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Religion's Impact in Foreign Policy

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“WHEN GOD COMES IN, COMMUNISM HAS TO GO”

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RESEARCH QUESTION

How did religion impact foreign policy during the Cold War period?

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

The Cold War, an extremely hostile exchange that spanned over twenty years but had limited bloodshed, has been called a “religious war”. Looking further into why this two-decade war was given a theological name, I was interested to see how religion impacted the Cold War foreign policies. Foreign policy was ultimately altered by domestic attitudes. My research then encompassed presidents’ rhetoric during inaugural addresses and church membership, comparing both data sets to what foreign policy decisions were being made 1945-1989.

THEORY: I theorized that church membership would decline during the Cold War after its peak in the early 1950’s. I believed the inverse to be true concerning presidents’ rhetoric in their inaugural addresses, the number of times religion or words pertaining to religion would increase during the span of the Cold War. Each time a sentence contained phrasing or words that qualified as pertaining to religion, it counted as a one. The percentage of Americans attending church membership was how the other set of data was measured. I theorize that as presidents’ rhetoric increased and church membership decreased, foreign policy will be less invasive.

H₁: As church membership decreased, invasive foreign policy decreased.

H₂: Presidents’ religious rhetoric impacted foreign policy.

H₀: Church membership and religious rhetoric did not correlate to change in foreign policy.

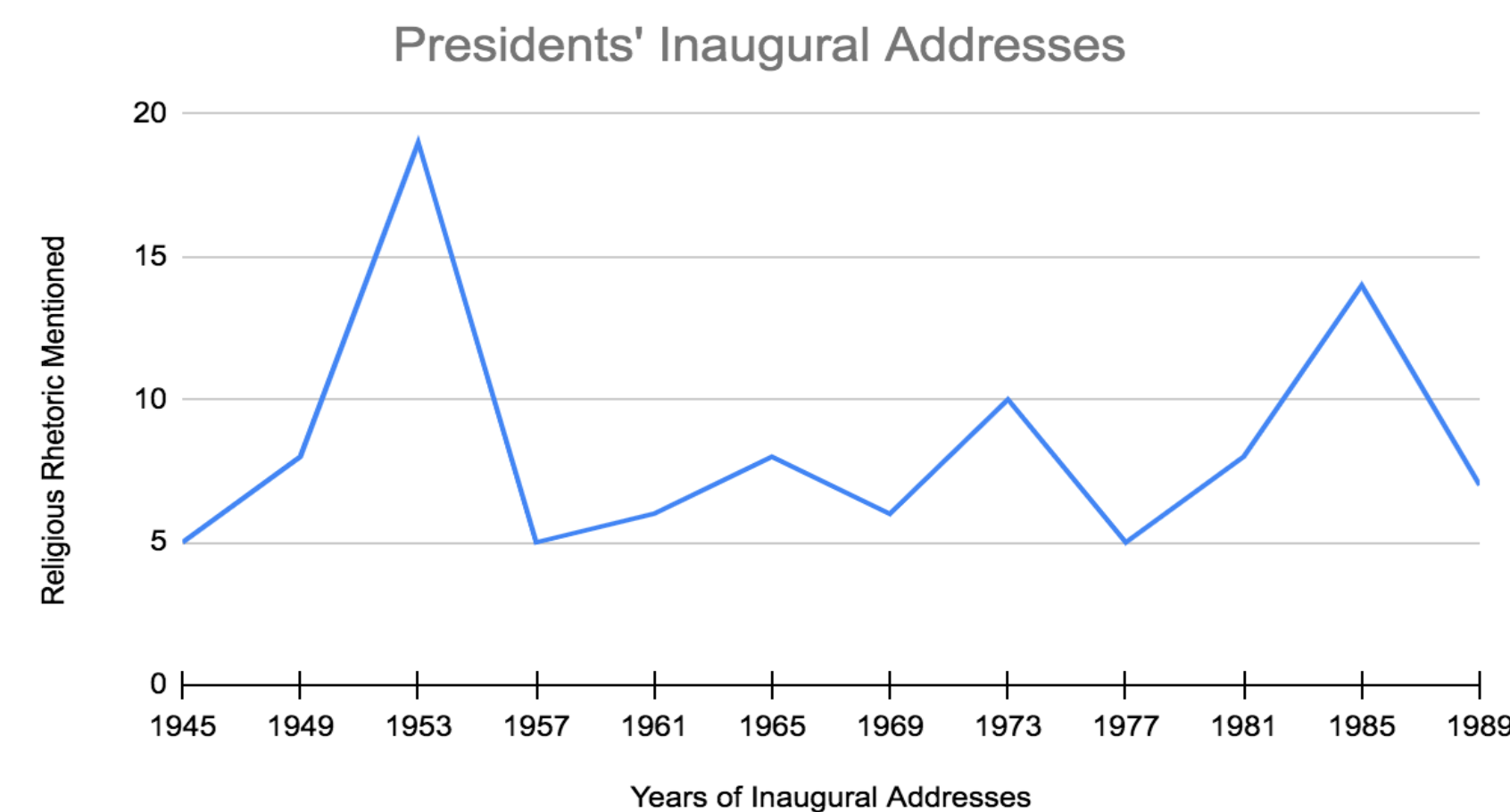
METHODOLOGY AND DATA

PROPOSED METHOD: I propose carrying out empirical analyses of presidents’ religious rhetoric in their inaugural addresses through 1945 to 1989. Simultaneously, I will complete an analyses of church membership in the United States within the same time period. By looking at both empirical analyses, I will compare them to the foreign policy being implemented during the Cold War.

