**RELIGIOSITY AS AN INDICATOR OF POLITICAL INTEREST AND ACTIVISM AMONG ASIAN AMERICANS**

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Race, religion, and politics are three topics known to be impolite for dinner table conversation. However, for social scientists the three topics are some of the most fascinating and thoroughly researched. This paper discusses various techniques used by political scientists to study religion and makes an argument for how religiosity works as an indicator of political behavior differently across racial groups. Ultimately, we provide evidence that the religion and religiosity of Asian Americans is understudied. Moreover, the most frequented national surveys do not provide us with the necessary data to study Asian-American religion because of either 1) a small number of Asian-Americans in the sample, or 2) the lack of necessary questioning in regards to religion.

**Studying Religion and the Need for Better Measures**

Religion has always been an important force in American politics and government from the writing of the first amendment. From the preceding (and subsequent) debates over whether pacifists should be forced to serve in the military, and whether religious oaths should be a requirement to hold federal office, to the election of the first Roman Catholic President, John F. Kennedy, and the rumor-mill and misinformation regarding President Barack Obama’s religion. Special attention has been placed on religion in regards to elections since the rise of the Religious Right in the 1980’s. Because religion is, without a doubt, a powerful force in campaigns and elections, the ability to measure the intensity of religion, or religiosity, has become critical for the study of political thought, political behavior, and political campaigns. Consequently, understanding how we measure religious intensity and using an appropriate measure is of utmost importance.

Religiosity, that is the intensity of religious belief and practice, is a measure employed in several studies of human behavior. For example, in general social science studies, religiosity has been used as an indicator of young marriages (Uecker 2014), contraceptive use in adolescents (Studer and Thornton 1987), as well as mood states of those coping with cancer (Fehring et. Al 1997). In the field of political science it has been used as an indicator of several important political traits including: authoritarianism (Altemeyer 1996), conservatism (Olson and Green 2006), Republican Party identification, (in)tolerance and even good neighborliness (Putnam and Campbell 2010). Religiosity is also used as an indicator of political positions on several issues including: attitudes toward homosexuals and on the issue of same-sex marriage, abortion, divorce, birth control, gambling, pornography, welfare, the environment, and attitudes toward suicide and euthanasia. Because of its broad application, religiosity is clearly a useful tool in the social sciences.

However, researchers use different methods in order to measure religiosity. Many simply use a variable that measure how frequently a respondent attends a religious service outside of weddings and funerals. I call this method *basic religiosity*, or *incomplete religiosity* because while it can be useful, it does not capture the various aspects of religiosity. Religiosity is a concept that contains cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects (Hackney and Sanders 2003). Three main aspects of religiosity include belief, behavior, and belonging. Basic religiosity only hones in on religious belonging. Sometimes, religious belonging is the strongest indicator of a type of attitude, and often, different factors of religiosity lead to different results. For example Putnam and Campbell find that religious attendance is positively related to social trust, while fundamentalism is negatively related to social trust (Putnam and Campbell 2010). Oftentimes, however, using only an attendance variable excludes the effect of religious belief and behavior on political attitudes. Often when we think of someone who is religious we think of their beliefs and their actions, while church going can be viewed more as a social norm.

Others researchers tailor scales to measure certain kinds of religiosity. This type of measurement, which I call *specific religiosity*, can be useful, if done intentionally, to measure different types of religiosity, but if researchers develop a scale unintentionally measuring only one type of religiosity, our understanding of the sample’s religious attitudes are flawed.

Many studies attempt to measure the intensity of religious behavior and practice through one variable: the frequency a respondent attends religious services. However, this approach has been criticized by many (Chaves and Cavendish 1994; Hadaway and Chaves 1993; Marcum 1999; Marler and Hadaway 1999; Presser and Stinson 1998: Hadaway and Marler 2005; Presser and Chaves 2007: Rossi and Scappini 2014).

These criticisms center on the argument that frequency of attendance measures are distorted in that they are significantly overestimated (Rossi and Scappini 2014). Respondents typically answer that they have attended religious services more frequently than they actually have because it is socially desirable to do so (Presser and Stinson 1998). Putnam and Campbell point out ways in which attendance of religious services can be misleading through underestimation in studies of the elderly or infirm (Putnam and Campbell 2010); individuals in these groups may be religious but unable to attend religious services. Furthermore, while measuring the frequency of attendance at religious services may incorporate the concept of religious belonging and an aspect of religious behavior, it does not necessarily encompass religious belief. By using only an attendance variable, a researcher may simply be measuring a respondent’s willingness to participate in a social group while the respondent may not be religious in the typical sense.

