

**The Impact of Religiosity on Political Activism among Seventh-day Adventist College  
Students**

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PSYC-297: Research Design & Statistics II

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Marcy 8, 2023

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The Cultural Revolution was a movement that rocked China's core fundamental beliefs and turned the country all the way around. This decades-long event saw a nationwide struggle to be released from imperialism, poverty, and starvation. Violence was prevalent during this time with the estimated death toll ranging from 500,000 to 2,000,000 (Phillips, 2016). While there were strong leaders at the head of this movement, the sheer amount of change that took place in China during this time could not have been done without the activism of students and young people (Phillips, 2016). The Tiananmen Square protest had a large influence on the revolution and was student-led. Without attempting to justify one of "the bloodiest eras in Chinese history," the level of student activism in this era was unprecedented (Phillips, 2016). This is certainly not the only instance of mass political activism among students. Even in the last decade, there have been student protests on a wide range of issues such as Black Lives Matter, women's rights, and LGBTQIA+ rights.

Despite the worldwide history of student-led political participation, activism on college campuses is not always the case, especially when it comes to Seventh-day Adventist Universities. This observed phenomenon may be due to the fact that Seventh-day Adventists have a history of pacifism, which may permeate into areas other than war (Hoehn, 2018). Some suggest that religion can negatively impact political participation, and as Seventh-day Adventists are more conservative, this may explain the lack of political participation on their campuses (Omelicheva & Ahmed, 2017). However, this is a very nuanced perspective as the literature suggests that this is not the view of the majority of religious people. The goal of this study is to

examine the impact religiosity has on political participation as it relates to Seventh-day Adventist college students.

### **Religiosity**

Religion, particularly Protestantism, usually has two different broad categories, conservative and liberal. These two categories can be defined as intrinsic versus extrinsic where intrinsic refers to religious beliefs and practices being the primary model for how one lives one's life, and extrinsic refers to religious beliefs driven by social and personal needs rather than devotion (Rosik et al., 2007). Academically, religiosity is used when referring to how conservative or devout a person is. Religiosity denotes a profound sentiment of allegiance or conviction towards religious beliefs, and its manifestation is subject to variation across groups and different religious traditions.

As evidenced by the literature explored here, religiosity is a driving force for many social beliefs. Concurrently, the level of religiosity that a person holds can determine the strength of those social beliefs (Wang et al., 2021). The relationship between religiosity and social beliefs is most often seen nationally in the face of a polarizing election, especially in democratic countries. For example, religion plays such a fundamental role in United States politics, because religion has such a hold on smaller communities within the states (Leedge & Kellstedt, 1993).

High levels of religiosity can also be an indicator of social prejudices and behaviors deemed unacceptable by society, for example, homophobia. For example, the more conservative a Protestant is, the more likely they are to be homophobic (Rosik et al., 2007; Bassett et al., 2001). Concurrently, religiosity may be a predictor for anti-abortion beliefs and has been found to be the reason why the difference of men and women who hold anti-abortion beliefs is

significantly small (Barkan, 2014). Both of these sentiments are held by those with major belief systems or intrinsic religiosity.

Driskell et al. (2008) found that the more the belief system permeated and affected the lives of the believer, the more political engagement there seemed to be. For example, strong, positive beliefs about God, salvation, death, and hell, were found to be positively correlated with political engagement (Driskell et al., 2008). On the other hand, if religion was a minor belief system, it did not significantly affect political engagement (Driskell et al., 2008). This means that the impact of religiosity, positive or negative, on political engagement can only be seen if the level of religiosity is high. Yet some smaller denominations, Seventh-day Adventists in particular, often avoid politics because of the belief that there are outside forces influencing politics (Dudley et al., 1992).

### **Political Participation**

Political participation is an important part of a robust government and can stimulate political growth regardless of political regime or affiliation (Levy & Akiva, 2019). Political participation can be classified in several ways: voting, interest group, or community participation (Gerber et al., 2015; Meyer et al. 2008; Layman & Weaver, 2016; Driskell et. al, 2008). Political engagement can be seen through whether or not a person votes if they participate in political campaigns, or more non-traditional participation such as demonstrations or rallies (Secret et al., 1990; Brown, 2011). Voting is the most common type of political engagement because it is the most accessible to people (Secret et al., 1990; Brown, 2011; Sönmez, 2013).

Community engagement, another form of political participation, can be described as active participation by NGOs, local residents who identify issues and contribute to their solutions, and efforts to address social problems within a community (Head, 2007). For this

reason, community engagement is not only an important part of political participation but is the first step in political participation. Creating and engaging in the community builds the social ties and structures needed for robust political participation (Secret et al., 1990; Brown, 2011; Westfall, 2019). Having strong ties with peers and those ideologically similar can be a catalyst for political discourse and engagement (Westfall, 2019). Volunteering is one form of community engagement that is mostly seen in churches but has been used as both a measure of religiosity and political participation (Ruiter & De Graff, 2006; Driskell et. al, 2008).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The literature has found that religiosity may not negatively impact political participation. In fact, religiosity tends to strengthen political participation. Despite this, there were not many studies examining this relationship in the Seventh-day Adventist church. The importance of this study stems from the fact that there is a gap in the literature, specifically in regard to Seventh-day Adventist college students. The purpose of this study is to determine the relationship between religiosity and political participation among college students at Southern Adventist University, particularly, if the level of a Seventh-day Adventist college student's religiosity impacts their level of political participation. This study is important because it will examine whether the lack of political participation stems from a strict religious foundation.