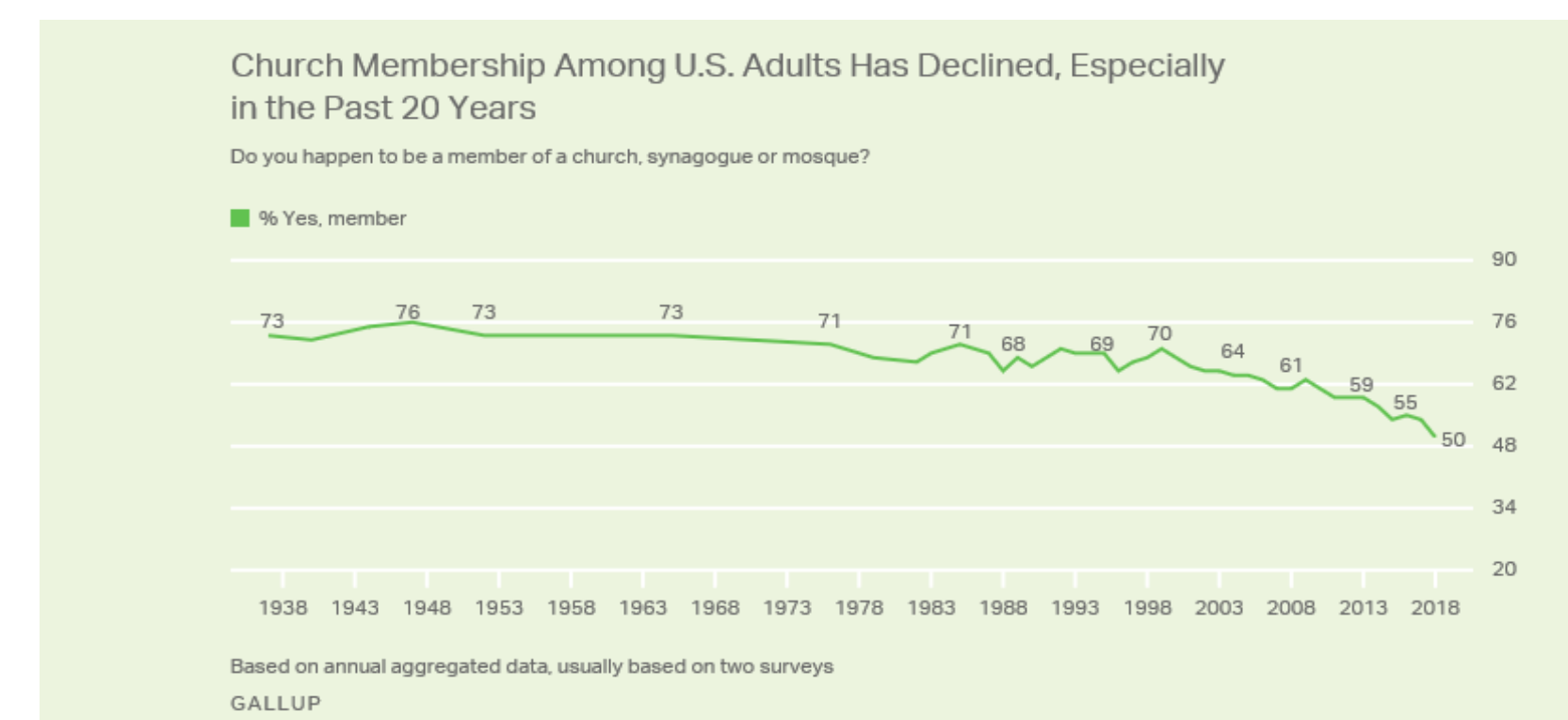
INITIAL DATA: The Dependent Variable is “Cold War Years”; the key Independent Variables are “Religious Rhetoric in Inaugural Addresses” and “Church Membership.”

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

RELIGIOUS RHETORIC MENTIONED IN INAUGURAL ADDRESSES:



CHURCH MEMBERSHIP:



ANTICIPATED FINDINGS & LIMITATIONS

In my comparative analysis, I observed from my two graphs and the timeline of the Cold War that presidents’ religious rhetoric correlated with foreign policy movements during the period studied. In years that there were ten or mentions of religion, there were serious historical moments. For example, in 1953 was the most mentions of religious rhetoric in an inaugural address, and during that year was the Nuclear Arms Race atomic test series of 11 explosions, as well as a report on the “Vulnerability of U.S. Strategic Air Power”.

Moreover, during this year also was the peak of church membership within the United States. I notice in my findings, that as foreign policy relations with the Soviet Union worsened, religious rhetoric increased to create a unified front.

The biggest limitation of my research would be the small data set of the inaugural addresses. Ultimately, these findings should contribute to further research discerning religion’s role in foreign policy and public opinion.

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