However, measuring religiosity using only an attendance variable is often a necessary evil caused by the lack of data. Some data sets including, among others, the National Asian American Survey (NAAS), simply do not feature other variables that can measure religiosity, but rather contain more variables that are useful in studying differences between types of religions. It can also be useful for exit polls and other quick surveys, which are trying to measure a respondent’s religious intensity without adequate time to go into depth with questions about religious belief and behavior.

In order to fully rounded measure all three aspects of religiosity—belief, belonging, and behavior—when using survey data, a scale must be composed of many aspects of religious belief and behavior beyond simply frequency of attendance. Unfortunately, there is no uniform scale for social scientists to turn to, although many offer their own versions. Because of the ambiguous nature of religious belief, one must be broad in the development of such a scale or risk danger of measuring a certain factor or dimension of religiosity rather than a more pure form. While many measures of religious belief and practice should be included in the scale, as social scientists it is our responsibility to ensure that no single religious tradition is favored over another if we want to study the population as a whole[[1]](#footnote-1).

The literature shows that religiosity measures are strongest when combined into scales (Hill and Hood 1999). Various scales are used to measure religiosity, but in general, a good index or scale of religiosity tries to capture what has become a sort of cliché in the study of religion, the three B’s of religiosity: Believing, Belonging, and Behaving. All three aspects of religiosity can have an influence on the others. For instance one’s religious beliefs can expand or become more important to him or her as they spend more time belonging to a religious community or behaving religiously. Likewise, one’s religious belief can cause one to seek out a certain type of religious organization, and cause them to behave religiously in different ways; for example, if one believes in the spiritual act of speaking in tongues, they will likely seek a church or religious organization that shares that belief and worship in that way.

While one does not necessarily have to consider their religious belief to be an important aspect of their life, or believe certain things to behave religiously or belong to a religious group, belief is an important part of a religiosity scale because religious belief can influence translate into political values. For instance, if a respondent on a survey indicates that his or her religious believes are highly important in their day to day life, and he or she believes that abortion is a sin, they are probably likely to vote for a pro-life candidate, or even participate in pro-life protests. When using survey research to study religion, an important measure of belief is a question asking the importance of religious belief in the respondent’s life. Some specific beliefs are also important in developing a religiosity scale, one common one used is to what degree a respondent believes his or her religious text to be divinely inspired. Other sorts of specific belief indicators may be useful in understanding how religion affects politics, but not useful in developing a religiosity scale. Using the example from above, understanding a population’s believes on whether or not abortion is a sin, can help indicate whether or not a population would approve or disapprove of a pro-life candidate.

Religious belonging is important, because people behave socially. In fact, in their study of the relationship between religion and social capital, Putnam and Campbell find belonging to be the most important aspect of religiosity in indicating social behavior (Putnam and Campbell 2010). Additionally, according to Wald and Calhoun-Brown (2014), “[t]he members of a congregation may share regular social interaction, a common status, and a distinctive way of life. Out of these experiences, a common culture may emerge” (Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2014). A question that asks for respondents to indicate how frequently they attend at religious services outside of weddings or funerals is a good measure of religious belonging when used in a religiosity scale. Another option that can be used in studying religious belonging is to examine the social circle of an individual. Knowing the religions that those in a respondent’s immediate social circle claim, and how religious they are, helps us to understand the respondent’s religious community, and therefore religious belonging.

Religious behavior is the most tangible of the three aspects of religiosity. However, religious behavior can be broad. For example, for practitioners of certain faiths abstaining from eating particular foods is part of their religious practice, while religious practitioners of other religions may be devout in the practice of their own faith, yet never abstain from certain foods. Therefore, when studying religious behavior through survey research, it is important to pick broad behaviors that encompass typical religious practices. Some often-used questions in surveys ask how often a respondent prays or reads their personal religious text. These are good questions as most of the major religious traditions in the United States have a religious text and incorporate some form of prayer in their worship.

In addition to religiosity, religious tradition and religious denomination are other important aspects of American religious life. Many studies in political science use religious tradition as an independent variable in order to study political behavior (i.e. if an individual is a member of religious group A, they are more likely to vote for Candidate #1, than members of religious group B). Some studies even delve more specifically into denominational effects. As mentioned above, some surveys provide more data for studying by religious tradition than they do by religiosity. In fact, there is much dispute over which is more important, religiosity or religious tradition. Putnam and Campbell use a culinary analogy in describing religious tradition and religiosity; they compare religious tradition to a “flavor” and religiosity to “intensity” (Putnam and Campbell 2010). So which is more important, the flavor of religion or the intensity of religion? Both are useful in their own ways.

