Religious Commitment and Political Participation among Filipino Students in University-Based Religious Organizations

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ABSTRACT

Studies involving how religion affects the political dogma of an individual have exceedingly been laid on the surface of social science since the recognition of societal diversity. While it has always been argued that the concepts hold a strong connection, the need for a concrete characterization of religion and politics gets even more in demand as several considerations like multi-stage perspectives should be carried out. This study assessed the extent of how religious commitment can influence the political participation of members of university-based religious organizations. Using multiple regression analysis, only religious commitment had weak inverse relationship (t = -4.04, standardized β = -0.28, p 0.001, adjusted r2 = 0.07%) to political participation even if sex of respondents is controlled in the analysis. The religious commitment can only explain a little portion of the political participation of the respondents. There may be other significant factors that can explain the political participation of the respondents. This study has an implication on the student's moral development and political awareness.

Keywords: religious commitment, political participation, religious organization, Filipino students, sex.

INTRODUCTION

Religion playing a huge role in the lives of almost everyone has been apparent across many generations. Even in the previous millennia, the idea of having a supreme creator with established moral standards has long existed around the globe. Faith and spirituality have become the primary grounds of believers to live up to their personal duties and rituals as mandated by the church (Anas, Aijaz, Husain, 2015). Religiosity was found connected with higher positive outcomes, prosocial behaviors, and moral development (Dollahite, Hardy, & Layton, 2011). Although religion can be perceived subjectively, the culminated attitudes, beliefs, emotions, experiences, and rituals brought by the church make up for one's development of religious commitment (Küçükcan, 2000; Dollahite et al., 2011).

In essence, religion per se is not equivalent to religious commitment. Theorists and sociologists have found that even within a religious tradition, experiences vary in the interpretation of the concept (Küçükcan, 2000). In contrary, religious commitment instead involves a multidimensional

process for acceptance of a deity or supernatural being (Küçükcan, 2000). It explains how much an individual is involved in a religion and exhibits one's degree of adherence to the religious values, beliefs, and practices without failing to apply them in his everyday life (Anas, et al., 2015; Worthington, 1988).

Part of the discussion in this study explores another significant variable: political participation. Although political participation does not have a universally accepted definition, theorists and sociologists coined a set of interpretations based on an established frame of reference involving conventional political norms (Lamprianou, 2013). These include membership in political parties or community-based organizations, active roles in cultural interactions, signing petitions, and even setting up demonstrations and riots against corrupt officials (Bourne, 2010; Lamprianou, 2013). Furthermore, political participation is often treated as equivalent to "political engagement" (Lamprianou, 2013). The definition points out a similar scope of the examples mentioned earlier but implies more of an electoral process engagement (e.g., voting or joining a political party) (Lamprianou, 2013; Riley et al., 2010). Out of the given definitions, Munroe (2002) gives out a more defined meaning of the concept—which describes political participation as an individual's degree of exercising their rights to engage politically.

Several studies point out that religious commitment influenced political participation. The previous work of Secret and Johnson (1990) provide evidence on the relationship between religious commitment and political participation among white and black American. People in religious societies have higher political behavior (Aghazadeh & Mahmoudoghli, 2016). Furthermore, the involvement of Latinos in small church groups and church-based activities affects political activities (Djupe & Neiheisel, 2012).

Another interesting variable linked with political participation is sex. A recent study suggests that men show more participation through traditional forms of political participation (Gregory, 2016). These include joining political parties, actively consume media information regarding politics, engage in political discussion, and donate more money in campaigns (Gregory, 2016). Meanwhile, women pose atypical forms of political participation. When compared to men, women are found more likely to vote (Carroll, 2014; Gregory, 2016). Other popular types of participation among women also include political consumerism, boycotting products, social activism, an increase of political knowledge, and political efficacy when female candidates are involved (Coffe & Bolzendahl, 2010; Gregory, 2016; Stolle, Hooghe, & Micheletti, 2005). Literature suggests that existing sex differences in political participation are higher than men (Gregory, 2016).

