

## Unificationists in the Voting Booth

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September 26, 2016



The 2016 presidential election is just six weeks away, and American Unificationists appear evenly split between the nominees of the two major political parties, with many believing they must decide between two highly imperfect choices. In a survey of 208 Unificationists I conducted in March, only 17% of respondents said Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump was their first choice.

Respondents were asked to rank their number one and two choices for the presidency from the five remaining major party candidates: Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders, Ted Cruz, John Kasich, and Donald Trump. The survey also included questions presenting respondents with general election hypotheticals.

Survey respondents were first procured by posting a message on the Facebook group “UC House and Travel Network,” a platform used by thousands of people around the world. I then had the help of pastors in major communities who made announcements and/or put a link to the survey in their community emails. Most respondents were from the East Coast, California and the Midwest.



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This survey is not a perfect sample of the voting Unificationist population, and it is important to keep in mind that much has happened since it was conducted. The survey, therefore, is best taken as a snapshot in time, while its predictive value for the general election is limited.

With this in mind, I will mainly focus on the questions about the primary elections. Every state has different rules about who can vote in a party primary, complicating any nationwide analysis. The purpose of the survey, however, was to gauge voters’ inclinations rather than how they would, or could, actually vote.

Fifty percent of respondents identified as Republicans, 25% as independents, 16% were Democrats, 8% had yet to register to vote, and less than 1% were registered with a third party.

Thirty-seven percent of respondents were 60 years and older, 30% were 18-25 years old, 23% were 26-39 years old (mostly under 30), and 11% were 40-59. More simply, the oldest and youngest voters were best represented, but this may parallel real world demographics in the church.

“Cultural” Unificationists comprised 25% of the sample. Cultural Unificationists answered affirmatively that they “value [their] friendships in the movement, generally support its ideals and attend some church events, but [are] skeptical of some of its core beliefs.” Sixty-six percent of respondents were religious Unificationists; they “believed in the significance of True Parents, the Blessing, and Unificationist texts.” Nine percent responded “neither,” most of whom indicated they were somewhere in between.

Clinton’s chief opponent in the Democratic primaries, Senator Bernie Sanders, was the first-choice for 28% of respondents, while Clinton was the favorite for 5% of respondents. On the Republican side, Trump was liked far less than either Senator Ted Cruz or Governor John Kasich; Cruz and Kasich each garnered the support of 18% of respondents, while 12% of respondents had Trump as their first choice. All other respondents were either undecided or named a third-party candidate as their first-choice. Libertarian Gary Johnson was the third-party candidate mentioned most often, followed by Green Party candidate Jill Stein.

Sanders garnered the most support because he was liked by 76% of Democrats and over one-third of the independents, as well as 5% of Republicans. Republican votes were split more evenly, and three ways instead of two, between Cruz, Kasich and Trump.

Sanders’s dominance among Democratic Unificationists may be explained by the fact that a significant portion of these voters were below the age of 30, and younger voters gravitated toward Sanders in larger

numbers than for Clinton in this year's primaries nationwide. Unificationists aged 60 and above, on the other hand, predominantly put their trust in Cruz or Kasich. These voters put the senator from Texas as their first choice most often (29% did so), followed by the governor of Ohio (26%). Trump earned 18% of that group's support, 12% were undecided, and 8% opted for Sanders.

Fifty-three percent of respondents who identified with the Unification Church in a more cultural, and less religious, sense opted for Sanders. He was followed in this category by Cruz and Kasich at 13% each, Trump (8%), undecided (8%), and lastly Clinton (6%).

Religious Unificationists favored Cruz most (21%), then Kasich (20%), undecided (18%), Sanders (18%), and Trump (15%), followed by Clinton and the combined votes for third parties at 4% each.

Why did these members choose as they did? In the realm of politics, where public servants disappoint and political parties represent changing coalitions of ideologies and interests, people must always negotiate their ideals with the real world decisions to be made.

It is in these thought processes that we can gain insight into what it means to be a member of the Unification Church in America, a nation where the church has an established tradition of activism and journalistic endeavors. And while the presidential ambitions of three of the above candidates are ended, at least for the time being, the motivations of those Unificationists who chose them reveal some aspect of their worldview, as well as their take on how the Unification Church should be engaged in civic life.

Considering that the Unification movement dedicated resources toward support of Republican politicians, such as presidents Nixon, Reagan and the Bushes, it will be surprising to some that 28% of the respondents favored Sanders, a democratic-socialist. These members felt that Sanders was the candidate with the most integrity and that he best aligned with their perspectives regarding issues like climate change and the economy. One respondent stated that "I think that America has declined... in terms of healthcare and education and that lowering taxes is not a viable plan to address those issues, nor is simply allowing for more 'competition'. Also, I trust Sanders' ambitions far more than I trust Clinton's given her apparent single-minded pursuit of the White House."