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| Table 1: Studying Religiosity | | | |
|  | **Definition** | **Possible Survey Questions** | **Compatible Surveys** |
| Basic (Incomplete) Religiosity | Uses only one basic indicator of religiosity | The most common example is a study that uses only a frequency of religious service attendance variable to measure religiosity. | NAAS |
| Rounded Religiosity | Uses an in-depth religiosity scale designed to measure general religious behavior, belief, and belonging. | **Behavior:** How often do you say grace before meals?  **Belief:** Do you believe that the Bible is the word of God?  **Belonging:** About what percentage of your social circle has the same religion as you?  (Putnam and Campbell 2010) | CCES, ANES |
| Specific Religiosity | Uses an in-depth religiosity scale designed to measure a specific type of religious behavior, belief, and belonging. | Do you believe in transubstantiation?  How important is that belief? (Mockabee 2012) | 2006 ANES Pilot Study |
| Religious Tradition | Rather than examining intensity of religion, this method looks at differences in behavior across the four main religious traditions in America. | Is R Black Protestant,  Evangelical Protestant,  Mainline Protestant,  Catholic, or other? (Fowler et al 2010) | NAAS, CCES, ANES |
| Religious Denomination | Similar to studies using religious tradition, only more specific to the denominational level. | Which evangelical denomination do you identify with?  Which Mainline Protestant denomination do you identify with? | NAAS, CCES, ANES |

Three different studies all measuring the same aspect of political behavior (in this case conservatism) can use religion in three different ways. For an example of a study that focuses on the flavor, sticking with the culinary analogy, Guth et al (1998) examines the difference between orthodoxy and modernism and find a link between these two different religious “flavors” and political ideology (Guth et al. 1998). Other studies which focus on type of religion often center around religious tradition or focus even more specifically at the denominational level.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Alternatively, Olson and Green provide evidence that it is the intensity, the level of religiosity, that matters by developing the “The Religion Gap” hypothesis in which conservatism is not determined by either orthodoxy or modernism, but by the frequency of church attendance itself (Olson and Green 2006). In this case, the frequency of church attendance acts as a basic measure of religiosity.

Social scientists are able to use religion as an independent variable in yet another way. In a study of the impact of religion on political behavior, Mockabee (2012) finds that different factors of religiosity, in this case communitarian and individualistic factors, have opposite directional relationships with conservative policy preferences; while the individualistic factor that Mockabee uses is a typical scale of religiosity to find a positive relationship with conservative positions on social issues. While the communitarian factor he developed uses measures such as “the importance of belief in transubstantiation” and when trying to be a better Christian does the respondent tend to avoid sin or help others, has a positive relationship with liberal positions on social issues (Mockabee 2012). Other social scientists including Benson and Williams (1986) and Glock and Stark (1968) have offered dimensional studies of religious belief. While this factor analysis is similar to a study of religious “flavor” as an indicator of political behavior, I contend that it is more a study of the intensity of a particular flavor because it measures specific types of religiosity.

The United States is known for its relatively high religiosity among other developed western nations. This is largely attributed to the nation’s religious freedom and religious pluralism. If religion in America is viewed as a market, there is a multitude of firms from which consumers can get their individual spiritual needs met. If one firm cannot do so, there are many more for them to choose from.

While American religiosity has always been relatively high, it has ebbed and flowed with the decades. Putnam and Campbell describe this trend in recent decades as a “shock and two aftershocks” (Putnam and Campbell 2010). The shock being referred to is the cultural revolution of the 1960’s which disrupted a period of high religiosity following World War II; the first aftershock took place in the 1970’s and 1980’s as the rise of religious conservatism, followed by the most recent aftershock in the 1990’s and 2000’s which is characterized by youth becoming less religious (Putnam and Campbell 2010). It seems then that the level of religious intensity in America at the aggregate level is a series of pushes in one direction followed by push-backs in the opposite. However, others argue that religion and religiosity have declined over time as America has become more secular (Fowler et Al 2010). This does not counter the fact that religion is still an important aspect of many American’s lives not to mention a powerful force in elections and campaigns.

However, Asian American religiosity is something that is little studied, especially in political science. Asian Americans as a group are little-studied in general as well. This is despite the fact that they are among the nation’s fastest growing populations by race according to U.S. Census data (United States Census Bureau). When studying religion among racial groups, the focus tends to be on African-Americans or Latinos as compared to Caucasians. This is likely because these two groups are typically the ones with the highest religiosity, while Asian Americans are typically the racial group with the lowest.[[3]](#footnote-3) Additionally, Asian Americans are stereotyped as even less religious than they actually are. Carnes and Yang (2004) point out that, until recently, in many scholarly works, “The conceptualization of Asian Americans didn’t include the religious factor” (Carnes and Yang 2004). As mentioned before, the National Asian American Survey (NAAS) is a dataset with very few religion or religiosity variables. This is probably due to the fact that Asian Americans are a very diverse group in ethnicity as well as religion.

