

RELIGIOUS & POLITICAL LANDSCAPE AMONG
COLLEGE STUDENTS

By

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Abstract: Americans are largely religious, therefore, religion does have an effect on American politics. In addition, research shows that there is an overall lack of academic research studying college students. This thesis aims to discover if a connection exists between Protestant Christianity and political preferences and participation among college students. A quantitative survey analysis was conducted with 125 respondents. Participants completed an electronic survey questionnaire comprised of questions that asked about their personal religiosity and political preferences. The data was analyzed to see if a connection exists between Protestant Christianity and political preferences and participation. The data supports the advancement of mass communication theories, specifically the top-down / bottom-up theory of political attitude formation. This thesis hopes to add value to academic research concerning college students, religion and politics.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Americans are largely religious, therefore, religion does have an effect on American politics. In the United State of America, democracy is a key identifier and governmental practice. In addition, the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States of America prevents the government from making laws that respect an establishment of religion or prohibit the free exercise of religion. Citizens of America have the right to practice religion, vote on matters of state and to elect public officials, and because of this, American citizens will often cast their political votes while being influenced by their own religious beliefs and principles.

Research shows how the United States boasts one of the most religious populations internationally, with 95% of Americans professing belief in God (Perry, 1996). In addition, 70% of American adults are members of a church of synagogue, and 40% attend church weekly (Perry, 1996). More recently, Pew Research studies show that 70.6% of surveyed Americans identify with the Christian faith, with 47% of Christians attending religious services at least once weekly (Pew Research, 2015).

While it can be complex with many separate denominations and specific viewpoints, overall, Christianity focuses on and is centered around Jesus Christ (Britannica, 2011). Scholars

note that the essence of Christianity is in both the faith tradition, addressing the historical figure of Jesus Christ against the background of and while remaining faithful to one God (Britannica, 2011). Out of the thousands of churches and denominations, a large majority of Christians identify as Protestant Christians. Overall, the term Protestant is a general term referring to Christian churches that are not Roman or Old Catholic, or Eastern or Oriental Orthodox (Britannica, 2011).

Specifically looking at Protestant Christians, who account for a large number of religious Americans, research shows that the Christian Bible is the main source that political stances and views are centered around (De Koster & Van der Waal, 2007). When it comes to social issues like life and death, sexuality, and gender relations, Protestant Christians tend to be considered conservative and traditional (De Koster & Van der Waal, 2007). Even though Protestant Christians will vote based on their faith, their faith may lead them to vote in a way that is not typically conservative or traditional. Their faith and principles may also lead them to vote apart from the group. For example, in the Presidential Election of 2016, 81% of white, Evangelical Christians voted for Republican candidate Donald Trump, but there were large groups of Evangelical Christians who did not vote for Trump (Brooten, 2017). These groups claimed that “Mr. Trump’s racial and religious bigotry and treatment of women is morally unacceptable to us as Evangelical Christians, as we attempt to model Jesus’ command to ‘love your neighbor as yourself’” (Brooten, 2017).

Along with the importance of religion in American society, religion also plays an integral role in the collegiate experience. Time in college is viewed as a powerful force in the shaping of individuals because collegiate institutions feel they have a responsibility to the moral and

intellectual formation of students (Dalessandro, 2016, Lee, 2002, & Wolfe, 2006). One way that students engage and expand in their moral and intellectual formation is through the religious exposure and pluralism often present in higher education in the United States (Lee, 2002 & Bowman & Smedley, 2012). Religion plays a major factor in a quest for meaning. While there is a plethora of religious organizations on a college campus, students will reinforce their religious beliefs by getting involved with the religious groups on campus that share their same views and beliefs (Park & Bowman, 2015). Studies show that getting involved with peers who are like-minded and share the same religious views and attending religious services in college will strengthen personal beliefs and increase commitment to religion (Bowman & Small, 2011 & Lee, 2002). While collegiate religious environments cultivate bonding social capital and reinforce religion, it can also be associated with a more close-minded attitude of other viewpoints (Park & Bowman, 2015). Also, the introduction to new ideas and values in college has been shown to liberalize the views of students, with liberal views being strongly related to weaker religious belief and involvement (Lee, 2002). Thus, the different views being presented and reinforced in college can be viewed as a contributor to polarizing political opinions.

While research shows different characteristics of religious people and college students in America, researchers discuss how overall, the factor of religion has been neglected in higher education research (Lee, 2002). The presented literature focuses on how religious involvement impacts political participation. Due to the role that the collegiate experience plays in shaping individual values, the role of religious engagement in college deserves to be further explored.

This study explores the different methods of communication, specifically from the pulpit, the Bible, and through interactions with each other, that are utilized by Protestant Christians to

develop a political stance. This study provides insight into the different messages that could potentially have an impact on the voting behaviors and patterns of Protestant Christians.

This study adds value by providing understanding on how Christians incorporate their faith into their political behaviors. This study contributes to literature on how religion contributes to society by shaping political voting behaviors and opinions. Additionally, it sheds light on how religious participation in college contributes to political attitude formation.

Along with the presented evidence of religious impacts, mass communication theory serves as a framework for gathering relevant information. The top-down / bottom-up theory of political attitude formation states that ideological preferences are products of environmental conditions and internal pre-dispositions that motivate people to hold liberal or conservative policy preferences (Baran & Davis, 2009). This theory invites the idea that ideological preferences, for Christians, this would be doctrines of Christianity, have an impact on their political choices. For Protestant Christians, who account for a large number of religious Americans, their political stance and views are centered around the Christian Bible. Protestants are normally considered conservative and traditional when it comes to several social issues like gender relations, sexuality, and life and death (De Koster & Van der Waal, 2007). Baran and Davis state that political attitudes are a combination of social experiences, such as life experience and different news and political exposures, and genetic pathways, which exert influences on attitudes and behaviors over time (2009). It has been observed that liberal and conservative voters tend to process information differently, with conservatives making clear distinctions, making quick decisions and sticking to those decisions, and they are sensitive to group distinctions (Baran & Davis, 2009). Liberal voters

maintain complexity, like to deliberate on their decisions, and are more open to new ideas (Baran & Davis, 2009).

