saying the same has increased slightly (also not significantly), there have been large and significant increases in the numbers of self-identified liberals and people of no religion who now declare themselves less likely to vote for a Mormon candidate. In both groups just over 40% are either somewhat less likely or a lot less likely to vote for a Mormon, up from numbers in the 20s five years ago.

While small sample sizes in the 2012 survey (163 for non-religious people, 363 for liberals) mean that there are large confidence intervals around these numbers, this does seem to indicate a much more pronounced aversion to Mormon candidates among liberals and religious “nones.” People of no religion are now significantly less likely to say they would vote for Mormons than are evangelicals; the reverse was true in 2007. In 2007 there was no significant difference between liberals and conservatives on this question, but in 2012 liberals appear significantly less likely to vote for a Mormon. What has caused these changes?

Since 2007 Mormons have become more prominent in American politics for two reasons: the continuing candidacy of Mitt Romney and Mormon activism against same-sex marriage. When Romney first appeared as a national candidate, far fewer Americans were aware of his religious identity; a December 2007 Pew study found only 42% of respondents could correctly identify Romney as a Mormon, though the number was 60% for Republicans (Pew Forum 2007). In our 2012 sample about 66% could identify Romney as a Mormon, and these numbers were similar across partisan categories. Although Romney has emphasized his Mormonism much less in 2012 than he did in the 2007-08 campaign, awareness of his religious affiliation has steadily risen, especially for liberals and Democrats. In the 2008 election conservative Mormon activists played a crucial part in the success of Proposition 8, which banned same sex marriage in California. The importance of Mormon activism was widely recognized at the time, and in a high-profile demonstration shortly after the election progressive anti-Prop 8 demonstrators gathered outside the LDS temple in Westwood to protest the Church’s role in marshalling donations for the ballot measure (Garrison and Lin 2008).

Mormons, then, have become increasingly prominent on the conservative and Republican side of politics. There are a few prominent Mormon Democrats such as Senate

majority leader Harry Reid, and Jon Huntsman was the most liberal mainstream candidate for the Republican nomination, but Mormons tend to be associated with conservatism in politics and the media. Mormons are the most Republican-affiliated major religious group in the United States (even more so than evangelical Protestants).¹ Because of the strength of this association, it is possible that liberals and people without religious convictions increasingly see Mormons as being on the same side of America's politico-religious divide as evangelicals and other religious conservatives who oppose abortion, gay rights and non-traditional gender roles (see Campbell 2006, Putnam and Campbell 2010). Social identity theory would predict that liberals, especially with secularist tendencies, would be less likely to trust Mormon candidates the more they associate Mormons with a conservative and authoritarian religious identity that is antithetical to their own (see Green, Palmquist and Schickler 2002). We might also expect that other religious conservatives would increasingly see Mormons as allies, and this may moderate any distrust based on denominational differences.

Unfortunately we do not have any panel data allowing us to directly test this explanation for changing political attitudes towards Mormons. However, both the EGSS 4 and the Pew survey from 2007 contain questions that allow us to examine how much attitudes to Mormons are and have been related to the "culture wars." As well as containing questions on whether respondents would be more or less likely to vote for a Mormon, both surveys also ask whether respondents would be more or less likely to vote for an evangelical. If the "culture war" hypothesis is correct, then we should see an increasingly strong

¹ In 2007 52% of Mormons identified as Republicans while 13% identified as "leaning Republican," compared to 38% of evangelicals who identified as Republicans and 12% who identified as "leaning Republican." See "party affiliation" in comparisons of social and political views at <http://religions.pewforum.org/comparisons#> last accessed 05/14/2012.

correlation between these answers. Religious conservatives who would be more likely to vote for an evangelical should also be more likely to vote for a Mormon, while secular liberals who are less likely to vote for an evangelical should be less likely to vote for a Mormon.

An alternative explanation for increased aversion to Mormons is that they are more widely perceived now as religious outsiders. Previous research suggests that one of the most important factors in negative attitudes toward Mormons is the belief that they are not Christians (Smith 2011, Campbell, Green and Monson 2011). Both scholarly and popular treatments of anti-Mormonism assume that this is a particular problem among evangelical Protestants who may otherwise be natural allies of Mormons. However, because Americans in general strongly associate national identity with Christianity (Straughn and Feld 2010, Theiss-Morse 2010) this may well be a broader problem outside evangelical circles. Furthermore, respondents who do not identify Mormons as Christians, regardless of their own religious identity, may be more likely to consider Mormonism a “cult” which is not to be trusted. Table 2 below shows how many survey respondents actually accept Mormons’ self-designation as Christians (broken down by survey year and religious identification).

[Table 2 about here]

This table shows that significantly fewer evangelicals than others accept Mormons as Christians. In all categories, the numbers of respondents who say Mormons are not Christians has declined slightly. This decline is not quite significant at the level of 95% confidence, though this insignificance may be due to differences in the answer format.² An

² Pew’s 2007 survey included a “don’t know” response to this question while the ANES 2012 survey did not. In the Pew sample about 31.2% of respondents said they did not think Mormonism is a Christian religion (42% for evangelicals), while 17.3% said they did not know (17.5% for evangelicals). Because respondents in the 2012 survey simply chose between “Christian” and “not Christian,” it is possible that some of the “Christian” response

alternative explanation for increasing aversion to voting for a Mormon, then, is a decline in the number of Americans who accept Mormons' self-identification as Christians. Again, we do not have panel data to test this directly, but the question of whether Mormons are Christians should allow us to assess the relative importance of this factor in both samples.

We therefore have two main (non-exclusive) explanations for aversion to voting for Mormons and the increasing prevalence of this aversion. First is a "culture wars" hypothesis, that more secular-minded liberals increasingly see Mormons as political enemies, part of a repressive conservative religious coalition led by evangelicals. Second is an "outgrouping" hypothesis, that Americans who do not see Mormons as Christians are less likely to vote for them, and fewer Americans are seeing Mormons as Christians. These explanations should interact with each other: we might expect that whether or not Mormons are Christians matters much less to secular-minded people who want less religion in politics and much more to Christians themselves, especially evangelicals who want more candidates with since Christian convictions.

