

IAF SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SYMPOSIUM (E1)
Calling Planet Earth - Space Outreach to the General Public (6)

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WHAT DOES GOD NEED WITH A STARSHIP? EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS AND SUPPORT FOR
OUTER SPACE EXPLORATION.

Abstract

Despite anecdotal evidence of the growing interest of the American people for outer space exploration, the role of religion in forming opinions and influencing behaviors in this area remains greatly unexplored. This paper seeks to investigate this nexus by modelling the statistical effects of religion on the level of interest in space exploration and commitment to both space politics and industry. By acknowledging religion, and especially Christianity, as a fundamental social institution for generating political support in the US, our work wish to prompt policymakers to look at more efficient ways to reach out to religious individuals thereby reducing opposition and generate new opportunities for outer space funding. Using data from several waves of GSS and the Pew's American Trends Panel, we constructed an index of "Space Policy Support" as a continuous variable accounting the combined effects of personal views (for example knowledge about and interest in space exploration), concrete policy outcomes (for example funding), and expectations (for example about Mars colonization and Private Space Industry). Religion, the key predictor, is operationalized as to encompass conventional measures of belonging (denominational membership), behavior (attendance), beliefs (biblical literalism), and level of salience. Controlling for robust socio-demographic variables, such as for example race, gender, income, education, and scientific knowledge, our findings show a statistically significant difference between evangelical Christians and members of other denominations, including non-religious, in opinions and attitudes regarding space exploration and space policy. For example, despite scoring high levels of agreement with general concepts of "US space supremacy" or "national and industrial interest," evangelicals are shown as the least interested and supportive of funding space exploration. These differences can be explained in terms of increased religiosity and its connection with specific political views.