Although various research articles on the relationship between political participation and religious commitment and political participation and sex were established, these mainly focus on western study participants. There is a scarcity on the published articles in the Philippines which examine the relationship between religious commitment and political participation of Filipinos. We suspect that college students with higher religious commitment also have higher political participation. Understanding the political behavior of Filipinos is critical on good governance and nation building. Thus, it is impelling to identify if religious commitment and sex can explain political participation.

Purpose of the Research

The main focus of the study is to find out the role of religious commitment and sex on political participation of college students who

are members of various religious organizations in the Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP) Manila Campus. The PUP is known to be a politically inclined institution, houses different organizations in religious accounts with varying sets of beliefs, internal culture, and principles. These organizations have been involved in certain political activities and these activities are populated by mostly activists in the university.

This study specifically aimed to a) determine the level of religious commitment; b) determine the level of political participation; and c) predict the religious commitment and sex on political participation of the sampled members of religious organizations.

The study hypothesized that religious commitment and sex do not predict political participation of college students.

METHODOLOGY

Respondents and Sampling

The 192 respondents (from seven campus-based religious organization), aged 17-26 years old, male (n = 71) and female (n = 121) in the study were chosen purposively during the second semester of the academic year 2016-2017 at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines (Manila, Philippines).

The purposive sampling technique was utilized in the study (Etikan et al., 2016). It is a non-probability technique which relies on the judgment of the researcher in selecting the respondents that are to be studied (Rahi, 2017). The sample being investigated is small, especially when compared with probability sampling techniques.

Using purposive sampling, the researcher set the inclusion and exclusion criteria for choosing respondents. The inclusion criteria were the following:1) a bonafide college student in PUP2)

has been studying in PUP for more than a year; 3) a member of any accredited and active religious organization in PUP, and 4) must be an active and participative member of their respective organization and shows willingness to participate in the study. Meanwhile, the exclusion criteria were the following: 1) not an active member of religious organization 2) potential respondents who do not complete the survey form, and 3) newly student of PUP.

Instruments

A survey questionnaire was used to obtain participants' demographic information such as age and sex.

The modified 10-item Religious Commitment Inventory (RCI) adopted from Worthington and colleagues (2003), with Cronbach $\alpha = 0.92$, was used to assess respondents' degree of religious commitment. RCI was rated using a 5-point Likert rating scale (1 as *"Not at all true of me"*, to 5 as *"Totally true of me"*). The respondents took an average time of 10-15 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

The 15-item Political Participation Scale (PPS), with Cronbach $\alpha = 0.89$, was used to measure the political participation of the respondents wherein they had to identify their involvement in political activities. The statements are composed of various determinants of political participation such as joining political parties, participating in political mobilizations, and offline and online engagements (Sönmez, 2012). The PPS was rated using the 5-point Likert scale (1 *"Never"*, to 5 *"Always"*). The respondents took 10-15 minutes to answer the scale.

Data Gathering Procedure

Recruitment of the participants was

conducted with the help of student leaders of different organizations. Consenting respondents were handed the pen-and-paper instrument. Before the administration of the survey, there was an orientation on the purpose of the study and the participants were informed that: a) they can participate or withdraw from the study anytime; b) they will not receive any monetary for joining; c) there are no right or wrong answers; d) all items need to be answered; e) they can take their time when completing the instrument. Identities of the participants were not obtained to ensure confidentiality.

Statistical Analysis

The frequency and percentage were used to describe the profile of the respondents. The weighted mean and standard deviation were used to describe the level of religious commitment and political participation of the respondents. Cronbach alpha was computed to find out the reliability of the instruments using Cronbach alpha = 0.70 as its cut off points for good reliability (Field, 2015; Gliem & Gliem, 2003).

Before the use of multiple regression analysis, assumptions were met (Field, 2015). Multiple regression analysis was utilized to determine if the religious commitment and sex as an independent variable when combined can predict political participation (dependent variable) of the respondents, $p < .05$, SPSS version 21.0.

RESULTS

The primary purpose of the study was to determine the degree of religious commitment and political participation of the college students and to find out if religious commitment and sex can predict political participation.