In order to allow for interactive testing of these hypotheses, we need a scale of "Christianism," that is a scale of a respondent's favorability toward conservative Christian values in politics and government. Respondents at the higher end of this scale should be less likely to vote for a Mormon if they believe Mormons are not Christians. Respondents at the lower end of the scale should be indifferent to whether Mormons are Christians, but should be less likely to vote for a Mormon if they are also less likely to vote for an evangelical. A question in the ANES provides a straightforward scale for this purpose; respondents are asked whether they favor or oppose "basing American laws on Christian principles." This

includes respondents who would have answered "don't know" if given the choice, making our estimates of the difference between the two samples conservative.

makes a seven-point scale, normalized around 0, with 3 being “strongly favor” and -3 being “strongly oppose.” The 2007 Pew survey did not have a directly equivalent question, but I create another normalized seven-point scale by combining the answers from two other questions, “do religious conservatives have too much control over the Republican Party?” and “do liberals who are not religious have too much control over the Democratic Party?”

Table 3 below shows the results of multivariate, interactive testing of these variables. The dependent variable for both the 2007 and 2012 samples is a three-point scale of attitudes toward Mormon candidates: whether a respondent would be more likely (1), no more or less likely (2) or less likely (3) to vote for a Mormon. For ease of interpreting the results (particularly the interactive components) I have used OLS regression. While an ordered logistic regression would have been more appropriate given the ordinal nature of the dependent variable, it has no effect on the direction or significance of the coefficients and little effect on the magnitudes.³ I have included controls for whether the respondent knows Mormons personally, whether the respondent is an evangelical Christian, a measure of ethnocentrism (the average response to the same question about candidates from different outgroups, minus the average response to the same question about candidates from the respondent’s own groups), self-identified ideology, and the race, sex, age and education level of respondents.

[Table 3 about here]

These results show several noteworthy things. First, whether a respondent believes Mormons are Christians continues to be a very important factor in their likelihood of voting for a Mormon, and if anything has become slightly more important. Respondents who believe Mormons are Christians are about half a standard deviation more likely to vote for a

³ Ordered logit results are available from the author on request.

Mormon candidate on our three-point scale. Second, likely support for an evangelical candidate—measured on the same three-point scale—has become a much more important predictor in the last five years of whether a respondent would be likely to vote for a Mormon. The partial correlation between the two is now .263 as opposed .089 in 2007, and is significant at the level of 99.9%. This large increase bears out the hypothesis that Mormons are increasingly associated with the evangelical side of the culture war. To fully understand the meaning of both of these results, we need to look at their interactions with the “Christianism” variable that acts as a proxy for the respondent’s cultural politics around religion. Both coefficients displayed in the table apply to respondents at the median Christianist position of 0. Figures 1 and 2 below show how the sizes of the effects change depending on the respondent’s cultural politics.

Figure 1 shows that in 2007 the question of whether Mormons are Christians was more important to people who believed that religion should play a greater role in politics and government. For people in the most “secularist” category of -3 on the horizontal axis, the effect of the Christian question was not significant at the 95% level in 2007. The much flatter and uniformly significant line in 2012 indicates that this question has become important to respondents across the board, regardless of their stance on the role of religion (and in particular Christianity) in politics. However, the confidence intervals show that overall there has been relatively little change on this question.

Figure 2 shows significant change on the association between the likelihoods of voting evangelical and Mormon candidates, especially among Christianists. In 2007 this correlation was much weaker, and insignificant for Christianists. In 2012 it is much stronger and significant for every category. This indicates that while secularists who would not vote for an evangelical have also become less likely to vote for a Mormon, Christianists who

would be more likely to vote for an evangelical are now more likely to vote for a Mormon. In other words, the position of Mormons on the evangelical side of the politico-religious divide is becoming increasingly entrenched. This has not yet eroded the traditional bases of anti-Mormon prejudice among conservative Christians—the “Christian question” is still important, and Table 3 shows that being an evangelical has an independently positive effect on aversion to voting for a Mormon. However, as the country continues to divide along the lines of religious traditionalism versus secular modernism, other religious conservatives may increasingly identify Mormons as being on their side.

Perceptions of Mormons and perceptions of Romney

How do Americans’ perceptions of Mormonism affect how they see Mitt Romney, presumptive nominee for the Republican Presidential candidacy? The ANES EGSS 4 provides a Romney “feeling thermometer” (0-100 scale for how survey respondents rate the candidate) that allows us to address this question. As mentioned earlier, a relatively high number of Americans can now identify Romney as a Mormon (about two thirds) but the Romney campaign has deliberately downplayed his religious identity, which is rarely mentioned explicitly. We may conjecture that Romney is trying to keep his religious identity out of the “tops of the heads” of voters (see Zaller 1992). Because the ANES asks respondents about Romney *before* it asks them about Mormons, we may get a reasonable idea of how successful this strategy has been; has the Romney campaign been able to decouple voters’ feelings about Mormons from their feelings about the candidate?

Figures 3 and 4 below show that the feeling thermometers for both Romney and Mormons are fairly similarly distributed, with a modal response of 50 and then a more or less normal distribution of responses at focal numbers such as 40, 60, 25, 75 etc. The only

disturbance to this pattern is the 14% of respondents who answer 0 for Romney. The mean rating for Romney is 42 with a standard deviation of 24.9, while the mean rating for Mormons is 49.4 with a standard deviation of 25. Our main concern in this section is how these two measures correlate with each other controlling for other important variables. In particular, we should expect respondents' party identification, ideological self-placement, whether the respondent is an evangelical, income, education level, race, age and gender to be factors in how respondents would view Romney.

[Figures 3 and 4 about here]

As well as comparing the magnitude of the Mormon feeling thermometer to these other variables, I will run a separate model looking at the specific effects of both positive and negative Mormon stereotypes on perceptions of Romney. The ANES asked respondents a series of questions measuring stereotyped attitudes. Respondents were asked how well a certain attribute (patriotic, lazy and violent) described a certain group (Mormons, whites, blacks and Hispanics). They were given the choice of "extremely well," "very well," "moderately well," "slightly well" and "not well at all," creating a scale from 1 to 5.

[Table 4 about here]

We can see from Table 4 that Mormons benefit from some positive stereotypes as well as suffering from some negative ones. Mormons are rated as significantly less lazy than any other group, though the difference between them, whites and Hispanics are fairly small. This perception of non-laziness may reflect the well-known success of a number of prominent Mormons in business, of which Romney himself is a prominent example, as well as the benefits of sobriety associated with Mormon temperance.

