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Do Sociocultural Factors Drive Civic Engagement? An Examination of Political Interest and Religious Attendance

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Abstract: The U.S. simultaneously faces declining rates of and barriers to engagement, despite the importance to society and benefits to the participant. Research largely focuses on individual demographics, social, and economic characteristics, but what role do sociocultural factors play in civic engagement? This study examines the influence of political interest and religious attendance on five measures of civic engagement—formal volunteering, informal volunteering, public meeting attendance, voting, and blood donation. Religious attendance plays a greater role in volunteering while political interest plays a greater role in political participation. This work illustrates how different factors relate to different types of engagement. Findings demonstrate the need to move beyond socioeconomic factors to examine sociocultural factors that may influence civic engagement and the need for multiple measures of engagement.

Keywords: civic engagement, volunteering, voting, political interest, religiosity

Civic engagement is vital for a healthy democracy. Despite the United States having a long tradition of civic engagement, dating back to Alexis de Tocqueville's 1831 visit to America (de Tocqueville 1831), social capital has been on the decline in recent decades (e.g. Alexander and Fernandez 2020; Cameron 2021; Piatak 2015; Putnam 2000; Skocpol and Fiorina 2004). In addition to this decline, the world has faced a series of recent events contributing to the erosion of civil society. Across the globe, countries have faced a pandemic and increasing polarization that threaten public trust and democracy (Bauer and Becker 2020; Deslatte 2020; Fanelli et al. 2020; Roberts 2020; Simonovits, McJoy, and Littvay 2022; Strachwitz and Toepler 2022). In the U.S., the pandemic drew attention to and exacerbated existing inequities (Gaynor and Wilson 2020; Wright II and Merritt 2020), politics has put democracy at risk (Jacobs 2022; West 2022), and younger individuals have the lowest rates of voting

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(e.g. Holbein and Hillygus 2016). Yet prominent theories of civic engagement take a resource- or status-based approach, where individuals with more resources or status signals, such as education or income, are more likely to engage (e.g. Smith 1994; Wilson 2000, 2012; Musick and Wilson 2008). Given increasing polarization that divides the public, what can bridge people together to promote civic engagement? Moving beyond socioeconomic factors, how do sociocultural factors influence civic engagement?

Drawing upon theories on civic engagement, sociocultural factors, such as political interest and religious attendance, may play an informational role, exposing people to a wider array of news and opportunities, and/or a social capital building role, where people expand their social networks and ties. People may learn about opportunities to volunteer, politically engage, or donate blood through their political interest or religious services. For example, people with larger networks tend to receive more invitations to volunteer (McPherson et al. 2006; Musick and Wilson 2008; Verba et al. 1995).

This study draws upon data from the Cooperative Congressional Elections Study, a nationally representative survey surrounding the 2016 Presidential Election, to examine the influence of two sociocultural factors—political interest and religious attendance—on measures of civic engagement ranging from community activities like informal and formal volunteering to political participation like attending public meetings and voting.

This study has several implications for research and practice. First, many studies on volunteering and civic engagement use government datasets, such as the Volunteering and Civic Life Supplement of the Current Population Survey (U.S. Census Bureau 2022), that do not include questions about religion or politics. Second, this study shows how sociocultural factors relate to civic engagement, sometimes above and beyond socioeconomic characteristics like education and employment. Lastly, different factors correspond to different types of civic engagement. Individual demographics, socioeconomic characteristics, and sociocultural factors, like political interest and religious attendance examined here, relate to formal volunteering, informal volunteering, attending local public meetings, voting, and blood donation in different ways. Findings highlight the importance of both the need to move beyond a resource-based approach to recruit volunteers, engage the public, and mobilize voters and the need to measure civic engagement broadly as people may engage, participate, and donate to the community in different ways. While higher political interest corresponds to both community and political participation, greater religious attendance corresponds largely to community participation with no significant relationship with voting.