*The four major candidates in the 2016 Presidential Election: Hillary Clinton (Democratic), Donald Trump (Republican), Gary Johnson (Libertarian), and Jill Stein (Green).*

Some Sanders supporters made the case that Unificationist theology and thought is compatible with democratic socialism. One such person quoted from the *Divine Principle*:

“God’s plan is to develop a socialistic economy although with a form and content utterly different from the state socialism that communism actual established’ ... We need socialism centered on True Parents’ teachings of living for the sake of others. You do not build a God-centered polity by blindly electing a candidate who claims to be ‘Christian.’ ... These are no longer the days of the Red Scare. Sanders’s Democratic Socialism is not Mao’s Communism.” (p. 341)

Cruz voters felt that supporting family values, constitutionalism, and conservatism were important attributes in a candidate. Cruz voters gave much briefer responses. It was perhaps self-evident to them

that Cruz was the candidate who would align with conservative Unificationists in culture wars. One voter said that Cruz has “evangelical views... [is] pro-life... [in favor of] school choice, gun rights” and is against gay marriage as a federal mandate. Cruz voters were more likely to believe that Judeo-Christian culture should play a stronger role in politics than it does today:

“I am deeply concerned about the secularization of America. I feel that Christianity is under attack. I most want to see God brought back to our political discussions and make “In God We Trust” the reality it once was.”

Cruz supporters were more likely than Kasich supporters to put Trump as their second choice, but some expressed reservations about Trump. Emblematic of their thoughts was the sentiment that it could be “either Trump or Cruz. [But] Trump is a little too out there... too extreme... also Cruz is most aligned with my own beliefs.”

Kasich supporters most appreciated his relative moderation, that he was a “conservative with independent appeal.” These voters generally felt that Kasich was the best candidate to strike a balance between personality types and ideological persuasions. One said that he “seems like a happy medium between Cruz and Trump, and seems like an overall better politician and potential leader than either Democrat candidate,” and another asserted Kasich “is willing to work with the other side in order to make a deal but won’t compromise his beliefs. Never engaged in negative campaigning and refused to give in to it. Won’t further divide the country like Trump or Cruz.”

In regards to Clinton and Trump, it is perhaps most important to see through the eyes of their supporters because of their candidates’ historic levels of unfavorable ratings. “*How on earth* could a sane, conscientious, and informed voter support Trump and/or Clinton?” — this is a common refrain today. But to think this way is to deprive ourselves of an opportunity to grow our hearts by understanding the motivations of another. It also encloses us into an intellectual and social bubble that prevents us from being part of common sense, compromise-based solutions. Patronizing and feeble attempts at understanding will not do. One can superficially describe the motivations of a voting bloc while still reducing them to a caricature such as the red-faced and racist Trump supporter or the “social justice warrior” and welfare-dependent Clinton supporter.

When presented with a choice between Clinton and Trump, 35% of respondents opted for Clinton, with 35% going for Trump — a dead heat. The rest were either unsure (14%), voting for a third-party candidate (8%), or had decided not to vote (8%).

Unificationists for Trump are tired of politicians who offer a silken gloved hand to you while keeping a bared fist behind their back. Politicians who engage in double-speak are found in both parties, and so are those who are disproportionately beholden to special interest groups. Distrust in our politicians and public institutions is a central issue that affects all others. Unificationist Trump supporters believe him to be the kind of out-of-the-box candidate that can bring out-of-the box action to Washington and shake things up:

“He is not a politician and is straight-talking”; “There is no second choice. All other candidates are owned by special interests”; “Political divide between Dem & Rep is too entrenched. Trump can breach the divide”; “Trump is a last choice option who may have fidelity to liberty, government scale-back, rule of law”; “Hope for America. Is honest. I feel he could be the kind of person to understand Father’s [Sun Myung Moon’s] vision.”

Clinton is quite the foil to Trump, and vice versa, in both style and what they represent. Trump can note that Clinton is a veiled and carefully-scripted political insider, but the former Secretary of State and U.S. senator’s governmental experience can be an asset because the demands of political life and diplomacy are often different from those in the world of business. Unificationists for Clinton suggest the election of the first female president would be a positive hallmark in this nation’s history. Such a victory would be a tangible symbol that the “Age of Women” that True Parents have proclaimed is upon us. Unificationists for Clinton believe her less confrontational style, and ability to thoughtfully listen, will also make her a better negotiator with foreign leaders:

[She] “is female, has more experience with underprivileged groups, knows how to listen and how to talk”; “can help the process of breaking the glass ceiling, has experience in getting things done in Washington, therefore able to gather more support for her agenda, criminal justice reform, preschool for all”; “Has the most experience and is the most qualified person to run this country”; “[She is] compassionate, thoughtful.”

These quotes from Trump and Clinton supporters are not comprehensive cases for their candidates because the respondents were not asked to go into detail. Many counterpoints can be given to them. But my concern is not to change anyone’s vote. Whether Trump, Clinton, or another candidate is elected, many Unificationists will be deeply worried, perhaps even angry. This is why what I care most about is what happens *after* Election Day.

The United States is a microcosm of the world and the American Unification Church is somewhat of a microcosm of this nation. We hope our communities can embody what we hope our nation to become. If we wish for the American people to come together, our own people must exhibit bipartisan thinking and action. Respecting the basic reasoning of our brothers and sisters is an essential part of loving and living together, and it is my belief that on the whole we are quite good at maintaining civility. But perhaps not always.

To conclude, I draw upon the insight of one of the respondents to the survey:

“[The] politics of today are shameful and need to be entirely changed. We openly despised our President, mock him and spread lies about him. When we do that we hurt ourselves as a country and do not help our President to possibly do a better job... We, at the core, have to change the way we behave if we want the world to change. I don't want a Democrat or a Republican for President, I want a Congress with true ethics that will support and work with the President to make our nation great by making us, Americans, behave better every day of our lives.”

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