Mormons are also rated as significantly less violent than any other group, and this difference is much larger. There is slightly more than half a standard deviation difference

between the means for Mormons and whites in general (the next “least violent” group) while the difference between whites and blacks, rated as the “most violent” group, is less than half a standard deviation. This perception of non-violence may reflect a prevailing stereotype of Mormons as friendly, which appears even in otherwise skeptical depictions of Mormons such as Matt Stone and Trey Parker’s musical *The Book of Mormon*. In the nineteenth century, violent fanaticism was a trait widely associated with Mormons, who had been involved in armed conflicts with their neighbors and the government in Missouri, Illinois and Utah, and were notorious for the “Mountain Meadows Massacre” of a caravan of 200 non-Mormon pioneers in the south of Utah Territory in 1857 (see Givens 1997). Despite several contemporary attempts to link tenets of the modern Mormon religion with its violent early past (e.g. Jon Krakauer’s *Under the Banner of Heaven*), the opposite stereotype seems to prevail today.

However, respondents in the aggregate also see Mormons as significantly less patriotic than other white Americans, instead assigning them almost exactly the same patriotism mean as black Americans, about half a standard deviation lower. The perception of Mormons as unpatriotic may relate to their status as members of a close-knit, devout sect. Throughout American history, sects and other alien religions have been suspected of national disloyalty and prioritizing their own religious hierarchies over temporal authority (see e.g. Smith 2010b). This has been true of groups as diverse as Shakers, Catholics, Jehovah’s Witnesses and Muslims, and it was a perception that John F. Kennedy felt forced to confront directly in 1960.

In Model 2, as well as including these attribute ratings, I also measure the effect of the belief that Mormons are Christians and the effect of knowing Mormons personally. In this model I exclude the overall rating of Mormons in order to better isolate specific

stereotypes. The results are shown for both models in Table 5 below, along with the predicted effect of a one standard deviation increase/decrease in each independent variable (apart from binary variables). Model 1 shows that, measured in terms of standard deviation differences, a respondent's rating of Mormons has the single largest effect on their perceptions of Romney, an effect of greater than a third of a standard deviation change, which is about 26% larger than the effect of ideology and 44% larger than the effect of party identification. The partial correlation between rating of Mormons and rating of Romney, which are measured on the same scale, is .35 controlling for all other factors.

[Table 5 about here]

Taken separately, the effects of the different stereotype and attribute responses are not so large. Only the effects of the “unpatriotic” and “non-violent” stereotypes are significant—respondents who say Mormons are less violent are more favorable to Romney, while those who say Mormons are less patriotic are less favorable to him. The respective magnitudes of standard deviation changes are -3.25 and 3.01, about an eighth of a standard deviation each. Interestingly, the effect of whether respondents believe Mormons are Christians has no direct significant effect on their perceptions of Romney, which might suggest that this specific theological complaint about Mormons has little political effect on the evaluation of Mormon politicians. However, it may continue to exert an indirect effect through its influence on overall perceptions of Mormonism. Respondents' perceptions of Mormon laziness (or lack thereof) also had no significant effect. The difference in fit between the two models is an R^2 of .348 for Model 1 as opposed to .255 for Model 2, which suggests that these stereotypes alone explain very little of the variance found in overall perceptions of Mormons.

Taken together, this evidence suggests that overall perceptions of Mormons are very important to perceptions of Romney. They account for a large amount of variance, they partially correlate at .35, and they have a larger effect than either party ID or ideology. However, it is difficult to isolate any single source of negative (or positive) perceptions of Mormons that on its own has a large effect on how people see Romney. This might mean that negative perceptions of Mormons may be difficult for any Mormon politician (or for the church itself) to change, because opinions about Mormons are drawn from many different sources, many of which are not easily accessible to opinion leaders.

Did anti-Mormonism hurt Romney in the Primaries?

We have established that feelings about Mormons are closely related to feelings about Romney, but how does this translate electorally? While Romney ultimately won a clear victory at the Primaries, he endured an often surprising series of setbacks resulting in the longest meaningful Republican primary contest since Ford versus Reagan in 1976. Much like Obama in 2008, it was difficult for Romney to take advantage of the normal effect of frontrunner momentum (see Jackman and Vavreck 2010). There has been widespread speculation that the length and viciousness of the Republican Primary would hurt Romney's chances in the general election by weakening the base's enthusiasm and providing ready-made attack narratives for the Democratic campaign. How much was Romney's failure to win a normal quick victory due to ambivalence about his Mormonism?

Exit polls tended to show that Romney performed most poorly among evangelicals, self-identified "strong conservatives," and voters who rated "electing a true conservative" as their most important priority (Cox, Quealy and Willis 2012). His losses came in states with

high numbers of evangelicals and large rural populations, particularly in the South.⁴ This may suggest a role for anti-Mormonism in his losses, but they may have been over-determined by other factors such as his reluctance to campaign on social issues, his relatively liberal record as Massachusetts Governor and his position as an “east coast establishment Republican” in a year when much of the Republican base still identify as Tea Party insurgents.

To test the importance of Mormonism against other factors in the Primaries I use respondents’ self-reporting of how they voted or planned to vote in the Republican race. At the time of the survey nine states had voted,⁵ representing voting opportunities for about 16% of any random national sample. In the survey about 5% of respondents had voted from one of these states, while a further 15% said they had voted (or “probably” voted) in advance from another state. In total, slightly less than 8% of respondents said they had voted in a Republican primary or caucus. A further 26.5% of respondents answered “Republican” in response to the question “assuming you vote, which political party’s caucus or primary will you vote in?” These respondents were then asked whether they planned to vote for Romney, Santorum, Gingrich, Paul or another candidate. While this almost certainly overstates the number of respondents who actually would have voted, including these intended votes provides a useful gauge of how Republican voters saw their candidate choices during the primaries at a time when the race was far from decided, and it raises the *N* to a level where statistical inferences may be made.

⁴ Romney lost the primary vote proper, the caucus ballot or a “beauty contest” vote in Iowa, South Carolina, Missouri, Minnesota, Colorado, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Oklahoma, North Dakota, Kansas, Louisiana, and Kentucky.

⁵ Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina, Florida, Nevada, Colorado, Missouri, Minnesota, Maine all held some kind of vote prior to the beginning of the survey.

Of a total of 473 respondents who said they had voted or would vote in a Republican primary or caucus, a weighted total of about 30.1% indicated a preference for Romney while about 69.9% indicated a preference for another candidate. Nationally, about 38.1% of the vote had gone to Romney at this point, so non-Romney voters may be somewhat over-represented in this sample. To measure the effect of feelings about Mormons on the likelihood of voting for Romney I use the same Mormon feeling thermometer as I used in the previous section. To isolate the effects of attitudes towards Mormons on the likelihood of a primary vote for Romney, I included controls for the measure of ethnocentrism mentioned in the first section, measures of ideology, strength of party identification and support for the tea party, whether the respondent believes Mormons are Christians, whether the respondent is an evangelical, the “Christianist” measure explained in the first section, whether the respondent knows Mormons personally, the respondent’s race, sex, age, income, education level and level of political knowledge, respondent’s attitude to the birth control mandate in the affordable care act, respondent’s assessment of how much more or less the government should be doing, whether the respondent watches Fox News or listens to *The Rush Limbaugh Show*, and a standard measure of racial resentment. Between them, these items capture all the other factors—conservatism, gender, tea party support, general attitude towards religion and social conservatism, and media effects—that we might expect to have contributed to primary voting decisions.