Perhaps the difficulty in studying Asian-American religiosity is one derived from a culture gap. According to Bader and Finke (2014),

“the difficulties [of studying religiosity] are only exacerbated when we attempt cross-cultural research. Even seemingly obvious concepts, such as god(s), prayer, and “religion,” prove difficult to measure with clarity and consistency in surveys that include diverse religions and cultures” (Bader and Finke 2014).

Using the Pilot National Asian American Political Survey that has evolved into the NAAS, Lien (2004) shows that there is a relationship between religious attendance among Asian Americans and participation in politics. According to Lien, “Political participation such as voting, registration, and even more active forms is significantly higher for Asian religionists who go to a religious service every week” (Lien 2004). However, Lien focuses more on the type of religion that the respondent holds and does not account for religious belief or behavior in the analysis.

Lien (2004) does show us how religion can affect political behavior among Asian Americans and inspires several further areas to explore. Will these findings change when we consider other aspects of religiosity beyond just attendance? Are the findings transferable to other racial groups besides Asian Americans? If not what does this tell us about the relationship between religiosity and race?

**Race and Faith**

The study of religion across racial and ethnic groups is not something new. However, most of this literature has been dedicated to two minority groups in particular: African-Americans and Latinos. According to Fowler et al. “racial and ethnic identity is inextricably linked with religion in the United States, and that fact has political significance” (Fowler et al. 2010). In fact, while African-American Christianity is very similar to White Evangelicalism, most scholars consider Black Protestant as its own distinct branch of American Christianity (Fowler et al. 2010; Putnam and Campbell 2010). Putnam and Campbell (2010) show that Black Protestant’s lives are infused with religion more so than typical Evangelicals and Mainline protestants in four aspects: Church attendance, responding that religion is important in one’s daily life, responding that religion is somewhat or very important for personal decisions and saying that religion is an important part of one’s identity (Putnam and Campbell 2010).

Many scholars have pointed to religion’s crucial role in African-American society, going so far as calling the church “the central institution of the black community” (Fowler et. Al 2010). For Black Christianity as well as Black Islam, religion has been intertwined with civil disobedience and protest for decades. The Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “it is appalling that the most segregated hour of Christian America is eleven o’clock on Sunday morning.” Putnam and Campbell (2010) provide support for this point in their research, however, they add that racial diversity varies across religious traditions (Putnam and Campbell 2010).

The question of how religion and race interact is one that must be answered before one can discuss their implications on politics. Putnam and Campbell find that in general religion and ethnic reinforce one another, and individuals with a strong ethnic identity are more likely to be religious and vice-versa (Putnam and Campbell 2010).

The most prominent example of the religion-race relationship affecting politics is the American civil rights movement. There is a wealth of literature describing the ways that religion helped (and hindered) the fight for equal rights to African-Americans (Lambert 2010; Chappell 2005; Noll 2010). Harris (1994) argues that religion serves as an organization al and psychological resource for political action among African-Americans (Harris 1994). Harris (1994) goes on to show that while only 18% of white respondents reported hearing discussion about campaigns at church, 35% of African-Americans did; additionally, 18% of African-Americans reported that their minister encouraged their congregation to vote a specific way in an election, while only 5% of Whites said the same (Harris 1994). Supporting the de facto norm of religious attendance of the most common indicator of religiosity, McKenzie (2004) argues that among African-Americans religious belonging reinforces civic norms more strongly than messages from clergy (McKenzie 2004).

In contrast, there is mixed evidence as to whether or not religious organizations participate in political advocacy for Latinos (Fowler et al 2010; Espinosa et al 2005). While there is clearly less political advocacy than that in the African-American community, faith based organizations provide social capital in the Latino community in addition to mobilizing politically (Wilson 2008). Jones-Correa and Leal (2001) find that among Latinos religious service attendance plays a larger role than religious denomination in an individual’s political participation because of the church’s role in fostering civic associations (Jones-Correa and Leal 2001). Like Asian Americans, Latinos are less likely than other groups to affiliate with a political party in America (Hajnal and Lee 2011). While Jones-Correa and Leal (2001) find that religious belonging plays a role in Latinos’ political participation, it will be interesting to see whether religious belonging or a more complete religiosity has an effect on joining a political party. It is likely that Latinos receive more attention than Asian-Americans in the political science literature because at 10% they make up a considerably larger percentage of the voting population, and their percentage of the electorate is estimated to double by the year 2030 (Taylor et al. 2012).