In correlation with the literature review and theoretical framework, hypotheses are developed on how religious involvement among college student affects political participation and opinion formation. Finally, we discuss the results of religious effects on political opinion and opportunities for further research throughout upcoming political elections.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Christianity in American History

The United States of America's foundation of democratic government is largely centered around religious principles, particularly of Judeo-Christian traditions. Religious values and rhetoric were heavily valued and emphasized by the nation's Founding Fathers, and they also relied on moral unity to be a starting point for diversity (Reichley, 1986). Beginning with the exploration and colonization that led to the start of the United States of America, Puritan colonists viewed America as their "promised land" (Bennett, 1975). Bennett notes

America was to be the final scene in which the people would be 'ruled by the Institutions, Laws, Directions of the Word of God, not only in Church-Government and Administrations, but also in the government and administration of all affairs in the Commonwealth. (p. 86)

Doctrines of Christianity can be observed in several elements of American government, which was the intention of many founders of the American government. Religious beliefs are found in doctrines, sacred stories, and writings. Themes about life meaning and values are evident

in these teachings (Corbett, Corbett-Hemeyer, & Wilson, 2014). Christian dogma and principles are woven into the foundation of the United States of America. “In God We Trust” and “One Nation Under God” are just a few of the many American traditional sayings that take mention of God and reflect Christianity (Corbett et al., 2014, & Gonzalez, 2012.). Along with religious indicators, there are also components that have been installed to ensure a separation of Church and State, resulting from previous religious oppression. Both church and state maintain their importance and interdependence, even though they are intended to remain separate. In keeping with the concept of Social Dualism, Bennett (1975) writes:

Religion and politics are in a state of balance where both are mutually controlling; the state seeks constant religious legitimation and protection for its actions while moral principles are introduced into action through politics. In short, each transcends the others weaknesses (p. 83)

The founders of the United States of America created a foundation of government that is heavily influenced by religion, while still keeping a separation of Church and State. The separation of church and political institutions, or disestablishment, is a feature of many modern societies. The main themes of disestablishment are that religion belongs to personal conscience, and neither belief or the lack thereof can be influenced by religious groups or government. Another theme of disestablishment is that while religious beliefs will inevitably influence political decisions, there should be no formal relationship between authorities of the church and of the government (Corbett et al., 2014). The struggle to harmonize a secular government with a religious population is still evident today. Questions about the relationship between church and

state often arise when religious values are imposed on non-religious people and when government interferes with different religious practices (Corbett et al., 2014).

Even with the notion that church and state can and must be kept separate, the two do share similarities; both religion and politics are concerned with the pursuit of values and maintaining an element of control in the lives of the people involved (Corbett et al., 2014). Even with attempts to keep church and state separate, religion plays a notable role in politics due to the large religious majority in America.

Religion & Societal Influence

Due to the inclusion of religious value and dogma in government, which creates an ever present consciousness of God in America, the concept of civil religion is often applied. Many Americans believe there is a religious dimension to the United States itself, evident through its creeds, such as the Pledge of Allegiance, hymns, such as the Star Spangled Banner, and traditions, such as opening government sessions with prayer (Corbett et al., 2014). With the obvious presence of religion in American life, churches have a vital social function in American society, which is to “breed and nurture the values out of which Democracy grows” (Reichley, 1986). Research suggests that religious culture where one lives can still influence even the non-religious (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009). Many religious leaders feel that if the church is passive to politics, it leads to the dominance of secular humanism, which goes against the teachings of the Church (Reichley, 1986).

Along with the ever present element of religion in American government, of the world’s democracies, the United States of America boasts one of the most religious populations. As

previously noted, studies show that 95% of Americans profess belief in God, and 70% of American adults are members of a church or synagogue. America is overwhelmingly religious while also being religiously pluralistic (Perry, 1996). Along with professing faith in God and joining local churches, 40% of the American population attends church weekly (Hadaway, Marler, & Chaves, 1993) at one of the 300,000 congregations in the United States (Greenberg, 2000). More recently, Pew Research studies show that 70.6% of surveyed Americans identify with the Christian faith, with 47% of Christians attending religious services at least once weekly (Pew Research, 2015). Within the religious population, a large number of religious Americans identify as Protestant Christians. Their political stances and views are largely centered around the Christian Bible, and are normally considered conservative and traditional when it comes to several social issues like gender relations, sexuality, and life and death (De Koster & Van der Waal, 2007). These views are reinforced with more frequent church attendance (Hess & Rueb, 2005). Religious conservatives seek to maintain traditional roles and values, or even return to the past values and behaviors of American Society, also known as social traditionalism. (Hess & Rueb, 2005, Layman & Carmines, 1997).

The prominence of civil religion and the church present a reminder that cultural values can unite while still creating division (Gonzalez, 2012). While the number of American Protestant Christians continues to grow, the number of those moving towards secularism in the United States of America has also grown, creating a cultural divide centered around religious lines. This divide has significant influence on American politics (Layman & Carmines, 1997). Conservatives typically operate off of a set of pre-given guidelines derived from their religious faith. This creates an increase of popularity for left-leaning parties, composed of secularists who lack the

aforementioned guidelines (De Koster & Van der Waal, 2007). Out of this divide between religious conservatives and secularists, an age of contestability has been created, where religion is of fading importance to one majority, while it is of increasing importance to the other, thus creating a political culture where religion is the center of debate (Horwitz, 2009). Political views in America have a clear division between individuals who are committed to their practice of religious beliefs, and those who have abandoned traditional religion in favor of modern views (Layman, 1997). Evidence supports the notion that those who remain religiously faithful continue to create a prominent political cleavage, and the continued division between religious and secular voters remain a best predictor of vote outcomes (Raymond, 2011).

Civic Involvement: A Byproduct of Religious Participation

The prominence of the religious voting cleavage is a culmination of many aspects of religious life. Institutional involvement and participation builds access to community and awareness and support for social justice (Lee, 2002). Most notably, participation builds social capital, or “the features of social life—networks, norms, and trust—that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives” (Greenberg, 2000). Along with the sense of community and social capital built within the church, participants also develop civic skills through different forms of group interaction.

First, congregations are encouraged to mobilize politically through the clergy and church leadership (Djupe & Gilbert, 2006). A central feature of Christian services is the sermon, or a vertical, or one-way communication from the pastor to the congregation. Religious leaders are overall focused on influence of behavior and the world views of their followers (Scheufele et al., 2003) so sermon focus is heavily centered around religious and spiritual content, but can also

contain political information (Jelen, 1992). Studies show that many congregation members approve of their pastors who take on a cue-giving role on political matters while preaching a sermon (Van Geest, 2007). Sermons or other religious teachings can become more psychologically engaging or politically significant when leaders make connections between political goals and Christian values and life practices, and encouraging political participation as a vital religious duty (Greenberg, 2000, Scheufele et al., 2003). Weekly service attendance has the potential to create more political significance, and further deepen the divide between religious and secular cleavages, through the reinforcement of political messaging, fostering a further connection between faith and politics (Hess & Rueb, 2005, Olson & Green, 2006, Raymond, 2011, Scheufele et al., 2003).