1 The Decline of and Inequity in Civic Engagement

Civic engagement and social capital play a critical role in society from engaging people in volunteering to ensuring all segments of our society have a voice through political representation. Yet civic engagement has been waning. In his seminal work, *Bowling Alone*, Putnam (2000) describes the decline of social capital in America since the 1950s. Indeed, this can be seen from downward trends in volunteering (e.g. Piatak 2016) to voting (e.g. Stanley and Niemi 2018). In the U.S., only about a quarter (24.9%) of the population volunteers (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2016) and less than half (49%) of the population voted (U.S. Census Bureau 2019). Civic engagement trends have been stable at these declined levels over the past two decades (AmeriCorps, Office of Research and Evaluation 2021). Alexander and Fernandez (2020) argue rather than disengagement, “a more thorough explanation would document the ways in which citizens have been abandoned by institutional forms that encourage their participation in the project of democracy” (381).

While many use social capital, civic engagement, and political participation interchangeably, they have different meanings. Ostrom and Ahn (2009) define social capital as “an attribute of individuals and of their relationships that enhance their ability to solve collective action problems” (22). Similarly, Putnam (1995) defines social capital as the “features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (67). These definitions and others (for further discussion, see Bixler and Springer 2018), demonstrate how social capital is the social fabric of society that facilitates collaboration, trust, and coordination to advance the common good.

Civic engagement is often equated with civic associations and associational membership (e.g. Barreto et al. 2022; Putnam 2000). Nonprofits have an opportunity to play a greater role in civic engagement (Abramson and Salamon 2016), fostering social cohesion (Anheier and Toepler 2019), and in giving people a voice in the democratic process (Alexander and Fernandez 2020). Scholars have found enhanced public support for nonprofits in times of political polarization (Lamothe and Lavastida 2020). While nonprofits engage in civic activities and can be “schools of democracy” (Dodge and Ospina 2016; Fernandez et al. 2022), people can also civically engage in their communities independently as individuals—through formal organizations and informal volunteering.

Meanwhile, political participation can be defined as: “actions of private citizens by which they seek to influence or to support government and politics” (Milbrath 1981, 198). Similarly, Verba et al. (1995) define political participation as activities with “the intent or effect of influencing government action—either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influence the

selection of people who make those policies” (p. 38). With this broad definition, political participation cannot be captured by a single measure like voting but encompasses a wide range of activities related to public policy, government, and politics, such as protests, campaigning, internet activism, and voting (e.g. Brady et al. 1995; Dalton 2008; Newman and Bartels 2011).

The broadness of each of these concepts makes consistent measurement difficult and many examine a wide array of measures to capture each. For example, Chetty et al. (2022) measure social capital in three ways: connectedness between different people, also known as weak ties (Granovetter 1983) or bridging social capital (Putnam 1995); social cohesion, also known as strong ties or bonding social capital; and civic engagement, which they measure as volunteering and density of civic organization. Cnaan et al. (1996) examine definitions of volunteering across four dimensions: free choice, remuneration, structure, and intended beneficiaries. Similarly, Li and Zhang (2017) examine political participation across four dimensions: degree of institutionalization, individualized versus group-based, difficulty, and policy influence. The forms of civic engagement are in Table 1 below varying in structure, group involvement, and relation to politics/policy, which defines political participation compared to community engagement. This study focuses on civic engagement broadly ranging in measures from community engagement like informal and formal volunteering to political engagement like public meeting attendance and voting to a more personal act of giving, blood donation.

Calls for greater civic engagement and service in the U.S. can be seen in the recent Presidential Proclamation of National Volunteer Week (Biden 2021):

We are living in a moment that calls for hope and light and love. Hope for our futures, light to see our way forward, and love for one another. Volunteers provide all three. Service—the act of looking out for one another—is part of who we are as a Nation. Our commitment to service reflects our understanding that we can best meet our challenges when we join together. This week, we recognize the enduring contributions of our Nation’s volunteers and encourage more Americans to join their ranks.

Table 1: Measures of civic engagement.