So while religion has this mobilizing quality among African-Americans and to a lesser-extent Latinos, how do Asian Americans compare? Lien (2008) has already shown a relationship between religious participation and political activism among Asian Americans, but is this effect stronger or weaker than that for other racial groups. Additionally, there has been little evidence on whether or not, when studying across racial groups, religiosity plays a role in interest in news and politics.

**Hypotheses**

In order to advance the work of Lien (2004), in this project I hypothesize that: H1) among Asian Americans, religiosity will have a positive relationship with political participation, H2) among Asian Americans religiosity will have a positive relationship with interest in news and politics, and H3) the effect of religiosity on political activism and interest in news and politics will be higher among Asian Americans than other racial groups. Through these hypotheses, the author hopes to show how religiosity’s strength as a predictor of political behavior is different among various racial groups.

**The Dataset**

For this paper, I am using the 2008 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES 2008). The CCES is a national stratified sample survey with over 50,000 respondents. The survey is done in two waves during election years: pre and post elections. The pre-election wave asks respondents to answer basic demographic questions as well as questions on their own personal political attitudes and political opinions, while the second wave mostly asks questions pertaining to the election (CCES 2008).

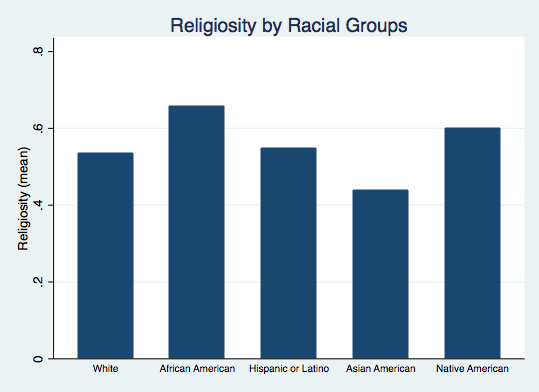
**The Demographics of Religiosity**

First, In order to show a glimpse of religiosity today across typical demographics, I used the 2008 Cooperative Congressional Study (CCES) to develop a three-variable scale to measure religiosity. The first variable is an ordinal variable asking respondents how important religion is to them. The second is a variable asking how frequently the respondent prays. The last variable in the scale asks respondents how often they attend religious services outside of weddings and funerals. These three variables unearth the three main aspects of religiosity: belief, behavior, and belonging respectively. The scale ranges from 0 to 1, with 0 indicating no religiosity and larger scores indicating higher levels of religiosity. It is a reliable measure with a Chronbach’s Alpha statistic of .83.

Using this scale, I have created a series of bar charts to illustrate mean levels of religiosity across various demographic groups. The descriptive statistics that these graphs demonstrate are consistent with the current literature describing the American population.

Looking at the chart titled, “Religiosity by Racial Group”, one can see that African-Americans and Latinos are consistently the most religious racial groups, while Asian Americans are consistently the least religious. Additionally, the chart titled, “Religiosity by Race, Marital Status, and Sex” shows that those who are married tend to be more religious than those who are not married, and that women tend to be more religious than men. Once again, to recognize the validity of this graph, these findings are consistent with most of the current literature.

Now, turning to the charts describing religiosity by income and educational achievement, we find something else interesting: that these variables do not make too much of a difference in regards to religiosity. Although, there is a slight drop in the amount of religiosity among the highest levels of income, religiosity tends to be fairly consistent across income and education levels. This runs contrary to the Marxist claim that religion is the opiate of the masses, in fact it seems that, at least in the American context, religion is similarly important for both the rich and poor, the scholar and the uneducated.



Figure



Figure



Figure



Figure

**Who participates?**

Before we can discuss how religion affects one’s political participation, we must review the current literature on who participates. One of the most obvious forms of political participation in America is voting. Others studies show evidence that genetic factors may play into political attitudes and behaviors (Alford, Funk and Hibbing 2005), and door-to-door canvassing efforts increases voter turnout (Green, Gerber, and Nickerson 2003), One study also shows that having a politically diverse social network increases political participation, which in turn promotes the creation of a more diverse social network (Quintelier, Stolle, Harell 2012). It would be interesting for future research to test what effect the political makeup of one’s religious congregation has on political participation, unfortunately, none of our datasets have such a measure. Additionally, such data would be hard to come by as many individuals are unlikely to know the political leanings of fellow congregants.