Along with influence from religious leaders, communication networks built within church congregations have the ability to increase political participation and action (Djupe & Gilbert, 2006). Research shows that discussions about politics within church groups are likely to reinforce the political information presented by the pastor or other religious communicators, and accelerate political involvement (Scheufele et al., 2003). Religious dedication produces values and beliefs through obedience to teachings, so groups that share the same religious beliefs are highly influential because they remain as an important point of reference for those involved (Hess & Rueb, 2005).

While discussing political information with fellow and like-minded citizens is of importance for the American voter, it can also lead to close mindedness when it comes to other sources of political information (Scheufele et al., 2003). Research shows that evangelical Protestants are more likely to hold to “greater levels of literal religious of doctrinal commitment,”

(p. 305) and are more likely to receive political cues and opinions from their religious groups and leaders. In turn, this makes them less likely to engage in diverse political conversation outside of their religious group, and they avoid sources with which they are prone to disagree with (Scheufele et al., 2003).

Throughout the religious institutional social network, leaders promote interest for the collective good of society and serve as important challenges to authority (Scheufele, Nisbet, & Brossard, 2003). The strengths of the social capital presented within church communities produce united, dedicated activists, voters and respected leaders, supplying action when political issues demand it (Green, 1995, Greenberg, 2000).

Political Participation

As previously stated, evidence supports the notion that those who remain religiously faithful continue to create a prominent political cleavage, and the continued division between religious and secular voters remain a best predictor of vote outcomes (Raymond, 2011). In American politics, history shows conservatives tend to vote with the Republican party. Those with high levels of religious commitment have become increasingly more likely to vote Republican, who lean consistently conservative, while citizens who favor secularism tend to vote with the Democratic Party, who is consistently liberal (Hess & Rueb, 2005, Layman, 1997, Layman, Carsey, & Horowitz, 2006, & Olson & Green, 2006). A key element in voting behavior of United States citizens has been loyalty to political parties, lending to high degrees of predictability in vote outcomes (Tuckel & Tejera, 1983).

Even though religious conservatives typically vote with the Republican party, they do not always vote for the Republican candidates. As previously stated, many religious conservatives did not vote for the Republican Candidate, Donald Trump, in the 2016 presidential election as normal (Brooten, 2017). They viewed Trump as a candidate that went against the teaching of the church for many reasons, including racist remarks and negative expressions towards women that went against the model of Christ (Brooten, 2017).

The instance of religious groups standing against Trump in the 2016 presidential election is just one example of inter-faith political disagreement. Research shows that just because religious groups tend to vote for conservative policy and with the Republican party, there are often differences of opinion between, and within, protestant denominations on certain issues and approaches to political involvement (Gonzalez, 2012 & Van Geest, 2007). One example of division comes from conservative evangelicals being more concerned with moral reforms, focusing on issues like pornography, abortion, divorce and gambling, while groups of mainline protestant churches emphasize social justice agendas, highlighting issues like global cooperation, poverty, peace and racism (Van Geest, 2007). Conflicts within religious populations can arise when theological and moral oppositions do not align, and when opinions differ on placing value on matters of importance.

While some particular groups of Christians do not have aligning agendas and views, and do not use their vote for the Republican party or certain conservative policies, overall, religion aims to shape political opinion by identifying clear stakes for individuals and also for groups, and provide information for the pursuit of group interest (Brooks, 2002). This adds to the notion that many citizens, especially those of religious affiliation, tend to vote in accordance with a standing

decision of group solidarity (Burnham, 1968). This is because Christians do not compartmentalize their faith when they vote, and they continue to hold their convictions and faith at the forefront of all decisions (Gonzalez, 2012). Gonzalez (2012) also states that

The religious right focuses much of its agenda on issues of sexuality, education, and family. There is a worldview where authentic Christian “American” values are being threatened by a humanist secular worldview. (p. 580)

Specifically looking at Protestant Christians, who account for large number of religious Americans, research shows that the Christian Bible is the main source that political stances and views are centered around (De Koster & Van der Waal, 2007). When it comes to social issues like life and death, sexuality, and gender relations, Protestant Christians tend to be considered conservative and traditional (De Koster & Van der Waal, 2007). The conservative stance is often accompanied with the desire to maintain traditional moral values in American society (Layman & Carmines, 1997). Research shows that religious groups will get involved in politics based on whether issues are perceived as moral or political, with 96% of American clergy saying they approved standing for moral political issues (Van Geest, 2007).

A main theme among religious conservatives is the association with social traditionalism, or the belief that society should return to past behaviors and values (Hess & Rueb, 2005).

Religious voters tend to display their longing for traditionalism and moral values when voting on “hot button” issues such as homosexuality and abortion rights. Research conducted in the United States shows that religious affiliation is one of the strongest predictors of homosexuality attitudes (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009). Religious denominations and groups differ in the extent to which they

condemn homosexuality, with conservative Protestants having the least accepting attitudes. (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009). Research shows that 75% of evangelical Christians support traditional marriages, only 12% support gay marriage, and 13% support civil unions. On gay rights issues in general, 45% of evangelical Christians are supportive and 40% are not, with most in evangelical leadership being against gay rights legislation (Van Geest, 2007). Like other matters of political participation, the frequency of church attendance also has an effect on opinions about homosexuality, with 82% of people who attend weekly church services opposing same-sex marriage (Rutchick, 2010). Along with research on homosexuality, research shows that religion directly influences opinions on abortion, which church doctrines heavily teaching the sanctity of life as beginning at conception (Hess & Rueb, 2005). Abortion opinions among religious peoples vary by denomination, with Protestant Christians being the most pro-life (Hout, 1999).

Due to the large role that religion plays in American society, the Church does have an impact on political outcomes. Religious tendencies and leanings can be seen in voting behaviors and opinions on different issues, but it can also be put on display through different political leaders.

Along with voting in group solidarity regarding certain moral issues and elections, religious Americans will also utilize their religious principles when choosing their leaders, with the notion that contemporary politics in the United States are heavily candidate-centered (Green, 1995). Overall, when assessing candidates for office, voting citizens consider many different qualities. Citizens look at the competence of the candidate, including his intellectual abilities and applicable experience, and they look at the character of the candidate, assessing their morals and integrity (Kaveny, 2012). Voters also look at the candidate's ability to collaborate and work with

others, and lastly, they look at their connections and affiliations, and how that may or may not impact their ability to perform (Kaveny, 2012). With these typical qualities the average voter looks for, the religious voter will vote for leaders who are like-minded and will propagate their own religious values (Green, 1995 & Gonzalez, 2012).