Forms of civic engagement	Structure	Relation to politics/policy	Group involvement
Voting	High	High	Individual
Public meeting attendance	Moderate	High	Group
Formal volunteering	High	Low	Group
Informal volunteering	Low	Low	Group
Blood donation	High	Low	Individual

Yet people may not have equitable opportunities to engage. For example, Piatak (2016) finds unemployed individuals are less likely to volunteer, but those that do, devote a greater amount of time to volunteering than full-time employees. Similarly, Piatak et al. (2019) find individuals without home internet access have lower rates of volunteering and are less likely to become involved through invitations to volunteer, but again, those that do, devote a greater amount of time to volunteering than the digitally connected. Verba et al. (1995) argue: "... many people never receive requests to get involved. Moreover, inclusion in a recruitment network is not a random process ... " (p. 134). This reflects the predominant theories on the determinants of volunteering – the dominant status (Smith 1994) and resource-based (Musick and Wilson 2008) approaches. These approaches argue that people with dominant statuses, or resources, in society, such as a job and higher levels of education or even a spouse or a child, will be more likely to receive invitations to volunteer due to the social network resources bring in addition to them serving as "ability signals" (Musick and Wilson 2008). Unfortunately, volunteer recruiters have been found to target certain groups bases on resource-based characteristics (e.g. Dean 2016).

Resources influence the ability to engage beyond volunteering. For example, public meetings play a role in gaining citizen input into the policymaking process (Adams 2004); however, socioeconomic and mobilization factors, such as a lack of availability, awareness, or invitation to engage, often limit the voices represented (McComas, Beasley, and Trumbo 2006). In addition, the United States has a dark history of voter suppression from Jim Crow laws and women's suffrage before all American citizens were granted the right to vote (Wang 2012) to the role of institutions in shaping accessibility and turnout (Kropf 2016) to voter ID laws today shaping whose votes get cast (Hajnal et al. 2017). Despite civic engagement being vital for a healthy democracy, engagement in U.S. politics, elections, and civil society have been far from inclusive or equitable in addition to being on the decline. How might cultural and less visible factors beyond reflections of socioeconomic status correspond to civic engagement?

2 Sociocultural Factors: Political Interest and Religious Attendance

Moving beyond demographic determinants and socioeconomic factors that are often examined in the literature, this study examines the role of political interest and religious attendance as examples of sociocultural factors that may engage or bridge people together across lines of difference. Socioeconomic factors are based on the resource or dominant status approach, where ties to one another are largely strong

ties or bonding social capital. For example, people at the same workplace or with children at the same school are in the same social circles and may receive the same requests to volunteer or information to engage. However, sociocultural factors, like religious attendance or extracurricular group activities, may be more likely to bridge people across socioeconomic lines. For example, people across social groups and economic statuses may attend the same religious services for bridging social capital or weak ties. See Table 1 for examples of each category, where the focus of the resource-based approach is to engage those with greater socioeconomic resources, based on assumptions that they have the resources to give. However, this ignores the benefits of engagement for individuals and the need for broader and inclusive political, civic, and community participation.

Theoretically, sociocultural factors, like political interest and religious attendance, may play an informational or network-building role that may correspond to higher levels of civic engagement. For example, Howard and Gilbert (2008) find those involved in voluntary organizations are more engaged in political action. Across countries, research finds associational involvement corresponds to political action that is not explained by civic skills or civic mindedness (van der Meer and van Ingen 2009; van Stekelenburg et al. 2016). However, Wiepking, Einolf, and Yang (2023) find that both secular and religious involvement correspond to increased giving and volunteering and that this relationship is mediated by social capital. Based on the role political interest and religious attendance may have in measuring personal motivation for engagement, learning about opportunities to engage, and broadening one's social network to receive greater invitations to engage, both sociocultural factors are expected to positively correspond with civic engagement.