Table 4 illustrates the level of religious commitment of the respondents. Based on the survey, the respondents have a high commitment with M = 4.19; SD = 0.64. Among all the ten statements, only one statement was assessed with "moderate commitment" while the remaining was interpreted as "high commitment." The statement *"I enjoy spending time with other people with the same religious affiliation as mine"* was assessed with the highest among items with high commitment, M = 4.37; SD = 0.71 while the statement *"I read books and magazines about my faith"* was assessed with the lowest M = 3.94; SD = 0.94 (moderate commitment).

The statement saying that respondents consider their religious beliefs as the basis of their whole approach in life got M = 4.30; SD = 0.83, thus assessed as "high" in terms of commitment level. High level of commitment was attached as interpretation to the statement with M = 4.29; SD = 0.80, where respondents reported that they enjoy working in the activities of their religious affiliation. The statements where respondents reported that they spend time trying to grow in understanding their faith and they give importance to their religion because it answers many questions about the meaning of life got a score M = 4.28; SD = 0.87 and were assessed as "high commitment" in this term. The four remaining statements were assessed as "high commitment" among respondents with weighted means 4.18, 4.16, 4.12, and 4.02 with standard deviation ranges from 0.80 − 0.90 respectively.

Findings showed that respondents have "low" political participation indicated in the overall rating (see Table 2). From our survey, the low participation of respondents reflected on statements for example, *"I participate in a boycott"* with M = 2.08; SD = 1.59, "*I share online videos/opinions about a social-political issue on social media*" with M = 1.92; SD = 0.89 and I write blogs or post a status/tweet about a

social-political issue (M = 1.79; SD = 0.93).

To further examine if religious commitment combined with the sex of the respondents can predict political participation, a multiple regression analysis was conducted (see Table 3). Political participation was entered as the dependent variable, and religious commitment and sex were entered as independent variables and potential predictors. In the regression model, it was observed that out of two independent variables, only religious commitment was able to explain, adjustedr2 = 0.07% of the variance in political participation. Religious commitment (β = -0.28; t =-4.05; p<0.05) can significantly predict political participation. The inverse relationship between religious commitment and political participation suggests that students who have higher levels of religious commitment have lower levels of political participation. On the other hand, the variable on sex was not significantly related to political participation; in other words, students' political involvement was not influenced by whether they were male or female.

DISCUSSION

Religious commitment is defined as the practice of one's beliefs in reference to religion (Hood Jr., Hill, & Spilka, 2018). In this study, the religious commitment of the respondents was assessed (see Table 1). The high level of religious commitment of the respondents such as attending religious activities and allowing their faith as a guide for their decision is supported by the results of Social Weather Stations (SWS) showing that religion is important among Filipinos (Santos & Marchadesch, 2017). According to Abad (2001), Filipinos consistently believe they are religious based on studies in 1991 and 1998. Intuitively, it is expected from the respondents of a religious organization to be religious.

However, the present study did not show

a high level of political participation, a concept used to describe how individuals express their attitudes and behaviors towards a particular political instance. Participation comes in several forms— through voting, joining campaign signatures, establishing political organizations, and even conveying personal opinions on any political agenda with family, friends, or to some extent within any social networking sites (Sönmez, 2012; 2013). Based on the survey, most of the respondents did not participate in political activities such as attending debates, engagement in political marches, rallies, boycott demonstration, and sharing opinions in online media. One possible explanation is that members of the religious organization are individuals who hugely embody divinity rather than engage in political activism that usually uses violence as a means. The members of religious organizations are probably pro-peace advocates who prefer less involvement in any political engagement activities.

The results of multiple regression analysis showed that religious commitment predicts a negatively weak relationship on political participation of religious organization members. Contrary to the previous work of Sönmez (2013) which indicates that religiosity is negatively associated with all forms of political participation (conventional and unconventional approach), the present study suggests that the religiosity of the members does not support political activism unless it is directly opposing their religious belief (e.g., the promotion of pro-life rather than abortion and the use of contraceptives or any form of violation on human rights). The core teaching of religion is to work towards peace and unity which may likely affect their decision to participate in any form of political activism. However, there are numerous factors that may influence the political behavior of the members of the organization which are not covered in this