Along with several considerations that are made when electing leaders, there have been several notable American leaders who exhibit traits of Evangelical leadership. Evangelical leadership traits include that they identify as a Protestant Christian, they have had a personal conversion, the Bible is the sole authority for their faith and morals, and also that they have a sense of mission for Christ and a sense of personal holy living (Berggren & Rae, 2006). Throughout American history, several political leaders have exhibited Evangelical leadership traits, with some leaders applying the traits directly to their objectives in office. American Citizens expect political leaders to affirm and recognize Judeo-Christian values and the value of religion in general (Gonzalez, 2012).

Several candidates who have been elected to the office of President of the United States have identified with Evangelical Christianity (Gonzalez, 2012). Most notably, President Jimmy Carter was very open and candid about his faith. Carter mentioned his belief that Americans “have a responsibility to try to shape government so that it does exemplify the will of God.” (Berggren & Rae, 2006). Carter’s policies placed a heavy emphasis on human rights and conflict resolution, and he also strongly believed that American influence was best exerted through sharing American morality and commitment to freedom (Berggren & Rae, 2006).

Another prominent Evangelical leader was President George W. Bush. Bush won his second presidential term after a religion played a major role in the 2004 Presidential Election,

where weekly worship attendees comprised 42.8% of voters (Olson & Green, 2006). Bush claimed that his faith forms his general outlooks, and that his “compassionate conservative” approach to domestic issues is inspired and informed by his faith. At the time of his ascendency to President, many voters thought it was important for the President to be religious (Berggren & Rae, 2006).

Former President Dwight D. Eisenhower was also considered to be a religious political leader. He said “Our government makes no sense unless it is founded in a deeply religious faith... I am the most intensely religious man I know.” (Bennett, 1975). Former President Ronald Reagan recognized the importance of religion in America, stating that the awakening of religious America was important for keeping our cherished ideals (Reichley, 1986).

While it is known that most Evangelical Christians vote and identify with the Republican Party, President Barack Obama won the presidency as a religious Democrat. Obama identifies with the United Church of Christ, a Mainline Protestant denomination (Gonzalez, 2012). Obama acknowledged the power that faith had in the lives of American people, drawing from his own Christian conversion experience (Horwitz, 2009). At the Democratic National Convention in 2004, Obama famously said “We worship an awesome God in the blue states,” identifying a party often viewed as being secular as religious (Gonzalez, 2012).

It is evident throughout several facets of political participation that religion does in fact have an impact on voting attitudes and behaviors.

Faith and the College Student

Religious involvement and beliefs impact the everyday life of both religious and non-religious American voting citizens, including those at the college level. Initially, religion was held a prominent role in the lives of college students as colleges and universities were initially started as training grounds for members of the clergy (Allen, 2007 & Bowman & Smedley, 2013, Wolfe, 2006). In addition to the religious background of these institutions, higher education institutions greatly influence the behavior of emerging adults by promoting specific norms and values. Of these values and norms, inclusivity and open-mindedness are two of importance, with many students holding the belief that they should be able to go about their lives without having other beliefs imposed upon them (Dalessandro, 2016). In addition to promoting certain values, the collegiate experience provides the student with a sense of purpose and the ability to build community and connections with others, like-minded or not (Lee, 2002 & Magolda & Ebben, 2007).

College norms ultimately impact how students will communicate within their communities. Time in college is viewed as a powerful force in the shaping of individuals because collegiate institutions feel they have a responsibility to the moral and intellectual formation of students (Dalessandro, 2016, Lee, 2002, & Wolfe, 2006). Furthermore, a priority of most higher education institutions is to cultivate an environment where meaningful engagement can happen among students, with campus involvement being a leading factor in their personal development of values (Lee, 2002, & Park & Bowman, 2015).

One way that students engage and expand in their moral and intellectual formation is through the religious exposure and pluralism often present in higher education in the United States (Lee, 2002 & Bowman & Smedley, 2012). Bowman & Smedley state

Religious pluralism is characterized by the respect and celebration of diverse religious traditions, encouraging positive relationships among religious communities, and engaging in collaborative efforts for the common good (p. 746)

Research reflects the importance of religious engagement in college, with 80% of students stating that they discuss religion or spirituality with their friends, and 76% percent of student are looking for their purpose and meaning in life (Magolda & Ebben, 2007). Religion plays a major factor in a quest for meaning. While there is a plethora of religious organizations on a college campus, students will reinforce their religious beliefs by getting involved with the religious groups on campus that share their same views and beliefs (Park & Bowman, 2015). Studies show that getting involved with peers who are like-minded and share the same religious views and attending religious services in college will strengthen personal beliefs and increase their commitment to religion (Bowman & Small, 2011 & Lee, 2002). Additionally, studies reflect that students, both religious and secular, become more religiously active in college when they have religious friends (Small & Bowman, 2011).

In addition to reinforcing their religious values, students engage in religious activities in college for their own well-being. While some studies show that there is decreased involvement in religion among college students due to collegiate struggles (Dalessandro, 2016), it is also reported that many students participate with religious groups to help alleviate the strains associated with

coursework (Allen, 2007). Concerning Protestant religious groups on college campuses, students who belong to these religious subcultures flourish in their association with like-minded students on a religiously diverse campus (Small & Bowman, 2011). Furthermore, Protestant students are more satisfied with their collegiate experiences than those who are not affiliated with any religion, and engaging in religion is positively related to the mental health and well-being of the students who are involved (Bowman & Smedley, 2013). Studies report that unhappiness and poor emotional health is associated with those who report a weakening of their religious beliefs or who have no affiliation with religious groups in college, especially in relation to students involved in Protestant religious groups (Bowman & Smedley, 2013 & Lee, 2002).

While commitment to religion can be increased while in college, the introduction of and exposure to new ideas can also contribute to disaffiliation from religion (Lee, 2002). College campuses can often be viewed as institutions where “intellectualism skewers religious thought” (Allen, 2007). Lee (2002) notes:

Higher education tends to expand one’s horizons and may also mean greater exposure to counter-cultural values. For many person, such exposure has worked to erode traditional plausibility structures, which maintained the poorly understood religious convictions that seem so typical of American religion (p. 371)

Overall, it is found that because colleges introduce different ideas and values that may counter religious beliefs, students can be susceptible to religious disaffiliation. Many religious students believe that prevailing norms on most college campuses are hostile toward religious

values (Magolda & Ebben, 2007). Therefore, the introduction of new ideas leads students to become less favorable to the church, and less conservative in their beliefs, leading to a more liberal cultural standpoint (Lee, 2002).