I also include a binary variable for whether respondents answer “Muslim” in the ANES survey when asked about Barack Obama’s religion. 26% of respondents answered Muslim in response to this question, consistent with a trend going back to 2008 (see Smith 2010). 36% of respondents who voted in or intended to vote in the Republican primaries answered Muslim. It seems likely that many Americans who feel uncomfortable about voting

for a Mormon would in general feel uncomfortable about the perceived rise of religious outsiders in American politics and government. I hypothesize that respondents who believe Obama is a Muslim would also have been less likely to vote for Romney at the primaries because of a generalized distrust of religious outsiders.

The results of the logit analysis (likelihood of Republican primary participant voting for Romney) are in table 6 below.

[Table 6 about here]

Most of the control variables in this model are insignificant at any accepted level of confidence and the overall fit of the model is only .112, which suggests that the mechanisms behind primary vote choice are relatively difficult to access by survey, at least with a sample this small. However, respondents' ratings of Mormons do have a significant effect on their likelihood of voting for Romney at the primary. An increase of one standard deviation in Mormon ratings increases the likelihood of voting for Romney at the primaries by 7%. This factor may seem modest, but it could have been very important given the closeness of some of the primary races such as Iowa, Michigan and Ohio.

Perhaps just as interesting is the fact that respondents who believe Obama is a Muslim were 15% less likely to vote for Romney, even controlling for all other factors. This throws new light on the accusation, frequently heard throughout the primaries from Romney's conservative opponents, that Obama and Romney are too similar. While the congruence of "Romneycare" and "Obamacare" was the most frequently cited similarity, the most salient similarity for some conservatives may have been that they did not consider either to be a true Christian. How do such voters respond when given an electoral choice only between the Mormon Romney and the "Muslim" Obama? I deal with this question in the following section.

Will Anti-Mormonism Hurt Romney in November?

We have seen so far that (a) there are both politically conservative and politically liberal sources of negative attitudes towards Mormons; (b) how citizens feel about Mormons significantly and substantially affects how they feel about Mitt Romney; and (c) the attitudes of Republican Primary voters and Caucus-goers towards Mormons and religious outsiders in general had a notable impact on their likelihood of voting for Mitt Romney in these contests. In light of all this, how should we expect negativity and ambivalence about Mormons to affect Romney's chances at the general election, especially as he is facing a candidate who is also in some important senses a religious outsider?

One possibility is that neither conservative nor liberal anti-Mormonism will actually matter in the context of a general election. Those who would not vote for Mormons because they are not true Christians are likely to be concentrated in "red" states that Obama has little chance of winning under any circumstances, and they may vote for Romney as the lesser of two evils given their also-prevalent belief that Obama is a Muslim. Liberals who believe Mormons harbor an illiberal or theocratic social agenda similar to that of Evangelicals are unlikely to vote for any Republican candidate anyway. In other words, neither version of anti-Mormonism is "cross-cutting." It is unlikely to cause many people to change their vote.

But even if anti-Mormon conservatives would not vote for Obama, in a close election there could be serious consequences to conservative Republican voters staying home because of objections to their candidate's religion. Third Party or independent candidates on the right could also take votes from conservatives uncomfortable with Romney's Mormonism, which could affect the outcome of the race in closely fought states. In order to evaluate the likely *impact* of anti-Mormon attitudes we therefore need to examine

how voters with doubts about Mormons evaluate Romney compared to other alternatives—Obama, other candidates, and not voting.

A question from the EGSS 4 that gives us some leverage on this problem asks respondents about their voting intentions in the general elections. Respondents were asked “If the 2012 Presidential elections were between Barack Obama as the Democratic candidate and Mitt Romney as the Republican candidate, would you probably vote for Barack Obama, Mitt Romney, someone else, or probably not vote?” There was also an “undecided” option. Of the weighted sample 40.6% said they would vote for Obama, 28% said they would vote for Romney, 4.5% said they would vote for another candidate, 17.6% said they were undecided and 9.3% said they would probably not vote. 32% of respondents, then, refused to declare for either Obama or Romney in this (then hypothetical) contest, leaving Obama with a large numerical advantage. Does ambivalence about Mormons play an important role in dampening enthusiasm for Romney, pushing large numbers of conservatives and Republicans into uncertainty about whether they could even vote for the Republican candidate at the election?

When this survey took place in late February and early March the outcome of the Republican Primary had not yet been determined, though Romney was the clear frontrunner. We might expect that after Romney sealed the nomination higher numbers of conservative and Republican respondents would declare their intention to vote for him. Nonetheless, this is currently the best data we possess on the potential impact of anti-Mormonism on electoral enthusiasm for Romney. A first look at this data in Table 7 below shows the respective response shares for Obama, Romney and “neither” among those who say they would be “less likely” or “much less likely” to vote for a Mormon, compared to those who say being a Mormon would make no difference or would be more likely to vote for a Mormon.

[Table 7 about here]

This picture suggests that reluctance to vote for a Mormon could hurt Romney. In the sample of voters for whom Mormonism makes no difference or is a positive, Obama's lead over Romney is statistically insignificant. Romney's share of definite intended voters halves in the sample of respondents who say they would be less likely to vote for a Mormon, giving Obama a very strong lead. Many respondents who say they would be less likely to vote for a Mormon are liberals and Democrats who were unlikely to vote for a Republican anyway, hence the increase in Obama's vote in this sample. However, the "neither" category also increases by ten points, indicating that an electorally important bloc of respondents are conservatives or Republicans who have doubts about voting for a Mormon candidate.

To more rigorously assess this impact I obtain multinomial logit estimates of the effects of attitudes about Mormons on the likelihood that respondents would choose a non-Romney option (voting for Obama, not voting, voting for another candidate or answering "undecided") as opposed to indicating an intention for voting for Romney. I expect to find little or no effect on the likelihood of voting for Obama instead of Romney when standard controls are included; conservatives who see Mormons as religious outsiders would probably see Obama the same way, and the choice of liberal secularists to vote for Obama will be over-determined by other factors. However, I suspect respondents with lower opinions of Mormons and Mormon candidates will be more likely to choose neither candidate when presented with a choice between Obama and Romney.

