



Investigating the Role of Religiosity in Adolescents' Civic Engagement

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Introduction

Research has demonstrated that religion serves as a factor in promoting positive behavioral and health outcomes in American youth (e.g. Smith, 2003; NSYR, 2003). There is less evidence about its relation to civic engagement. Religious participation appears to promote community service because churches provide service opportunities and religious youth adopt a religious rationale for service (Youniss et al., 1999). Less is known about how religiosity relates to political engagement. Recent research also points to a decline in religious attendance among adolescents (Hardie et al., 2013). This project investigates the place of religion in the lives of high school seniors and the relationship between religiosity and civic engagement using survey and interview data from the Stanford Center on Adolescence Civic Purpose study.

Research Questions

1. To what extent are religion and/or spirituality central in the lives of adolescents today?
2. How does religiosity relate to youth's civic engagement - specifically political activities, community service and future civic intentions?
3. How does religiosity influence the political and social views of religious youth?

Hypotheses

Religiosity

1. For most youth, religious life as a goal will be less important compared to other life goals.
2. Religious group activities will be less frequently attended for most youth, but regularly attended by a minority of youth.

Civic Engagement

3. Religiosity will be positively related to community service, political activity and future civic intentions.

Sample

- Public high school seniors from seven high schools in the Bay Area, Central Valley and Southern California
- $N = 1,578$
- Mean age = 17.36 ($sd = .44$)
- 52% female
- 16% born outside the USA
- 68% parent(s) born outside the USA
- 46% Latino, 26% Asian, 10% Mixed, 7% Other, 6% White, 5% Black

Measures

Religiosity measured through three separate items

1. Religious life as a meaningful goal: how meaningful is “devoting attention to my religious or spiritual life” as a goal on a five-point scale from “Not at all meaningful” to “Extremely meaningful” (Youth Purpose scale, Bundick et al., 2006).
2. Religious participation: Indicate frequency of participation in religious organizations since high school on a four-point scale from “Never” to “Regularly” (Youth Inventory of Involvement, Pancer et al., 2007).
3. Religious identity: Rate how central religion is to one's identity on a four-point scale from “Not at all central” to “Very central” (Civic Identity Scale, Colby et al., 2007).

Civic engagement measured through Youth Inventory of Involvement (Pancer et al., 2007), items rated on a four-point scale of participation frequency

1. Political activity: Composite score of six items, e.g. “Ran for a position in student government”, $\alpha = .73$
2. Community service: Composite score of five items, e.g. “Volunteered with a community service organization”, $\alpha = .84$
3. Future civic intention: Composite score of five items, e.g. “Making improvements in the community”, $\alpha = .79$

Interview protocol consisted of semi-structured questions that asked participants about their civic engagement, what mattered to them, their attitudes and concerns about community and society, and their views on America, citizenship and democracy.

Methods and Analysis

Survey data: Descriptive statistics and multivariate regression that controlled for sociodemographic variables

Semi-structured interviews: Open coding of interviews where youth discussed how religion related to their civic views and involvement (8 out of 59 interviews).

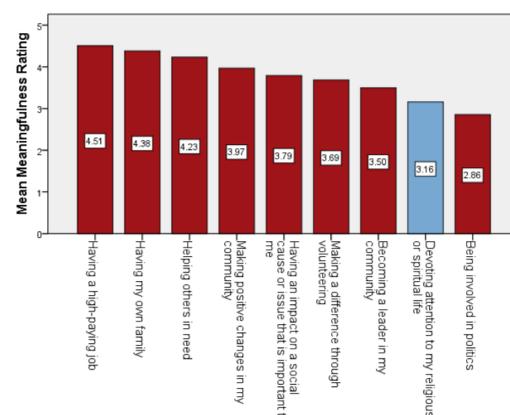
Coding scheme: Influence of religion on political views; political involvement; community service; importance of religious community; and moral development

Multivariate Regression

Predictors	Political activity $\beta/(s.e.)$	Community service $\beta/(s.e.)$	Civic Intention $\beta/(s.e.)$
Ethnicity			
Fixed effects			
Schools			
Fixed Effects			
US born	.06 (.04)	.14**(.05)	.07(.05)
Father immigrant	.09 (.05)	.01(.06)	.15**(.06)
Mother immigrant	-.05(.05)	-.03(.06)	-.03(.05)
Mother Ed	-.02 (.01)	-.03*(.01)	-.03*(.01)
Female	.11***(.03)	.31***(.04)	.21***(.04)
Peer Involvement	.23***(.02)	.31***(.02)	.26***(.02)
Parent Involvement	.05*(.02)	.06*(.03)	.08**(.02)
Religious life as a goal	.01(.02)	.03(.02)	.23***(.02)
Religious participation	.08***(.02)	.09***(.02)	-.01(.02)
Religious identity	-.02(.02)	-.03(.03)	-.11***(.03)
R ²	.24	.31	.29
N	1356	1361	1377

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Rating of Life Goals



Primary Findings

Survey Data

Place of Religion in Adolescents' lives

1. “Devoting attention to religious life” was not a primary life goal for most youth. It received low ratings compared to other life goals.
2. More than half of the participants (58.2%) had never participated in religious group activities since starting high school. A small percentage (12.9%) participated regularly.

Religiosity and Civic Engagement

1. Religious participation was positively related to political activity ($\beta = .08, p < 0.001$) and community service ($\beta = .09, p < 0.001$).
2. Religious life as a goal was positively related to future civic intentions ($\beta = .23, p < 0.001$), while religious identity was negatively related to future civic intentions ($\beta = -.11, p < 0.001$).

Interview Data

Political Views

1. While some religious youth acknowledge that religious beliefs influence their views on social issues (e.g. abortion) and choice of political representatives, others think that state and religion should be separated.
2. Religious beliefs promote a sense of citizenship and social responsibility that involves taking care of others and doing good deeds.

Civic Engagement

1. Religious beliefs are key components of moral compass and self-identity.
2. Religious beliefs motivate youths to contribute to their causes and their communities.
3. Religious communities provide opportunities to serve and empower others, and encourage civic engagement.

Discussion & Future Directions

Religiosity is very important to a minority of youth. Different aspects of religiosity have different associations with civic engagement. Religious participation has a modest positive relationship with political activities and service, while a religious identity was negatively related to civic intentions. Whereas these results point to the importance of the resources, skills and opportunities provided by religious institutions and communities to youth (Smidt, 1999; Youniss et al., 1999), they also suggest that a religious identity alone does not promote civic behavior. Further study on religious identity and its relation to civic engagement is needed.