Another way that the college experience can greatly contribute to the individual beliefs and ideas of the student is whether the institution they are attending is affiliated with a certain religion. The religious affiliation of the institution can impact the religious and spiritual outcomes of the student in attendance, with studies showing that students who attend religiously affiliated colleges have stronger gains, beliefs, and practices when it comes to their religiosity (Magolda & Ebben, 2007 & Small & Bowman, 2011). Many in society tend to hold the belief that religious collegiate institutions replace open-minded discussion and logic with dogma and other religious truths (Wolfe, 2006). However, reflecting the political environment in the United States, many religious institutions are becoming more mainstream in their practices in order to maintain academic prestige, while others are committing more heavily to religion and conservatism (Wolfe, 2006).

Collegiate religious environments cultivate bonding social capital and reinforce religion, but can be associated with a more close-minded attitude of other viewpoints (Park & Bowman, 2015). Also, the introduction to new ideas and values in college has been shown to liberalize the views of students, with liberal views being strongly related to weaker religious belief and involvement (Lee, 2002). For example, one issue of constant debate in American politics concerns abortion. Just as religious involvement in general is a predictor of one's stance on this issue, religious involvement among college students is also a good predictor of opinion on abortion. While many college students will first look at the situation surrounding the abortion,

students who participate in religious activities are more likely to disapprove of abortion, while those who report less religious involvement have an increased pro-choice outlook (Hess & Rueb, 2005). This is just one example of the impact that religious involvement in college has on the political opinions of college students. Therefore, the involvement and engagement on campus, or lack thereof, has the ability contribute to political polarization.

Theoretical Framework

Along with the presented evidence of religion's role in the formation of political opinions by college students, and how religious involvement in college reinforces the beliefs of the students who participate, one mass communication theory provides broader insight into religious influence and its place in American politics.

The top-down / bottom-up theory of political attitude formation states that ideological preferences are products of environmental conditions and internal pre-dispositions that motivate people to hold liberal or conservative policy preferences (Baran & Davis, 2009). This theory invites the idea that ideological preferences, for Christians, this would be doctrines of Christianity, have an impact on their political choices. For Protestant Christians, who account for a large number of religious Americans, their political stance and views are centered around the Christian Bible. Protestants are normally considered conservative and traditional when it comes to several social issues like gender relations, sexuality, and life and death (De Koster & Van der Waal, 2007). Baran and Davis state that political attitudes are a combination of social experiences, such as life experience and different news and political exposures, and genetic pathways, which exert influences on attitudes and behaviors over time (2009). It has been observed that liberal and conservative voters tend to process information differently, with

conservatives making clear distinctions, making quick decisions and sticking to those decisions, and they are sensitive to group distinctions (Baran & Davis, 2009). Liberal voters maintain complexity, like to deliberate on their decisions, and are more open to new ideas (Baran & Davis, 2009).

Based on the previous review of literature and theoretical reasoning, the following hypotheses result:

1. Students who identify as a Christian will align with the Republican Party.
2. Students who identify as a Christian will report conservative political views.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This thesis aims to discover if a connection exists between Protestant Christianity and political preferences and participation among college students. An analysis of the possible connection between the two was tested by inviting participants using social media and email to participate in an online survey. Findings from this research will showcase if there is a connection between religion and political choices.

The following analysis of research focuses on the participant's religious affiliations and political preferences, such as their political party affiliations, and if they are registered to vote.

To answer the research questions, a quantitative survey approach was used to help understand the problem. In this design, the researcher first collected and analyzed the quantitative data to produce statistical and numeric results. The survey design allowed the researcher to better understand the factors behind a potential relationship between university students' religion and political views. For this particular research study, the independent variable is religion, with Protestant Christianity and unspecified Christianity being the sole focus. The dependent variables are political party affiliation and political preferences (conservative or liberal).

To analyze the data gathered from the survey, SPSS software was utilized. The survey was created using the online survey software from Survey Monkey.

Survey Design

The online survey began with a consent form following the short form consent guidelines present by the IRB Office at Oklahoma State University. The consent form informs the participant of the nature and anonymity of the study. The survey began with demographic questions concerning the gender, age range, and college status of the participant.

Next in the survey, adaptations from the Pew Research 2014 Religious Landscape Study (RLS) were applied. Pew Research developed the aforementioned questionnaire to survey Americans about their personal religious beliefs and affiliations, and also their social and political views (Pew, 2015). After making adaptations and revisions, the final versions of the adapted scales were presented to the participants. Participants in the current study were asked about their religious affiliations, including what religion they identified with, if any, and if they were a Christian. Along with these questions, questions about their views of The Bible and their involvement with a church, among others, were asked.

After religious questions, participants were asked about their political opinions and affiliations. Questions regarding “hot-button” issues like abortion and homosexuality were asked, along with questions concerning their political party affiliations and if they are registered to vote. Multiple choice, 5-point Likert Scale, and matrix-style questions were implemented in this study.

Participants

Undergraduate and graduate students studying at Oklahoma State University served as the participants of this study. Once approval was received from the Institutional Review Board, the survey was administered to the university students electronically through email and through social media. Students voluntarily participated in the study, with the option to enter their email address to be entered into a drawing for a Sonic gift card to compensate for their participation. Upon completion of the survey, students were directed to a separate database to ensure anonymity when entering their email address for the drawing. This study was conducted during the Spring semester of 2019-2020, with the survey being open from March 24th through March 27th. A total of 125 students at Oklahoma State University volunteered to participate in the study. Out of 125 total participants, 72.8% of the participants were female and 27.2% male. A total of 88 participants (70.4% of respondents) identified with Christianity.

Data Collection & Analysis

To collect data, a quantitative survey method has been applied. As a survey instrument, adaptations from the Pew Research 2014 Religious Landscape Study (RLS) were applied. Pew Research developed the aforementioned questionnaire to survey Americans about their personal religious beliefs and affiliations, and also their social and political views (Pew, 2015).

Multiple choice, 5-point Likert Scale, and matrix-style questions were implemented in this study. After making adaptations and revisions, the final versions of the adapted scales were presented to the participants. Apart from the utilized scale, the instrument also included questions regarding the demographic information of the participants. For the demographic information,

questions concerning the participant's age, gender, school status, and social media usage were included.