In my multinomial logit model of response choice I include two measures of attitudes towards Mormons: the Mormon feeling thermometer, and the question "would you be more likely, less likely or equally likely to support a candidate for President who had the following characteristics (Mormon)?" I expect the latter, that directly links feelings about

Mormons to vote choice, will have a more important impact. I also include responses to the questions of whether the respondent thinks Mormons are Christians, and whether they personally know Mormons. To isolate the effects of these opinions about Mormons from the many other factors that might affect feelings about Romney, I include the same controls as I used in the vote choice model in the previous section.

I divide respondents into three categories: those who say they vote for Romney, those who would vote for Obama, and those who would either not vote, vote for another candidate, or say they are undecided. I compress three groups into the last category because separately they are much smaller (for example, only 59 respondents specify an “other” candidate) and it would be more difficult to discern the size and significance of the various factors that determine response. While the political meaning of each response is obviously different, they still form a useful category when grouped together because all three indicate an underlying lack of enthusiasm about either major candidate. While some undecided respondents ultimately will vote for Romney, they are certainly less likely to vote for him than those who say they will vote for him, and much less likely to donate to or volunteer to help the Romney campaign, or persuade others to vote for him. This is a significant problem for Romney if the “undecided” category includes many conservative and Republican identifying voters.

In the multinomial logit estimation “Romney” is the base response, so the results show the effects of the relevant variables on the likelihood giving a non-Romney response (either “Obama” or the composite category of “neither”). The small number of Mormons in the sample is excluded. I provide the parameters for three different estimates: one for the whole sample, one for self-identifying conservatives only, and one for all respondents in the

twelve “swing states” as identified by the Gallup/USA Today polling methodology.⁶ In this way I hope to identify politically consequential impacts. In order to keep the focus on political impact (and for the sake of brevity) in Table 8 below I show the effects of meaningful changes in significant independent variables rather than the full results, which are displayed in Table 9 in the appendix. Any effects derived from coefficients that are not significant at the level of 95% confidence are shown in italics.

[Table 8 about here]

Within the whole sample, a standard deviation increase on the question of being less likely to vote for a Mormon lowers the probability of answering Romney by 8% and raises the probability answering neither by 7%. The magnitude of these effects is larger within the conservative sample; the probability of Romney is lowered by 14% and inversely the probability of neither is raised by 14%. The effect is largest in swing states, where the probability of Romney is lowered by 11% and neither is increased by 17%. These are substantial effects in election races that could be close. As expected, respondents who are less likely to vote for Mormons are not more likely to vote for Obama, but are more likely not to vote, to vote for a third candidate or to be undecided.

Other factors that increase the probability of a respondent answering neither—being more Republican, more conservative and being more supportive of the Tea Party—increase the probability of answering Romney more and Obama much less. Interestingly, the belief that Obama is a Muslim lowers the overall probability of answering Obama by 24%, even controlling for party ID, ideology, support for the Tea Party and a host of non-significant factors. The dividend for neither (13%) is slightly higher than for Romney (11%).

⁶ Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Michigan, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Virginia.

Most effects are larger and less significant in swing states, partly reflecting the uncertainty of inferences made from smaller numbers. Most effects are smaller and less significant in the conservative sample, reflecting the fact that vote choice is over-determined within this group. However, the fact that the Mormon question is significant and quite large shows that opinion towards Mormons, not conservative purity or Tea Party support, is the most visible dividing line between conservatives who are willing to vote for Romney and conservatives who are not.

It is impossible to tell from these results exactly how badly reluctance to vote for a Mormon will hurt Romney in the general election. Many respondents in the “neither” category will probably vote for Romney in November even if they were unhappy about the prospect in late February. But these results do suggest that ambivalence towards Mormons could be the most important factor in creating an “enthusiasm gap” between Romney and Obama that will not swing the votes of large percentages of the population, but may cost Romney enough marginal support that he loses close races.

Discussion and conclusion

The ANES EGSS 4 sample is a medium-sized snapshot of an unstable opinion environment, but currently it is the best data we have on how attitudes towards Mormons may affect American electoral politics. Neither this sample nor any other existing survey allows us to say with any certainty whether anti-Mormonism could “cost Romney the election.” However, some strong findings do emerge from our analysis of this data.

First, the base of anti-Mormon sentiment has become broader. The traditional reasons for not wanting to vote for a Mormon—evangelical distrust, and the belief that Mormons are not Christians—have remained stable. Meanwhile, the aversion to Mormon

candidates among ideological liberals and people without religious commitments has increased substantially. The willingness to vote for a Mormon and vote for an evangelical used to be very weakly correlated, because liberals who opposed evangelical candidates saw Mormons as a marginal minority, while conservatives who supported evangelical candidates saw Mormons as un-Christian. Now the two tendencies are quite highly correlated, largely because liberals increasingly see Mormons in the same light as they see evangelicals, as religious authoritarians opposed to social progress. Religious conservatives have not yet abandoned their traditional distrust of Mormons, putting Mormon candidates in a difficult position for the time being. However, it seems possible that conservative Christians will increasingly see Mormons as allies, in step with the religious realignment seen in other areas of American politics.

Second, how individuals feel about Mormons is perhaps the single most important factor in how they feel about Mitt Romney, trumping even ideology and party identification. America's most famous Mormon politician has certainly tried to minimize the role of his religion in the primary and general campaigns, but this data suggests it will remain an important factor regardless of how much or how little it is discussed. Outside of Massachusetts, Romney remains a largely unknown quantity, and feelings about Mormonism will serve as one of the main heuristics for how people view him.

Third, negative attitudes towards Mormons appear to have played a significant role in deterring people from voting for Romney at the primaries. The magnitude of this effect at the individual level was only slightly smaller than the effect of attitudes towards the size of government, where Romney lost votes to more radically small-government candidates. Perhaps just as importantly, people who believe Barack Obama is a Muslim were

considerably less likely to vote for Romney, indicating he may have suffered from a generalized distrust of perceived religious outsiders.

Fourth, aversion to voting for Mormons plays an important role in creating doubts among conservatives about voting for Mitt Romney in the general election. Mormon-averse voters are significantly more likely to declare themselves undecided, not voting or voting for a third candidate in a contest between Romney and Obama. Indeed, aversion to Mormons—not Tea Party identification or conservative purity—is by far the most important factor dividing conservatives who say they will vote for Romney from conservatives who do not. While we can expect Romney to consolidate his support among conservatives as the election draws closer, this ambivalence about a Mormon candidate could create an enthusiasm gap that may be the difference in very close contests. Regardless of whether he wins or not, Mormonism certainly makes things more difficult for Romney.