General Impression on the Students' Religious Commitment

Table 1. Level of Religious Commitment

Statements	Mean	SD
I read books and magazines about my faith.	3.94	0.94
I make financial contributions to my religious organization.	4.02	1.03
I spend time trying to grow in understanding my faith.	4.28	0.76
I give importance to my religion because it answers a lot of questions about the meaning of life.	4.28	0.87
I consider my religious beliefs as the basis of my whole approach in life.	4.30	0.83
I enjoy spending time with other people with the same religious affiliation as mine.	4.37	0.71
I let my religious beliefs influence all of my decisions in life.	4.16	0.87
I spend periods of time in private religious thoughts and reflection.	4.12	0.90
I enjoy working in the activities of my religious affiliation.	4.29	0.80
I am well informed about my local religious group and have some influence in its decisions.	4.18	0.87
Total Weighted Mean	**4.19**	**0.64**

Interpretation: Very High Commitment (4.50-5.00), High Commitment (3.50-4.49), Moderate Commitment (2.50-3.49), Low Commitment (1.50-2.49), Very Low Commitment (1.00-1.49)

General Impression on the Students' Political Participation

Table 2. Level of Political Participation

Statements	Mean	SD
I work in a campaign for a party or candidate.	1.38	0.65
I engage in debates about a social-political issue with friends or family.	1.68	0.77
I volunteer with an organization that supports social-political party/individual.	1.47	0.75
I encourage others to sign a physical petition.	1.44	0.69
I participate in a boycott.	2.08	1.59
I create posters or flyers about a social-political issue.	1.28	0.54
I mobilize offline support for a social-political issue.	1.31	0.58
I attend political demonstrations/meetings.	1.37	0.68
I participate in protest marches.	1.28	0.55
I share information about a social-political issue in-person.	1.54	0.76
I attend in-person informational sessions about a social-political issue.	1.35	0.63
I follow political leaders or decision makers on social media with the same political stand as mine.	1.74	0.81
I share online videos/opinions about a social-political issue on social media.	1.92	0.89
I mobilize online support for a social-political issue through online campaign	1.77	0.89
I write blogs or post a status/tweet about a social-political issue.	1.79	0.93
Total Weighted Mean	**1.56**	**0.46**

Interpretation: Very High Participation (4.50-5.00), High Participation (3.50-4.49), Moderate Participation (2.50-3.49), Low Participation (1.50-2.49), Very Low Participation (1.00-1.49)

General Impression on the Students' Religious Commitment

Table 1. Level of Religious Commitment

Variables	Standard Coefficients β	Standard Error	*t*-value	Adjusted r²	F-value
Sex	-0.06	0.07	-0.83	7%	8.46
Religious Commitment	-0.28*	0.05	-4.05		

Interpretation: * - *p* < 0.05, significant

study.

The results on the variable of sex did not provide evidence on its influence on political participation, which is contrary to the previous work of Gregory (2016). According to Gregory (2016), gender is a significant predictor of political involvement because there are existing sex differences when it comes to comparing men and women. According to Phillips (1991), sex is worthy to study since previous literature mentioned that men and women have different patterns of behavior in terms of political engagement. In the case of the present results, it can be inferred that sex cannot impose an influence to political participation, even combined with religious commitment, because PUP as a political environment is tearing down the sex barriers due to the patriarchal ruling which is apparent in the country. Aside from the changing environment, it can also be due to social media which acts as a social lubricant allowing all to participate freely.

CONCLUSION

The present study provided partial evidence to support the hypothesis that religious commitment and sex do not predict political participation of college students. In other words, among the two variables - religious commitment and sex, only religious commitment predicts political participation of the respondents.

Although the regression analysis approach in this study presents an interesting analysis of the data sets, caution should be exercised since religious commitment can only explain a little portion on the political participation of the respondents. One cannot generalize the results due to the choice of sampling method; hence, multi-factors may contribute to predict the increase of political participation. Moreover, future researchers may strengthen the factor structure of the RCI and PPS questionnaire aside from its reliability.

It is recommended that future studies may use a mixed method research design to explore the possible linkage of other factors (for example, age, personal disposition, etc.) on political participation. The combination of quantitative and qualitative research design could provide a meaningful explanation of political behavior of college students.

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