Investigating the Relationship Between Polling Building Type and Voting Results: A Study in Priming

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Voting is a quintessential part of Democratic beliefs: the right to have a say in the government and who runs the country has been an important part of our country since its founding. Equally essential is that each vote is solely the individual's who cast the ballot. However, priming could dangerously impact this freedom by influencing the decisions the voter makes without them even realizing it. Priming is the term used to describe when something in our surroundings makes us think about something we might not have otherwise. Different contexts can prime different ideas, for example, a church or religious image might encourage people to think or behave in a more religiously-consistent way, even without them realizing it. Therefore, if these are displayed in voting places, then these displays can evoke values that are often associated with certain political parties, thus influencing their likelihood to vote for one group rather than another. This study shows the correlation between voting location and likelihood to vote for either a Republican or Democratic candidate using Virginia's 2016 election data, Virginian religious demographic statistics and the titles of each polling location. Although there is no overall effect for voting in churches, we find that when controlling for the effect of population in a district, the more religious believers there are, the more likely people are to vote for Republican candidates in churches compared to outside of churches—particularly in low-population districts ($p = .02$).

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