This study is based on the following question: does having a strict religious background impact a person's level of political participation?

### **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses will guide my study:

1. There is a relationship between level of religiosity and political participation.
2. There is a difference in levels of political participation between different ethnic groups.

## **Research Question**

The two research questions examined in this study will be:

1. Does college major impact political participation?
2. Does age impact religiosity?

## **Methodology**

### **Design**

The study is quantitative as it will be using coded answers from surveys to find correlation. Concurrently, the primary hypothesis being tested is correlational. Surveys will be used to collect the data for this study. They are the most practical way to gather and record the data for analysis.

### **Measurement**

There will be three measurements used in this study. The demographic scale will include sex, age, and ethnicity (see Appendix A). The political participation scale is a five-question survey in which participants answer yes, coded 1, or no, coded 2 (Park et al., 2012) (see Appendix B). Religiosity will be measured using the Duke University Religion Index (DUREL), a five-question survey in which participants' answers will range from the frequency of religious activities, on a six-point scale, to questions about intrinsic beliefs, on a five-point scale (Koenig & Büssing, 2010) (see Appendix C). The data from these surveys will be imputed into SPSS for further analysis. All inventories used here have high internal validity.

### **Participants**

There will be no less than 30 participants used for this study. The participants will be from various ethnic backgrounds and of both sexes. Each participant will be between the ages of

18 and 22 and must be a current college student. Participants will be attending a Seventh-day Adventist university and have a background in religion or spirituality at the time of the data collection. Participants will be recruited in classrooms at Southern Adventist University and on Instagram. The forms can only be completed once with no corrections. All participants will sign an informed consent form, and their identity and information will be anonymous and kept confidential.

### **Procedures**

A google form will be made which will open to the informed consent form first (see Appendix D). The next page will contain all the questions from the questionnaire. Participants will mainly be recruited from their classes at Southern Adventist University once approval is given by their professors. All participants will be informed that the information they are providing is completely anonymous and confidential. I will be available to answer any questions for questionnaires filled out in a classroom and I will attach my contact information to the form for those that are filled out on Instagram.

Data will be collected and analyzed after two weeks. It will then be analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) (IBM Corp., 2016). After analysis, I will move to the next part of my research.

### **Data Analysis**

This data will be collected from the questionnaires and will be scored and imputed into SPSS for analysis (IBM Corp., 2016). Because the level of religiosity and ethnicity will be used to predict political participation, regression will be used, and the data will be analyzed using chi-square. Pearson's  $r$  correlation coefficient will be used for the primary hypothesis, and a one-way ANOVA between groups will be used for the secondary hypothesis.

**Limitations**

This study will be performed on a small scale exploring the impact of religiosity on political participation among Seventh-day Adventist university students. There are two limitations present in this study:

1. The study will have a sample size of 30-40 participants which will impact the significance of any findings.
2. The data will be collected through self-reporting meaning that self-biases may affect the participants' answers. Participants may want to see themselves as more religious or politically involved than they actually are.



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## Appendices

**Appendix A**

## Demographic Questionnaire

What is your sex?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Male</li><li>● Female</li><li>● Other</li></ul>
What is your age?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● 18 years old</li><li>● 19 years old</li><li>● 20 years old</li><li>● 21 years old</li><li>● 22 years old</li></ul>
What is your race/ethnicity?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● White</li><li>● Black or African American</li><li>● Hispanic or Latino</li><li>● Asian</li><li>● American Indian or Alaska Native</li><li>● Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander</li><li>● Other or prefer not to say</li></ul>

**Appendix B**

## Political Participation Questionnaire

Have you ever participated in political demonstrations, boycotts, or marches before?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Yes</li><li>● No</li></ul>
Have you watched any political debates on television?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Yes</li><li>● No</li></ul>
Have you aligned yourself with any political party?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Yes</li><li>● No</li></ul>
Have you ever attended a political meeting or rally before?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Yes</li><li>● No</li></ul>

### Appendix C

#### Religiosity Questionnaire

	1	2	3	4	5	6
How often do you attend church, synagogue, or other religious meetings?	Never	Once a year or less	A few times a year	A few times a month	Once a week	More than once a week
How often do you spend time in private religious activities such as prayer, meditation, or Bible study [devotions]?	Rarely or never	A few times a month	Once a week	Two or more times/week	Daily	More than once a day
In my life, I experience the presence of the Divine [God].	Definitely not true	Tends not to be true	Unsure	Tends to be true	Not true	
My religious beliefs are what really lie behind my whole approach to life.	Definitely not true	Tends not to be true	Unsure	Tends to be true	Not true	
I try hard to carry my religion over into all other dealings in life.	Definitely not true	Tends not to be true	Unsure	Tends to be true	Not true	