The data was collected using a password-protected Survey Monkey account. The survey was distributed electronically via email and via social media. Random and snowball sampling were utilized to solicit participants. Participants were solicited directly through student emails approved and provided by the OSU Institutional Research & Information Management office and the OSU School of Media and Strategic Communication. In addition, the survey was distributed via social media by a provided Survey Monkey link. The social media post solicited responses from Oklahoma State University Students. The online questionnaire consisted of 32 questions. The data information was downloaded directly from the website to SPSS software for analysis. SPSS Statistics software was used to perform the necessary analyses of the survey data, through the utilization of descriptive statistics, correlation bivariate and ANOVA testing. The findings of this study will be discussed further in the following chapter.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study is to discover if a connection exists between Protestant Christianity and political preferences and participation. After making adaptations to the Pew Research Religious Landscape Study, adaptations were presented to participants electronically, gathering 125 voluntary results. Out of 125 total participants, 72.8% of the participants were female and 27.2% male. In addition, a large majority, or 90.6% of participants identified as being between the ages of 18-24, and the other 7% of participants identified as being between the ages of 25-34. Regarding college status, participants' answers were divided fairly evenly between freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, and graduate students, with Juniors having the highest percentage with 29.7%, or 38 participants, and graduate students having the lowest percentage of 10.2%, or 13 participants. Moving into religious aspects of the data, 106 participants, or 84.8% of all participants strongly agreed or agreed when asked "Do you believe in God?". In addition, 84 participants, or 67.2% of all respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they consider religion to be an important part of their life, with 47.2%, or 59 participants saying the strongly agree or agree with the statement that they attend religious services at least once a week. Concerning religious identification, as Table 1 on the following page indicates, 70.4% of respondents identified as being Protestant (Baptist, Methodist, Non-Denominational, Lutheran, Presbyterian, etc.) or Christian (unspecified) yielding a total of 88 participants identifying with Christianity.

Table 1.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Protestant (Baptist, Methodist, Non-denominational, Lutheran, Presbyterian, etc.)	51	40.8	40.8	40.8
	Catholic	11	8.8	8.8	49.6
	Christian (unspecified)	37	29.6	29.6	79.2
	Atheist (do not believe in God)	4	3.2	3.2	82.4
	Agnostic (not sure if there is a God)	14	11.2	11.2	93.6
	Something else	6	4.8	4.8	98.4
	Don't know	2	1.6	1.6	100.0
	Total	125	100.0	100.0	

Of the 88 participants who affiliate with Protestant Christianity or an unspecified denomination of Christianity, 95.5% selected that they are between the ages of 18-24. When asked about their religious involvement, 72.7% either strongly agreed or agreed that they were a member of a local church, but only 55.7% strongly agreed or agreed that they attended church at least once a week. Along with church attendance, only 29.5% of the 88 Christianity-affiliated respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they actively participate in an on-campus religious group.

When it comes to political engagement, of those who identify with Christianity, 86.4% answered yes when asked if they were registered to vote. Along with their voter registration, 69.4% of Christian respondents said they strongly agreed or agreed that their religious teachings and beliefs guide them to discern between what is right and wrong. In addition, and aside from

the hypothesis testing, among participants who identify as Christian, a strong positive correlation was shown between Republicans and Conservatives ($r(123) = .595, p < .001$).

Hypothesis Number One

Hypothesis number one states that students who identify as a Protestant Christian or Christian will align with the Republican Party. According to Table 2, out of the 87 responses to this question from respondents who identify with Christianity, 54.5% (n=48) consider themselves to be a Republican.

Table 2.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Republican	48	54.5	55.2	55.2
	Democrat	17	19.3	19.5	74.7
	Independent	14	15.9	16.1	90.8
	No Preference / Other	8	9.1	9.2	100.0
	Total	87	98.9	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.1		
Total		88	100.0		

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between Christianity and Republican party alignment using a correlation bivariate test. This test is fitting because it shows whether the two groups are related to each other. Table 3 shows a strong positive correlation was found ($r(121) = .340, p < .001$), indicating a significant correlation between the two variables. Thus, Hypothesis One is supported. Christians tend to align with the Republican party.

Table 3.

Correlations

		Christian	Republican
Christian	Pearson Correlation	1	.340**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	123	123
Republican	Pearson Correlation	.340**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	123	125

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-...

Hypothesis Number Two

Hypothesis number two states that students who identify as a Christian will report conservative political views. Before participants were asked to self-identify where they leaned politically, scales with different political statements were presented to have participants start pondering where their political leanings align. For example, participants were asked to answer on a 5-point Likert scale whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statements: “Abortion should be legal in all cases” and “abortion is murder.” After reverse coding the second statement, “abortion is murder,” both statements yielded similar responses, with 24% of Christian respondents strongly agreeing with both statements, and about 28% strongly disagreeing with both statements. In addition to scale questions about abortion, participants were also asked to respond to statements about same-sex marriage, including “gays and lesbians should be allowed the right to legally marry” and “same-sex marriage should not be permitted.” 24, or 27.3% of participants who identified as Christian strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that “same-sex marriage should not be permitted”, however, when asked “gays and lesbians should be

allowed the right to legally marry”, a total of 53, or 60.3% of Christian respondents said they strongly agreed or agreed with that statement, showing results that vary where legality is concerned. After these political statements, students were asked to identify where they aligned politically. According to Table 4, 42.1% of Christian respondents identified as very conservative or conservative, compared to the 37.5% that identify as moderate and the 20.4% that identified as liberal or very liberal.

Table 4.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very conservative	8	9.1	9.1	9.1
	Conservative	29	33.0	33.0	42.0
	Moderate	33	37.5	37.5	79.5
	Liberal	12	13.6	13.6	93.2
	Very Liberal	6	6.8	6.8	100.0
	Total	88	100.0	100.0	

A one-way ANOVA test was conducted. One-way ANOVA compares the means of two or more groups, in this case, political leanings including conservative, moderate, and liberal, of participants that vary on a single independent variable, religion. This test is appropriate because conservatism is a continuous variable. As seen in Table 5 on the following page, a significant difference was found among participants ($F(1,121) = 19.22, p < .001$). This analysis revealed that Christians ($M = 2.76, SD = 1.02$) have a mean lower than those who do not identify as being a Christian ($M = 3.71, SD = 1.22$) when it comes to conservative views. Thus, Hypothesis Two is not supported. Christians do not necessarily have conservative political views.

Table 5.

Descriptives

In general, how would you describe your political views?

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Non-Christian	35	3.7143	1.22646	.20731	3.2930	4.1356	1.00	6.00
Christian	88	2.7614	1.02827	.10961	2.5435	2.9792	1.00	5.00
Total	123	3.0325	1.16601	.10514	2.8244	3.2406	1.00	6.00

ANOVA

In general, how would you describe your political views?

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	22.738	1	22.738	19.223	.000
Within Groups	143.131	121	1.183		
Total	165.870	122			

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This thesis used a quantitative analysis of survey data to understand if there is a relationship between religion and political preferences. The purpose of this study was to further explore and find if there was a statistically significant relationship between Christianity and Republican, conservative political preferences.