2.1 Political Interest

Political interest is an individual's level of interest people in government and public affairs. As one might expect, political interest is highly related to civic engagement. As Prior (2010) states: "political interest is typically the most powerful predictor of political behaviors that make democracy work" (p. 747). Political interest might play an informational role, where those interested in public affairs will seek out information and opportunities to engage in society. In addition, those with political interest are likely to self-select into opportunities to engage, such as through political demonstrations or other associational involvement, that enhance civic engagement (Howard and Gilbert 2008; van der Meer and van Ingen 2009; van Stekelenburg et al. 2016). Research finds membership in such voluntary associations helps political integration among migrant groups (Eggert and Giugni 2010). Since political interest

may serve a motivational, information, or social capital role in fostering civic engagement, I hypothesize:

H1a: People with higher political interest will be more likely to informally volunteer.

H1b: People with higher political interest will be more likely to formally volunteer.

H1c: People with higher political interest will be more likely to donate blood.

H1d: People with higher political interest will be more likely to attend public meetings.

H1e: People with higher political interest will be more likely to vote.

2.2 Religious Attendance

Religion frequently corresponds to civic engagement. Religion can be seen as social capital fostering social networks, community involvement, volunteering, and mobilizing political engagement (Smidt 2003). Religious organizations are often used to engage communities in the democratic process (Mosley 2016). Religious involvement, across income, race, and ethnic groups, promotes civic engagement broadly defined as involvement in voluntary groups and political participation (Huckle and Silva 2020; Jones-Correa and Leal 2001; Smidt 1999; Verba et al. 1995). While some find people who report a religious affiliation tend to volunteer more (De Hart 2001; Heinz and Schnorr 2001; Lam 2002), others find no association between religious motivation and volunteering (Cnaan et al. 1993). However, attending religious services often corresponds to volunteering (Kim and Jang 2017; Musick and Wilson 2008; Ruiter and de Graaf 2006). Religious attendance might play a social role, where higher levels of religious attendance led to greater social networks with greater opportunities for invitations and information sharing to engage in society. Lewis, MacGregor, and Putnam (2013) found social integration mediates the relationship between attending religious services and volunteering, much like Wiepking, Einolf, and Yang (2023) finding on the mediating role of social capital for both secular and religious involvement on volunteering. Nonprofit voter mobilization efforts increase voter turnout (LeRoux et al. 2022), perhaps religious organizations also play a role in getting out the vote.

While religion, religiosity, and attending religious services tend to correspond with higher levels of civic engagement, research has found differences across measures of religion, religiosity, and the frequency of religious attendance across different types of civic engagement. For example, Yeung (2018) found that private religiosity corresponded to greater secular volunteering, whereas public religiosity reduced secular volunteering. Relatedly, Taniguchi and Thomas (2011) find that religious exclusiveness only promotes volunteering in religious areas, whereas religious inclusiveness promotes both religious and secular. In the Netherlands,

research finds spirituality increases informal volunteering, whereas religious service attendance corresponds to religious and secular volunteering but not informal volunteering (van Tienen et al. 2011). Similarly, McKenzie (2001) finds religious attendance corresponds to voting, but not other forms of political participation like attending local government meetings. Therefore, the influence of religious service attendance on civic engagement is not as conclusive as it may seem and seems to vary by the type of activity. Despite nuances found in past research, the social capital role of attending religious services would predict higher levels of civic engagement broadly across types of engagement.

H1a: People with higher religious attendance will be more likely to informally volunteer.

H1b: People with higher religious attendance will be more likely to formally volunteer.

H1c: People with higher religious attendance will be more likely to donate blood.

H1d: People with higher religious attendance will be more likely to attend public meetings.

H1e: People with higher religious attendance will be more likely to vote.

3 Methods

This study draws upon data from the 2016 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES), coordinated by a group of scholars and administered by YouGov (for details on sampling, content, and open data, see: Ansolabehere and Schaffner 2017). A matched random sample of 64,600 U. S. adults was asked the common content in October 2016 and in November 2016. Sample matching is used for representative samples from non-randomly selected pools of applicants. The CCES has been found to mirror voting turnout and election results (Ansolabehere and Rivers 2013; Ansolabehere and Schaffner 2014). Half of the survey consists of common content and the other half are based on team modules. This study is based on a team module, where a subsample of 1000 respondents were asked civic engagement questions relevant for this study. The analytic sample is 790 individuals with complete information across all variables in the study.