Anti-Mormonism may not be “the last acceptable prejudice”—far larger numbers of Americans quite happily say they would never vote for a Muslim or an Atheist—but this data suggests that it is still an acceptable, powerful, and politically important prejudice. If anything, its acceptability has increased in recent years as religious identity becomes more aligned with political choice.

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Appendix
Tables

TABLE 1: Percentages saying they would be less likely to vote for a Mormon candidate for President (\pm margin of error at 95% confidence)

	Pew sample 2007 (<i>N</i> = 2916)	ANES sample 2012 (<i>N</i> = 1234)
Whole sample	26.1 (1.8)	34.8 (2.7)
Evangelical Christians	36.8 (3.1)	33.6 (5.1)
Christians, not evangelical	20.9 (2.7)	27.1 (2.0)
Non-religious	21.2 (5.1)	40.9 (7.2)
Conservatives	29.6 (2.9)	31.6 (4.4)
Moderates	21.5 (3.0)	31.7 (5.1)
Liberals	27.6 (3.8)	42.7 (5.1)

TABLE 2: Percentages answering “yes” in response to the question “is Mormonism is a Christian religion?” (\pm margins of error at 95% confidence)

	2007 Pew sample (<i>N</i> = 2943)	2012 ANES sample (<i>N</i> = 1220)
Evangelicals	40.5 (3.1)	33.3 (4.9)
Non-evangelicals	57.2 (2.2)	53.8 (3.4)
Whole sample	51.5 (1.8)	47.1 (2.8)

TABLE 3: OLS coefficients on three-point measure of aversion to voting for Mormon candidates

	2007 Pew sample		2012 ANES sample	
	Coefficient	$P > z $	Coefficient	$P > z $
Belief Mormons are Christians	-.256	.000	-.285	.000
Evangelical support scale	.089	.028	.263	.000
“Christianist” scale	.060	.189	.051	.220
Belief Mormons are Christians*Christianism	-.034	.136	-.010	.552
Evangelical support scale*Christianism	-.025	.218	-.011	.299
Ethnocentrism	.169	.000	.233	.000
Evangelical	.089	.033	.139	.000
Respondent knows Mormons	-.025	.445	-.051	.037
Ideology scale (7 point)	-.003	.877	-.024	.046
Education level	-.007	.449	-.044	.019
White	-.037	.398	-.057	.195
Male	.007	.832	-.037	.294
Age	.001	.436	-.001	.282
Constant	2.12	.000	2.03	.000
N	1531		1178	
R^2	.118		.279	

TABLE 4: Means and 95% confidence intervals for stereotype attributes of different groups

	Patriotic		Lazy		Violent	
	Mean	95% CI	Mean	95% CI	Mean	95% CI
Mormon	3.14	3.07-3.21	4.38	4.33-4.43	4.43	4.38-4.48
White	2.54	2.47-2.60	4.14	4.09-4.20	3.93	3.88-3.99
Black	3.12	3.06-3.18	3.77	3.71-3.84	3.52	3.45-3.60
Hispanic	3.35	3.29-3.42	4.18	4.12-4.23	3.74	3.67-3.81

TABLE 5: Multivariate regressions on 100-point Romney feeling thermometer

	Model 1			Model 2		
	Coeff.	$P > z $	\pm SD	Coeff.	$P > z $	\pm SD
Mormon rating	.35	.000	8.75	-	-	-
Mormons Christians	-	-	-	1.75	.328	-
Mormons patriotic	-	-	-	-2.69	.001	-3.25
Mormons lazy	-	-	-	-1.11	.369	-.097
Mormons violent	-	-	-	3.42	.006	3.01
Know Mormons	-	-	-	2.25	.082	1.56
Party ID (Rep.>Dem.)	2.38	.000	4.93	2.29	.000	4.74
Ideology (Con.>Lib.)	3.73	.000	6.45	3.74	.000	6.47
Evangelical	.57	.745	-	.42	.825	-
Income	.27	.159	1.21	.34	.097	1.53
White	3.38	.086	-	3.18	.145	-
Male	-1.09	.475	-	-.83	.618	-
Age	.09	.067	1.48	.11	.042	1.80
Constant	-5.70	.191	-	7.39	.275	-
R^2	.348			.255		
N	1205			1178		

TABLE 6: Logistic regression results, likelihood of voting for Romney in GOP primary

	Coeff.	$P > z $	Pr $\Delta \pm$ SD or 0 \rightarrow 1
Mormon rating	.016	.017	.073
Wants less gov. scale	-.223	.011	.090
Obama is Muslim	-.802	.011	-.157
Listens to Limbaugh	-.782	.044	-.154
Racial resentment	.168	.037	.058
Constant	-.584	.682	-
R^2	.112		
N	429		

Not significant at any level: ethnocentrism, ideology, party ID, tea party support, R believes Mormons are Christians, evangelicalism, Christianity, knowing Mormons, race, sex, age, education level, political knowledge, income, support for birth control mandate, watching Fox News.

TABLE 7: Planned vote shares as percentages (\pm margin of error at 95% confidence)

	More likely to vote for a Mormon or no difference (845)	Less likely or much less likely to vote for a Mormon (400)
Obama	38.3 (3.3)	44.7 (4.9)
Romney	34.0 (3.2)	17.3 (3.7)
Neither (undecided, not voting or voting for another)	27.6 (3.0)	38.1 (4.8)

TABLE 8: Relative magnitudes of effects from meaningful changes in IVs on stated vote choice in Obama/Romney contest

	Whole sample	Conservatives	Swing states
	+1 SD increase on less likely to vote for a Mormon scale		
PR Obama	.01	.00	-.06
PR Romney	-.08	-.14	-.11
PR neither	.07	.14	.17
	+1 SD change on party ID scale (more Republican)		
PR Obama	-.21	-.01	-.34
PR Romney	.15	.07	.23
PR neither	.06	.06	.11
	+1 SD change on ideology scale (more conservative)		
PR Obama	-.21	-	-.20
PR Romney	.19	-	.21
PR neither	.02	-	-.01
	+1 SD change in support for Tea Party (more supportive)		
PR Obama	-.22	-.01	-.40
PR Romney	.12	.07	.15
PR neither	.11	-.06	.25
	Response that Obama is Muslim		
PR Obama	-.24	-.01	-.22
PR Romney	.11	.01	.07
PR neither	.13	.00	.14