Several studies have shown that socioeconomic status (SES) strongly affect whether or not an individuals votes or participates in politics in other ways (Campbell et al 1960: Nie, Powell, and Prewitt 1969; Verba and Nie 1972 Milbrath and Goel 1977; Verba, Nie, and Kim 1978; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). Because of this, we will control for both education and income in our analysis. We also control for age as studies show that those who are older are more likely to be regular voters (Pew 2006). Those who are white have also been shown to be more likely to be registered voters than individuals of a minority race (Pew 2006). Additionally, we control for sex, despite evidence showing that there is not much of a difference between men and women when it comes to voter turnout; and marital status.

**Methods and Measures**

The method of statistical analysis used to check the above hypotheses are both a series of ordinal logit models with either interest in news or interest in politics as dependent variables. I then use OLS regression analysis to look for a relationship between religiosity and political participation.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Interest in news, interest in politics, and political participation are three separate dependent variables. The first two are ordinal level variables in the CCES dataset. Higher scores represent higher levels of interest. The third, political participation is a scale comprised of several other variables involving the 2008 presidential campaign which include: whether or not the respondent voted in the election, whether or not the respondent attended a political meeting (such as a school board meeting or a City Hall meeting), whether or not they tried to persuade someone else to vote in the election, whether or not they displayed a political sign (such as a yard sign or a bumper sticker), whether or not they have worked for a campaign, whether or not they have commented on or discussed the campaign on online forums, and whether or not the respondent has donated to a campaign. The scale ranges from 0 to 1, with 0 meaning no political participation and higher scores indicating larger amounts of political participation. It is a reliable scale with a Chronbach’s Alpha statistic of .69.

I have already discussed the scale I use for my main predictor variable of interest, religiosity, but to refresh it is a scale that rangers from 0 to 1 and is comprised of religious attendance, frequency of prayer, and how important the respondent believes religion is to their daily life. The scale is a reliable measure with a Chronbach’s Alpha statistic of .83. I use the following variables as control variables: education, income, marital status, gender. Education was selected as a control because of the elitist theory suggesting that those who are more affluent and/or educated are more likely to participate in politics. Gender was selected as a variable simply to check for a difference among the sexes, while marital status was added as a control as those who are married may have a more vested interest in community news and local politics. There is also evidence that married women have different political attitudes than singly women, therefore using marital status as a control will help check if this translates into political interest or participation.

**Results**

A quick look at the descriptive statistics of the analysis shows that in a comparison of individuals by racial groups, religiosity does not have a positive relationship with interest in news and politics. That is except for when it comes to Asian Americans, who have a clear positive relationship between their religiosity and their likelihood to be interested in both news and politics (see figures 5 and 6). The same is true when looking at religiosity as an indicator of political participation by racial groups (see graph: Political Participation Among Asian Americans by Religiosity). Most racial groups have no directional relationship between religiosity and their political participation; however, among Asian Americans the descriptive statistics show a positive relationship between religiosity and political participation.

In order to test whether there is a relationship between religiosity and interest in news and interest in politics among Asian-Americans, I used a series of ordinal logit models. As interest in news and interest in politics are separate dependent variables I fit separate models for both and repeat the process looking at other minority groups in order to compare. The results of this analysis are shown in table 2. I found that while controlling for education, marital status, and sex, going from 0 to 1 on the religiosity scale leads to a 173.2 percent increase in the odds of following the news “most of the time”, and a 311.8% increase in one being “very much interested” in politics. These changes in odds caused by religiosity are much higher for Asian Americans than they are for other minority groups. Predicted probabilities of interest in news and interest in politics among Asian Americans across levels of religiosity can be seen in figures 7 and 8; these also show evidence that increased religiosity can lead to increases in interest in both the news and politics.

In order to test the relationship between religiosity and political participation, I performed two multiple regression analyses. The first only included CCES respondents who identified as Asian while the second included the entire sample. I used the same controls as earlier: education, marital status, and sex. In order to account for heteroskedasticity in both models, I weighted both of the models and used robust standard errors[[5]](#footnote-5). The goodness of fit measures for both models were weak, but that was expected because of the relatively short length of the scales for both the independent and dependent variables.

Religiosity had positive coefficients and was statistically significant in both models. As expected, education was also positive and statistically significant for both. Interestingly, the coefficient for sex was only statistically significant when looking at the entire sample rather than just the Asian American community. Marital status was not statistically significant in either model.