The dependent variables are five measures of civic engagement ranging in terms of formalization and relation to government and politics – formal volunteering, informal volunteering, public meeting attendance, voting, and blood donation. While broad measures of civic engagement, social capital, and political participation have been used in the past, understanding how different factors influence different ways of engaging, volunteering, and participating in civil society are vital. These are all measured as dichotomous variables with a one indicating the individual participated

in that type of civic engagement, and a 0 if they did not. The survey questions for volunteering were modeled from the Volunteer Supplement of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016) Current Population Survey. Respondents were asked, “Over the past year have you . . .” and given the option “volunteered through or for a formal organization” for formal volunteering and “worked with neighbors to fix or improve something” for informal volunteering.

Among the sample of respondents, 42 percent formally volunteered, and 24 percent informally volunteered. Public meeting attendance is whether respondents indicated they attended local political meetings (such as school board or city council), which about 11 percent of respondents did. Voting is whether respondents voted in the 2016 election, where 83 percent of the sample voted. Lastly, 13 percent of the sample donated blood in the past year. While the analytic sample has relatively high levels of civic engagement compared to some surveys (e.g. U.S. Census Bureau 2019, 2022), the study focuses on factors that correspond to different types of engagement rather than predicting levels of engagement.

The key independent variables are the two sociocultural factors—political interest and religious attendance. To measure political interest, respondents were asked: “Some people seem to follow what’s going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there’s an election going on or not. Other’s are not that interested. Would you say you are following what’s going on in government and public affairs . . .” then given a Likert-scale of options. This scale ranges from 0, hardly at all, to 3, most of the time, with an average of two or some of the time. Religious attendance is measured using one of the Pew Research Center’s (2015) measures of religiosity. Respondents were asked: “Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services?” The scale ranges from 0, never, to 5, more than once a week, with an average of 1.87 or nearly two indicating a few times a year. Descriptive statistics for all variables are above in Table 2.

Table 2: Potential correlates of civic engagement.

Types of Characteristics	Examples
Demographics	Gender
	Age
	Race
Socioeconomic	Education
	Employment
	Income
Sociocultural	Political interest
	Religious attendance
	Arts participation
	League/Club/Associational membership

In addition, several demographic and sociodemographic variables are included to control for the influence of individual characteristics and resources or status categories. The demographic variables include gender, race/ethnicity, and age. For gender, an indicator variable is included for females (58% of the sample) since women tend to volunteer more than men (e.g. Musick and Wilson 2008). For race/ethnicity, indicators are included for White (79%), Black (8%), and Latinx (6%) with multiracial and other as the excluded reference group. For age, the numerical age is included, which ranges from 20 to 94 with 52 as the average age of the sample. For family characteristics, indicators are included for whether an individual is married (55%) and has a child present in the household (25%) since both being married and having children increases one's social network. To control for socioeconomic factors, indicators are included for employment status (full-time, part-time, retired, unemployed, and disabled compared to other), homeownership (62% of the sample), and education, ranging from 1, no high school diploma, to 6, a post-graduate degree, with a mean of 3.78 or nearly four representing a 2-year degree.

Lastly, this study controls for political factors and religion as they may influence political interest, religiosity, and civic engagement. For political factors, political ideology is taken into account using an indicator for no ideology (nearly 6% report) and a scale of political ideology from liberal to conservative with an average of 2.86. Political party is also included with indicators for whether respondents are registered as a Republican (25%) or Democrat (37%) compared to independents. For religion, indicators are included for Protestant, Catholic, Nondenominational, Jewish, Muslim, Eastern Religion, and Other Religion compared to no religion, which is the excluded reference category.

Since each of the five dependent variables are indicator variables taking on one if the respondent participated in that type of civic engagement in the last year, logistic regression models are used for the analysis. Following are the results with odds ratios and robust standard errors reported for the logistic regressions with team module sample weights and clustered robust standard errors at the state level as respondents in a given community may be similar to one another. Results from models without clustered standard errors and weights mirror these results.