TABLE 9: Multinomial logit results for likelihood of voting for Obama, Romney or neither; base is Romney

	Whole sample (1098)		Conservatives (440)		Swing states (332)	
	Intended Obama vote					
	Coeff.	P> z̄	Coeff.	P> z̄	Coeff.	P> z̄
Mormon rating	-.01	.546	.01	.436	.01	.772
Less likely to vote for Mormon	.44	.096	.40	.363	.25	.593
Ethnocentrism	-.39	.071	-.02	.960	-.57	.180
Party ID	-.63	.000	.51	.024	1.05	.000
Ideology	-.84	.000	-	-	-.95	.000
Tea Party support	-.71	.000	1.73	.000	-1.30	.001
Mormons are Christians	.50	.150	.92	.176	1.13	.144
Evangelical	.52	.262	1.22	.050	1.95	.057
R knows Mormons	-.59	.022	-2.47	.001	-1.55	.006
White	-1.66	.000	-1.78	.013	-.06	.933
Male	.20	.547	1.39	.068	.33	.568
Age	-.01	.426	-.01	.596	-.01	.725
Political knowledge	.15	.289	-.27	.278	.27	.339
Education	.15	.409	-.15	.692	.17	.664
Income	-.03	.564	.02	.808	.11	.292
Opposition to birth control mandate	-.24	.018	-.21	.238	-.72	.002
Wants less government	-.22	.031	-.69	.001	-.03	.882
Obama is a Muslim	-1.51	.000	-2.19	.008	-1.27	.050
Watches Fox News	.18	.615	.13	.829	1.27	.075
Listens to Rush Limbaugh	-.27	.691	1.46	.294	-.58	.652
Racial resentment scale	-.12	.123	.25	.097	.23	.147

Constant	-.52	.797	-8.31	.019	-7.43	.082
	Neither (undecided, not voting or voting for other)					
	Coeff.	P> z	Coeff.	P> z	Coeff.	P> z
Mormon rating	.01	.270	-.01	.123	-.02	.131
Less likely to vote for Mormon	.59	.000	.98	.001	.81	.015
Ethnocentrism	-.19	.187	.03	.940	-.20	.494
Party ID	-.20	.015	.207	.140	.35	.031
Ideology	-.36	.001	-	-	-.54	.004
Tea Party support	.10	.313	.22	.070	.08	.726
Mormons are Christians	-.19	.452	.01	.981	-.52	.378
Evangelical	-.03	.919	-.12	.797	.45	.51
R knows Mormons	-.15	.402	-.10	.682	-.06	.857
White	-.51	.153	-.39	.521	.95	.151
Male	-.14	.531	-.07	.823	-.05	.901
Age	-.01	.218	-.01	.502	.01	.464
Political knowledge	.17	.090	-.04	.761	-.15	.431
Education	-.09	.482	.21	.214	-.01	.982
Income	-.06	.095	-.08	.112	-.02	.816
Support for birth control mandate	.10	.131	-.03	.735	.11	.426
Wants less government	-.07	.345	-.01	.920	-.17	.265
Obama is a Muslim	-.10	.661	-.02	.944	-.00	.999
Watches Fox News	-.35	.139	-.29	.350	.04	.932
Listens to Rush Limbaugh	-.27	.462	-.22	.619	-.17	.843
Racial resentment scale	.01	.953	-.03	.703	-.00	.991
Constant	1.46	.269	-3.17	.104	-.84	.745