Importantly, religiosity had a much larger coefficient (.1168; standard error: .03593) when looking only at the Asian population, than it did when examining the entire population (.0462; standard error: .00568). This not only provides evidence that religion is important in the political lives of Asian Americans, but that religiosity is a stronger indicator of participation among the Asian American population than it is of the population as a whole.

The constants in both models are statistically significant and it is interesting to note that the constant is smaller in the Asian American model (.11524; standard error: .11524) than the general sample model (.1910; standard error: .00645). This means substantively that Asian Americans who are not religious, the “religious nones,” are less likely to participate in politics than those who are not at all religious in the general population. Substantively, this means that an individual who goes from not religious at all to highly religious is likely to participate in politics in an additional way. This does not seem very significant, but religious conversion is a type of experience that often happens quickly and with large changes in the amount of religiosity. A religious none may convert to a religious zealot in a very short period of time, likewise, a very religious person may disown their religion altogether.

For both models religiosity has higher coefficients than those of all of the other control variables including education. While education seems to go hand in hand with affluence, which is studied often by those who contend that elites are more likely to participate, this data provides evidence that perhaps religiosity and indeed religion in general is important to understand in order to fully understand how Americans and, more specifically, how Asian Americans participate.

**Conclusion**

This paper goes beyond previous research to show that understanding the religious life of Asian Americans is an important consideration in trying to understand the political behavior and interests of Asian Americans. Going beyond Lein (2008), this paper uses a more comprehensive measure of religiosity beyond simply participation as an indicator of political action and then compares the strength of the indicator between the Asian American population and the general population. The results provide evidence that religiosity may be an even stronger indicator of political life among Asian Americans than among the population as a whole. This paper also contributes to the literature by showing evidence of a positive relationship between religiosity and interest in news and politics among the Asian American population. This is important as it shows evidence that political issues tend to be viewed as more important for those in the Asian American community who are more religious. The analysis shows that Asian Americans political participation lags behind White-American participation. There is a statistically significant difference in the mean participation of Asians (.257) compared to Whites (.355) (t=8.26). Perhaps, then, religiosity can be seen as an equalizing force for Asian Americans. The roots of this exceptional relationship between religion and politics among Asian Americans are still up for speculation. Perhaps the link is purely a social one, as Putnam and Cambpell (2010) points to. However, it is interesting to see that religiosity is connected to not only political actions that are social, but more personal acts such as news-reading and even one’s interest in politics.

Further, this paper hopes to inspire more political science research into the religious lives of Asian Americans by demonstrating that Asian Americans are an important group in American politics, that they are continuing to grow in political importance, and that religion is an important indicator of various political thought and action among this subgroup of the population. One important step that this paper argues for in order to further develop our understanding of Asian American politics is the inclusion of more in depth religiosity questions on surveys of Asian Americans. While type of religion, and religious attendance, are undoubtedly important aspects of Asian American religious life they do neither go far enough to help us understand how religious beliefs and behaviors work to form attitudes, nor do they help us form rounded religiosity scales that are more reliable than simple religious attendance variables.

**Appendix 1: Statistical Findings and Regression Outcomes**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Table 2: Ordered Logit Outcomes for Interest in News and Politics | | | | | | | |
|  | 1. News  (Asian Americans) | 2. Politics  (Asian Americans) | 3. News  (African Americans) | 4. Politics  (African Americans) | | 5. News  (Latinos) | 6. Politics  (Latinos) |
| Religiosity | 173.2\*  (.318) | 311.8\*  (.328) | 76.2\*  (.190) | 123.8\*  (.198) | | 51.0\*  (.170) | 77.2\*  (.176) |
| Education | 22.9\*  (.066) | 29.3\*  (.068) | 49.2\*  (.038) | 67.5\*  (.042) | | 61.1\*  (.039) | 72.5\*  (.042) |
| Marital Status | -34.9\*  (.200) | -28.7  (.205) | -28.9\*  (.095) | -29.6\*  (.099) | | -24.8\*  (.093) | -28.4\*  (.095) |
| Sex | -51.2\*  (.189) | -59.7\*  (.198) | -43.5\*  (.096) | -51.3\*  (.102) | | -41.3\*  (.091) | -51.7\*  (.095) |
| n | 422 | 427 | 1878 | 1896 |  | 1879 | 1912 |
| AIC | 1003.03 | 801.66 | 3977.76 | 3160.79 |  | 4080.11 | 3377.90 |
| BIC | 1031.34 | 826 | 4016.53 | 3194.07 |  | 4118.88 | 3411.23 |
|  |  |  |  | | | | |
| \*Statistically significant at the .05 criterion of significance  Coefficients given are the percent change in odds for a one-unit increase in x.  Notes: Several tests of the parallel regression assumption (PRA) were used on these models. Models 1, 2, 4, and 6 easily meet the parallel regression assumption. Model 3 meets the PRA, but more narrowly, and model 5 fails to meet the parallel regression assumption. | | | | | | | |