## Appendix D

### Informed Consent Form

#### Introduction:

My name is Naomi Daniels. I am an undergraduate student at Southern Adventist University. I am conducting a research study on the correlation between religiosity and political participation. Your participation is completely voluntary. I am seeking your consent to involve you and your information in this study. Reasons you might not want to participate in the study include not having a religious background or having triggering experiences with religion in the past. Reasons you might want to participate in the study include discovering if your religious background has affected you or your peers' involvement in politics. An alternative to this study is simply not participating. I am here to address your questions or concerns during the informed consent process.

#### PRIVATE INFORMATION

Certain private information may be collected about you in this study. I will make the following effort to protect your private information, including making sure that your answers are completely anonymous and providing a private place for you to fill out the survey if you wish. Even with this effort, there is a chance that your private information may be accidentally released. The chance is small but does exist. You should consider this when deciding whether to participate.

#### Activities:

If you participate in this research, you will be asked to:

1. Scan a QR code
2. Open the google forms page



3. Answer the questions as honestly as possible

Eligibility:

You are eligible to participate in this research if you:

1. Go to a Seventh-day Adventist university
2. Grew up in a religious atmosphere

You are not eligible to participate in this research if you:

1. Do not attend a Seventh-day Adventist university
2. Did not grow up Christian

I hope to include 30 people in this research.

Risks:

There are minimal risks in this study. Some possible risks include triggering memories from past experiences or someone seeing your replies as you fill out the survey. To decrease the impact of these risks, you can stop participating at any time if you feel uncomfortable.

Benefits:

If you decide to participate, there are no direct benefits to you. The potential benefits to others are filling the gap in the literature as to why political participation is a phenomenon in Seventh-day Adventist universities.

Confidentiality:

The information you provide will be kept confidential to the extent allowable by law. Some steps I will take to keep your identity confidential are not requiring your name or email address on the form, keeping your name separate from the data collected, and keeping your contact info separate from the data collected. The people who will have access to your information are

myself, my Research Design and Statistics tutor, and my professor, Dr. Tron Wilder. The Institutional Review Board may also review my research and view your information.

I will secure your information with these steps: keeping it in a private folder locked with a unique password and ensuring that no one else has access to these files but me. I will keep your data for 7 years. Then, I will delete electronic data and destroy paper data.

#### Contact Information:

If you have questions for me, you can contact me at: [naomid@southern.edu](mailto:naomid@southern.edu) ; (540)- 314- 5414

My professor's name is Dr. Tron Wilder. He works at Southern Adventist University and is supervising me on the research. You can contact him at: [thwilder@southern.edu](mailto:thwilder@southern.edu). If you contact us you will be giving us information like your phone number or email address. This information will not be linked to your responses if the study is anonymous.

If you have questions about your rights in the research, if a problem has occurred, or if you are injured during your participation, please contact the Institutional Review Board at:

[irb@southern.edu](mailto:irb@southern.edu) or 423-236-2285.

#### Voluntary Participation:

Your participation is voluntary. If you decide not to participate, or if you stop participation after you start, there will be no penalty to you. You will not lose any benefit to which you are otherwise entitled.

#### Future Research

Any information or specimens collected from you during this research may not be used for other research in the future, even if identifying information is removed.



## Questionnaire Scoring Key

### Section I: Demographics

For Sex: Male = 1, Female = 2, Other = 3

For Race: White = 1, Black or African American = 2, Hispanic or Latino = 3, Asian = 4,

American Indian or Alaska Native = 5, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander = 6, Other = 7

For Age: 18 = 1, 19 = 2, 20 = 3, 21 = 4, 22 = 5

### Section II: For Political Participation

Have you ever participated in political demonstrations, boycotts, or marches before? Yes=1,

No=2

Have you watched any political debates on television? Yes=1, No=2

Have you aligned yourself with any political party? Yes= 1, No= 2

Have you ever attended a political meeting or rally before? Yes=1, No=2

### Section III: For Religiosity

How often do you attend church, synagogue, or other religious meetings? Never=1. Once a year or less=2, A few times a year=3, A few times a month=4, Once a week=5, More than once a week=6

How often do you spend time in private religious activities such as prayer, meditation, or Bible study [devotions]? Rarely or never=1, A few times a month=2, Once a week=3, Two or more times/week=4, Daily=5, More than once a day=6

In my life, I experience the presence of the Divine [God]: Definitely not true=1, Tends not to be true=2, Unsure=3, Tends to be true=4, Not true=5

My religious beliefs are what really lie behind my whole approach to life: Definitely not true=1, Tends not to be true=2, Unsure=3, Tends to be true=4, Not true=5

I try hard to carry my religion over into all other dealings in life: Definitely not true=1, Tends not to be true=2, Unsure=3, Tends to be true=4, Not true=5