FIGURES

FIGURE 1

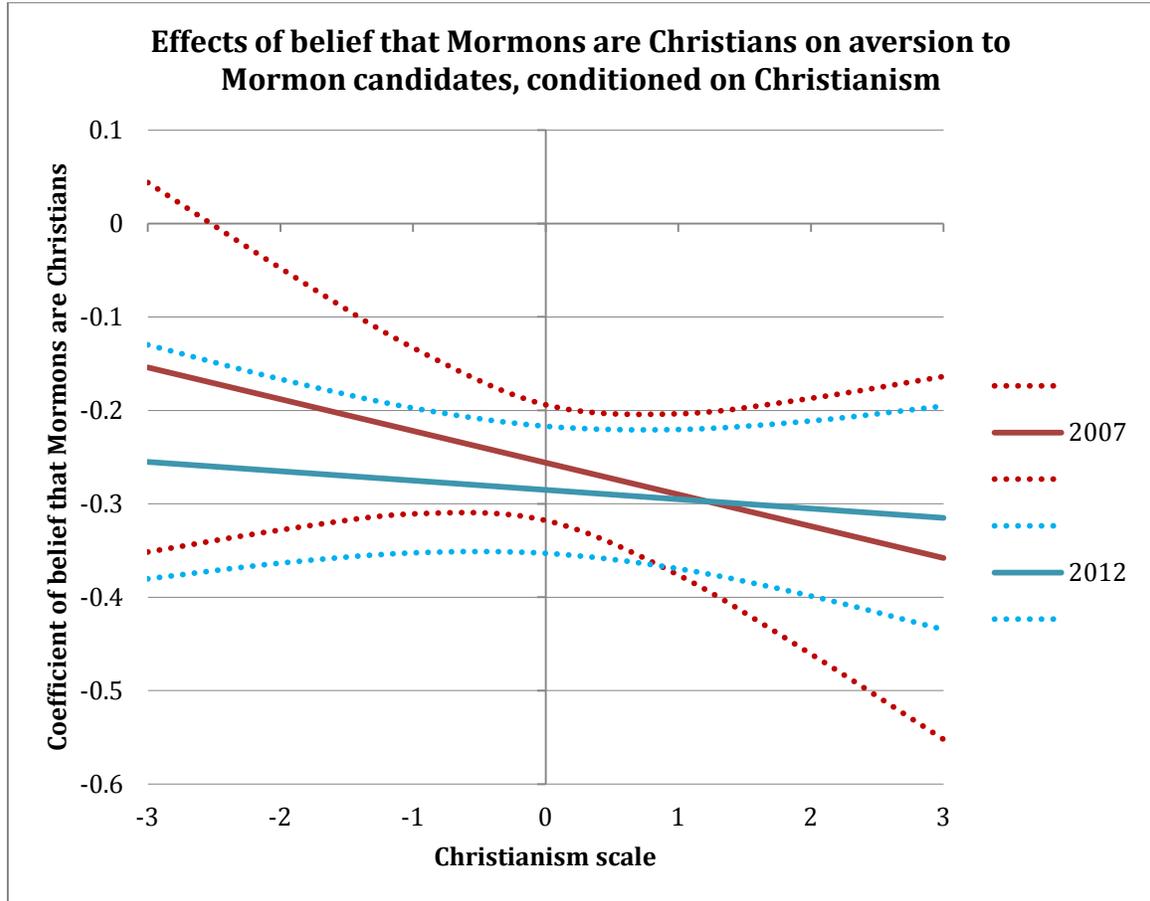


FIGURE 2

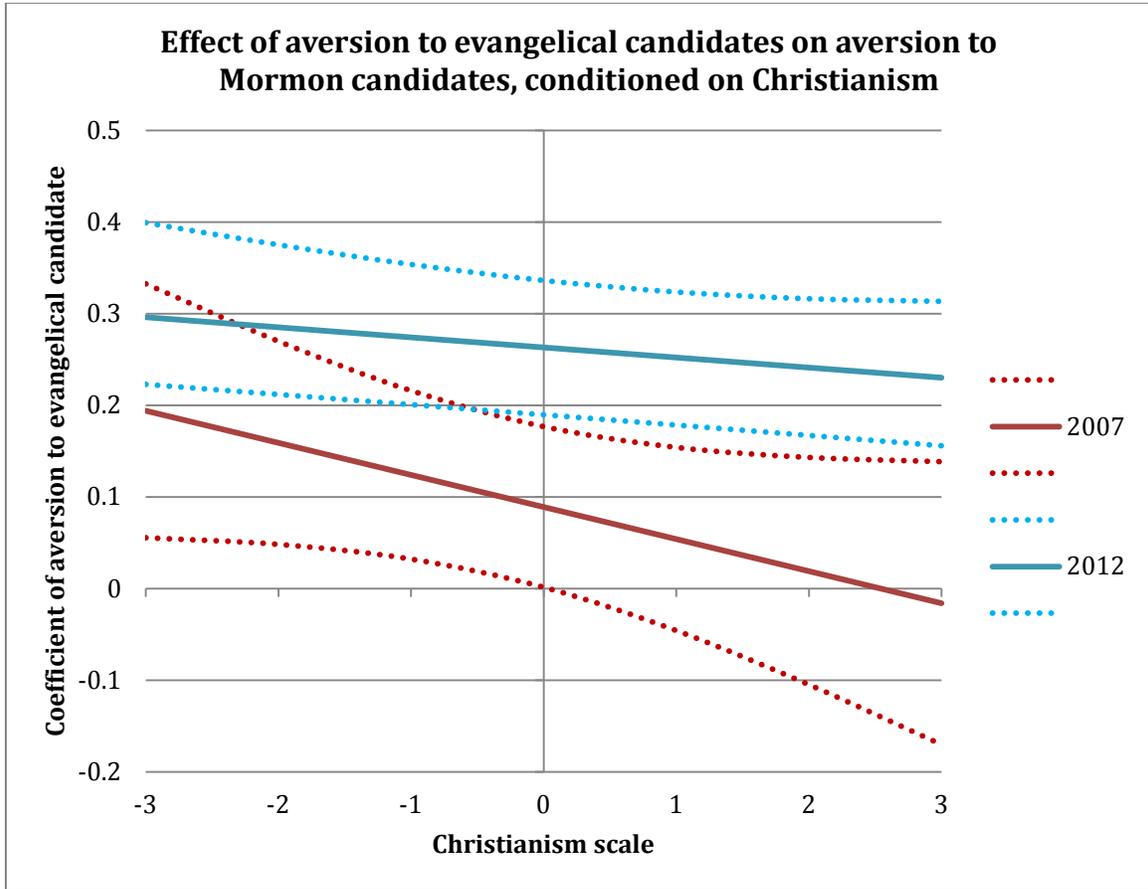


FIGURE 3: Distribution of answers to Romney feeling thermometer

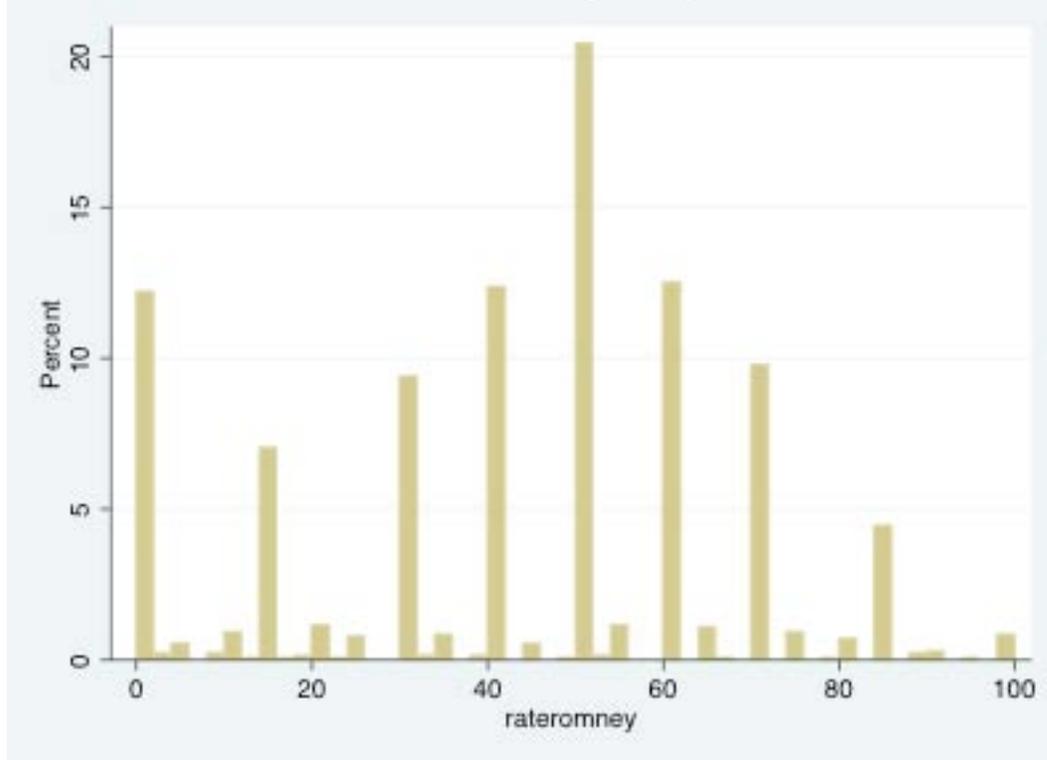


FIGURE 4: Distribution of answers to Mormon feeling thermometer