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Table 3: Political Participation | | | |
|  | Asian Americans | Rest of Sample | Entire Sample |
| Religiosity | .117\*  (.036) | .043\*  (.006) | .046\*  (.006) |
| Education | .026\*  (.008) | .042\*  (.001) | .0412\*  (.001) |
| Marital Status (Married) | -.027  (.024) | -.007\*  (.003) | .008  (.003) |
| Sex (Female) | -.018  (.022) | -.052\*  (.003) | -.051\*  (.003) |
| Constant | .115\*  (.039) | .259\*  (.009) | .191\*  (.006) |
| N | 338 | 26107 | 26445 |
| R-squared | 0.0818 | 0.1116 | 0.1093 |
| Root MSE | .17942 | .20667 | .20676 |
| \*Significance at the .05 criterion of significance  Robust standard errors are in parentheses.  CCES sampling weight applied. | | | |

**Appendix 2: Figures**

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Figure



Figure



Figure



Figure

**Appendix 3: Religiosity Measures in Major Surveys**

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| Table 1: Religion/Religiosity Variables in 2008 CCES |
| Would you describe yourself as a “born-again” or Evangelical Christian, or not? |
| How important is religion in your life? |
| Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services? |
| People practice their religion in different ways. Outside of attending religious services, how often do you pray? |
| Do you belong to any one of these churches or groups? (14 options) |
| What type of (one of 19 denominations ex: Baptist) church do you belong to? |

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| Table 2: Religion/Religiosity Variables in 2008 NAAS |
| What is your religious background? (35 including no religion, don't know, and refused) |
| How often do you attend your place of worship; at least every week, almost every week, a few times a month, only a few times during the year, hardly ever or never? |
| Would you describe yourself as any of the following:  a fundamentalist or evangelical Christian, a born again Christian, Pentecostal or Charismatic? |
| Have you always been a Christian, or did you convert at some point in time? |
| Did you convert before migrating to the United States? |
| Other than attending services or prayer, do you take part in any activity with people at your place of worship? |

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| Table 3: Religion/Religiosity Variables in 2012 ANES |
| Do you consider religion to be an important party of your life, or not? |
| Would you say your religion provides some guidance in your day-to-day living, quite a bit of guidance, or a great deal of guidance? |
| People practice their religion in different ways, outside of attending religious services how often do you pray? |
| Is the Bible the word of God or men? |
| Regardless of whether you now attend any religious services, do you ever think of yourself as part of a particular church or denomination? |
| Lots of things come up that keep people from attending religious services even if they want to. Thinking about your life these days, do you ever attend religious services, apart from occasional weddings, baptisms, or funerals? |
| Do you go to religious services every week, almost every week, once or twice a month, a few times a year, or never? |
| Would you say that you go to religious services once a week or more than once a week? |
| Do you mostly attend a religious group that is Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, or something else? |
| Do you consider yourself Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, or something else? |
| Is R Catholic, other Christian, other religion, not religious? |
| Major protestant denomination question |
| Specific protestant denomination question: What kind of church is that? What is it called exactly? Is that part of a larger church or denomination? What is the church called? |
| Specific Jewish Denomination |
| Does Christian R consider self born-again? |
| Religious identity: Progressive, non-traditional believer, secular, agnostic, atheist, spiritual but not religious, none of the above (ordered and asked three times, with narrowing response options) |

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1. Of course, if one is studying members of a particular religious tradition, it may be useful to tailor a religiosity scale toward that particular faith. However, this can be dangerous as many faiths contain many sects. As a general rule try to be as inclusive as possible. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The four major religious traditions in the United States are: Black Protestantism, Mainline Protestantism, Evangelical Protestantism, and Catholicism. Additionally, increased interest in the study of religion has gone to those who respond that they have no religious affiliation. These religious “nones” are not necessarily non-religious, they simply refuse to identify with any particular tradition or denomination. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This is not the case when looking at ethnicities within the definition of Asian American. In fact, Carnes and Yang 2004 point out that Filipino and Korean Americans are the most religious people in America (Carnes and Yang 2004). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. All statistical tests are run in Stata. a registered program of StataCorp. *Stata Statistical Software Release 13.0.* College Station, TX: StataCorp. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. I checked for non-constant error variance using the Cook-Weisberg test. The null-hypothesis of constant error variance was rejected in all cases. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)