Regarding Hypothesis One, the data shows a statistically significant relationship. Christians tend to align with the Republican Party. The literature review states how those with high levels of religious commitment have become increasingly more likely to vote Republican, who lean consistently conservative, while citizens who favor secularism tend to vote with the Democratic Party, who is consistently liberal (Hess & Rueb, 2005, Layman, 1997, Layman, Carsey, & Horowitz, 2006, & Olson & Green, 2006). The data from the current study supports this notion.

In addition, regarding Hypothesis Two, the data also shows a statistically significant relationship. The data did not support Hypothesis Two. Christians do not necessarily have conservative political views. The literature supports this hypothesis outcome as well. As previously stated in the literature, research shows that just because religious groups tend to vote for conservative policies, there are often differences of opinion between, and within, Christian denominations on certain issues and approaches to political involvement (Gonzalez, 2012 & Van

Geest, 2007). One example of division comes from conservative evangelicals being more concerned with moral reforms, focusing on issues like pornography, abortion, divorce and gambling, while groups of mainline protestant churches emphasize social justice agendas, highlighting issues like global cooperation, poverty, peace and racism (Van Geest, 2007). Conflicts within religious populations can arise when theological and moral oppositions do not align, and when opinions differ on placing value on matters of importance. So, overall, Christian political views can be largely varied based on denomination, leading some to lean to the conservative end of the political spectrum and some to lean to the liberal end of the political spectrum. Concerning college students, as stated in the literature review, while commitment to religion can be increased while in college, the introduction of and exposure to new ideas can also contribute to disaffiliation from religion (Lee, 2002). College campuses can often be viewed as institutions where “intellectualism skewers religious thought” (Allen, 2007). For college students, even though they identify with Christianity, politically, new thoughts and ideas are introduced, allowing for different political leanings.

As previously noted, the top-down / bottom-up theory of political attitude formation states that ideological preferences are products of environmental conditions and internal predispositions that motivate people to hold liberal or conservative policy preferences (Baran & Davis, 2009). This theory invites the idea that ideological preferences, for Christians, this would be doctrines of Christianity, have an impact on their political choices. For Protestant Christians, who account for a large number of religious Americans, their political stance and views are centered around the Christian Bible. Protestants are normally considered conservative and traditional when it comes to several social issues like gender relations, sexuality, and life and

death (De Koster & Van der Waal, 2007). Baran and Davis state that political attitudes are a combination of social experiences, such as life experience and different news and political exposures, and genetic pathways, which exert influences on attitudes and behaviors over time (2009). Along with the latter part of the theory definition by Baran and Davis (2009), life experiences and different exposures could lead college students to choose to vote outside of what is considered a political norm for Christians, and vote differently.

This study supports the top-down / bottom-up theory of political attitude formation by showing a statistically significant relationship between Christian participants and the Republican party. The literature shows that Christians, or those with high levels of religious commitment, are more likely to vote with the Republican party, who lean consistently conservative (Hess & Rueb, 2005, Layman, 1997, Layman, Carsey, & Horowitz, 2006, & Olson & Green, 2006). In addition, the theory goes on to state how political attitudes are a combination of social experiences, such as different life experiences and news and political exposures (Baran & Davis, 2009). This is also supported by data analyzed for hypothesis number two, which reveals that Christians do not necessarily have conservative political views. The literature states how higher education institutions greatly influence the behavior of emerging adults by promoting specific norms and values. Of these values and norms, inclusivity and open-mindedness are two of importance, with many students holding the belief that they should be able to go about their lives without having other beliefs imposed upon them (Dalessandro, 2016). Perhaps the introduction of different ideas during college, a form of a life experiences and political exposure, has influenced students to vary in their political leanings. Overall, this study supports the top-down / bottom-up theory of

political attitude formation by showing that both ideological preferences and life experiences can impact political preferences.

This study utilized adaptations from the Pew Research Religious Landscape Study, most recently conducted in 2014 (Pew Research, 2015). Data from participants at Oklahoma State University closely resembles data from the Pew Research study in 2014 for the State of Oklahoma. For the current study, 43% of all participants identified as a Republican. For the Pew Research study, 45% identified that they affiliate with the Republican Party (Pew Research, 2015). In addition, 68.7% of participants from the current study identified as Christian, and 79% of participants from the Pew research study identified as Christian in the State of Oklahoma, and out of the national sample as a whole, 70.6% of participants identified as a Christian (Pew Research, 2015). Lastly, for the State of Oklahoma, the Pew data research study shows that 38% of participants identified as having a conservative political ideology. The current study shows 34.3% of participants identifying as conservative (Pew Research, 2015). Data from the current study sample closely resembles the National and Oklahoma sample from the Pew Research Study in 2014.

Overall, this study is important for many reasons. As stated in the literature, time in college is viewed as a powerful force in the shaping of individuals because collegiate institutions feel they have a responsibility to the moral and intellectual formation of students (Dalessandro, 2016, Lee, 2002, & Wolfe, 2006). The literature shows how religious involvement in college can reinforce and strengthen personal beliefs and commitment to religion (Bowman & Small, 2011 & Lee, 2002). While students have the ability to strengthen their religious beliefs, students can be susceptible to disaffiliation and a less favorable attitude towards the church because of the

introduction of new values and ideas at college (Lee, 2002 & Magolda & Ebben, 2007). A key factor in one's quest for meaning is religion, and while students can choose to have religion be an integral part of their time in college, or disaffiliate from religion entirely, overall, the factor of religion has been largely neglected in higher education research (Lee, 2002, Magolda & Ebben, 2007, Park & Bowman, 2015). This study adds value because it looks at the relationship between the religion of college students and their political preferences. This study adds to research and the body of literature of the factor of religion in college.

In addition, the literature largely supports the notion that Christians, or those with large levels of commitment to their religion, tend to lean conservative on the political spectrum (Hess & Rueb, 2005, Layman, 1997, Layman, Carsey, & Horowitz, 2006, & Olson & Green, 2006). Data analyzed for Hypothesis Two show that this is not always the case. While this study contributes to literature on religion in higher education, it also shows that Christians do not always lean conservatively on the political spectrum, adding to the current body of literature and research completed on how religion and politics interact.

Limitations

It is important to acknowledge limitations in order to improve outcomes of future studies. While a sample size of 125 respondents can yield reliable results, the population of the study was limited to students at Oklahoma State University. With a broader demographic beyond just a single university, it is possible that results can be impacted when they represent the population as a whole. In addition, both random and snowball sampling were utilized to gather participants. A true random sample would potentially yield a sample more representative of the university. The participants attend a university that is largely considered to be conservative in political nature.

Broadening the scope of the sample could allow for a more accurate look at the overall religious and political preferences.

In addition to sampling limitations, intervening variables, such as the political affiliation of the participant's parents, their location, their income level and class status, could have a potential impact on the political preferences of the participant. This study did not ask the participants about possible intervening variables that may have an impact on their personal political alignments.

Strengths

While there are limitations in this study, there are also strengths worth noting. Overall, research shows that there is a low number of higher education studies in general. Studies over populations in higher education are important because it shows how students are personally evolving with the introduction of new ideas that come with attending a higher education institution. In addition, regarding political items, many college students are getting to vote for the first time in their life, so it is important to see where they might fall on the political spectrum.

Future Research

Future research could be conducted through a more qualitative approach. While surveying allows a large number of responses, a qualitative approach, such as a focus group or in-person interviews, might yield more in-depth responses to how political preferences are formulated from religious beliefs. Another study could analyze communication directly from the religious pulpit regarding items of political nature.

Another qualitative approach could be interviewing students in high school, and then again in college, to see if their personal ideas regarding politics have changed after collegiate exposure. While 77.6% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the religion they practice now is the same as the religion they practiced in high school, additional questions could be asked before and after students enter college regarding their religious affiliations.

In addition, while the findings and analysis section reports on the frequency of attendance at religious-affiliated activities, future research could further analyze how college student involvement could impact political participation and opinions. Another element to consider and further analyze would be the presence of potential intervening variables that impact the participant's political leaning, such as income and class levels, and the political affiliation of their parents.

Lastly, while the snowball sampling method aided in providing additional responses, a study conducted using only a random sampling, and expanding on the size of the sample to include more participants, would provide a more generalized outcome to better represent the population as a whole.

In an American society that is largely divided when it comes to politics, it is important to see where political stances are derived from. In addition, college students continually make up a new voting block with each passing election as they come of age to legally vote. All of these elements are important to continue to study because they are continuing to change.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX ONE

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION CONSENT FORM

Religious & Political Landscape Among College Students

You are invited to be in a research study of the Religious & Political Landscape Among College Students conducted by Megan Meador, School of Media and Strategic Communications, under the direction of Dr. Lori McKinnon, School of Media and Strategic Communications. Your participation in this research is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and you are free to withdraw your consent and participation in this project at any time.

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things: As a participant of this study, you will be required to complete a survey with questions about your religious affiliations and political preferences, along with a few basic demographic questions. The survey will take approximately 5-10 minutes.

Compensation: You will receive the opportunity to be entered into a drawing for one of five digital Sonic gift cards as compensation for your participation. To be eligible to receive the compensation, you will need to provide your email address upon completion of the survey. Email addresses will be collected in a separate database to keep your response anonymous.

Confidentiality: The information you give in the study will be anonymous. This means that your name will not be collected or linked to the data in any way. The researchers will not be able to remove your data from the dataset once your participation is complete. This data will be stored on a password protected computer and analyzed in a password protected data system.

The research team will ensure anonymity to the degree permitted by technology. Your participation in this online survey involves risks similar to a person's everyday use of the internet. If you have concerns, you should consult the survey provider privacy policy at https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/legal/privacy-policy/?ut_source=footer.

Contacts and Questions: If you have questions about the research study itself, please contact the Principal Investigator at megan.meador@okstate.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, please contact the OSU IRB at (405) 744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu.

If you agree to participate in this research, please click NEXT to continue.

APPENDIX TWO

IRB APPROVAL FORM



Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: 03/17/2020
Application Number: IRB-20-122
Proposal Title: College Students, Religion & Political Participation

Principal Investigator: Megan Meador
Co-Investigator(s):
Faculty Adviser: LORI MCKINNON
Project Coordinator:
Research Assistant(s):

Processed as: Exempt
Exempt Category:

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in 45CFR46.

This study meets criteria in the Revised Common Rule, as well as, one or more of the circumstances for which continuing review is not required. As Principal Investigator of this research, you will be required to submit a status report to the IRB triennially.

The final versions of any recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are available for download from IRBManager. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be approved by the IRB. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI, adviser, other research personnel, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any unanticipated and/or adverse events to the IRB Office promptly.
4. Notify the IRB office when your research project is complete or when you are no longer affiliated with Oklahoma State University.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact the IRB Office at 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu.

Sincerely,
Oklahoma State University IRB

APPENDIX THREE

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

College Students, Religion & Political Participation

1. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

2. What is your age?

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35+

3. What is your current college status?

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Graduate Student

4. What religion do you most identify with, if any?

- Protestant (Baptist, Methodist, Non-denominational, Lutheran, Presbyterian, etc.)
- Catholic
- Christian (unspecified)
- Atheist (do not believe in God)
- Agnostic (not sure if there is a God)
- Something else
- Don't know

5. Religion

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Do you consider yourself to be a Christian?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you believe in God?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Are you certain in your belief that a God exists?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Would you consider yourself to be "born-again" or an Evangelical Christian?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Would you consider religion to be an important part of your life?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Are you a member of a local church?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Do you attend religious services at least once a week?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you actively participate in an on-campus religious group?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Outside of attending religious services, do you pray?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you believe there is a heaven?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you believe there is a hell?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you believe that The Bible is the Word of God?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you believe that the Bible should be taken literally?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you believe that your religion is the one, true faith to eternal life?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you believe that only faith in Jesus Christ can lead to eternal life?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Is the religion you practice now the same religion you practiced as a in high school?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6. Political Participation

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Abortion should be legal in all cases.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gays and lesbians should be allowed the right to legally marry.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My religious teachings and beliefs guide me to discern between what is right and wrong.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A supreme being created all things, and guides the evolution of living things.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Abortion is murder.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Same-sex marriage should not be permitted.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. Are you registered to vote?

Yes

No

8. Do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or Independent?

Republican

Democrat

Independent

No Preference / Other

9. Do you lean more to the Republican Party or the Democratic Party?

Republican

Democrat

No Preference / Other

10. In general, how would you describe your political views?

Very conservative

Conservative

Moderate

Liberal

Very Liberal

Don't Know

11. How many social media accounts do you have?

- 0
- 1-2
- 3-4
- 5+

12. Do you follow religious leaders on your social media accounts?

- Yes
- No

College Students, Religion & Political Participation

Survey Drawing

If you wish to enter a drawing to win one of five digital Sonic gift cards, please visit the following link: <https://form.jotform.com/meganmeador/survey>

VITA

Megan Meador

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: RELIGIOUS & POLITICAL LANDSCAPE AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

Major Field: Mass Communication

Biographical: Research interests include religion's impact on political participation.

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Mass Communications at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May 2020.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Strategic Communications at the University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, Oklahoma in May 2017.

Experience:

Booking Clerk, Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, May 2017-July 2018

Graduate Teaching / Research Assistant, Oklahoma State University, August 2018 – Present