4 Results

Model one in Table 3 below shows the logistic regression results for formal volunteering. As expected, both political interest and religious attendance increase the odds an individual will volunteer through or for a formal organization. Similarly in Model 2, people with higher levels of political interest and religious attendance are also more likely to volunteer informally in their communities. Interestingly, political

interest has a stronger relationship with informal volunteering, while religious attendance has a stronger relationship with formal volunteering.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics.

	Mean	Std.	Min	Max
Dependent variables				
Formal volunteering	0.420	0.494	0	1
Informal volunteering	0.243	0.429	0	1
Local meeting attendance	0.109	0.312	0	1
Voting	0.830	0.376	0	1
Blood donation	0.130	0.337	0	1
Independent variables				
Political interest	2.232	0.929	0	3
Religious attendance	1.872	1.689	0	5
Controls				
White	0.791	0.407	0	1
Black	0.081	0.273	0	1
Latinx	0.063	0.244	0	1
Female	0.581	0.494	0	1
Child(ren) present	0.254	0.436	0	1
Married	0.547	0.498	0	1
Age	52.335	16.921	20	94
Full-time employee	0.408	0.492	0	1
Part-time employee	0.104	0.305	0	1
Retired	0.222	0.416	0	1
Unemployed	0.081	0.273	0	1
Disabled	0.070	0.255	0	1
Homeowner	0.624	0.485	0	1
Education	3.784	1.487	1	6
Political ideology	2.863	1.313	0	5
No political ideology	0.059	0.237	0	1
Republican	0.253	0.435	0	1
Democrat	0.367	0.482	0	1
Protestant	0.354	0.479	0	1
Catholic	0.228	0.420	0	1
Nondenominational	0.013	0.112	0	1
Jewish	0.033	0.179	0	1
Muslim	0.006	0.079	0	1
Eastern religion	0.011	0.106	0	1
Other religion	0.054	0.227	0	1
No religion	0.300	0.459	0	1

N = 790.

For the sociodemographic variables, only education consistently predicts volunteering, both formal and informal. Those with children are less likely to formally volunteer, but more likely to informally volunteer. Yet married individuals and those who own their own home are more likely to volunteer formally, but these factors do not significantly relate to informal volunteering.

Table 4 below shows the results for local meeting attendance (model 3), voting (model 4), and blood donation (model 5). Much like the findings for volunteering,

Table 4: Logistic regression results: formal and informal volunteering.

	Model 1:		Model 2:	
	Formal volunteering		Informal volunteering	
	Odds ratio	Robust standard error	Odds ratio	Robust standard error
Political interest	1.247	0.109*	1.443	0.155**
Religious attendance	1.514	0.084***	1.211	0.087**
White	0.973	0.366	0.876	0.398
Black	0.877	0.424	1.028	0.537
Latinx	0.681	0.275	0.800	0.287
Female	1.155	0.168	0.899	0.159
Child(ren) present	0.662	0.145	1.832	0.456*
Married	1.361	0.242	0.915	0.177
Age	0.988	0.006*	1.004	0.007
Full-time employee	0.967	0.380	0.839	0.304
Part-time employee	1.238	0.563	1.204	0.408
Retired	1.236	0.488	1.409	0.520
Unemployed	0.554	0.222	1.224	0.459
Disabled	0.669	0.349	0.882	0.472
Homeowner	1.315	0.218	1.356	0.328
Education	1.255	0.063***	1.185	0.085*
Political ideology	0.905	0.087	0.917	0.100
No political ideology	0.790	0.354	0.715	0.409
Republican	0.982	0.187	0.896	0.223
Democrat	1.167	0.249	1.033	0.209
Protestant	0.925	0.168	1.083	0.315
Catholic	0.966	0.201	1.129	0.271
Nondenominational	0.869	0.506	1.207	0.761
Jewish	0.743	0.321	0.887	0.468
Muslim	0.299	0.389	1.101	1.124
Eastern religion	0.692	0.455	2.182	1.451
Other religion	1.219	0.417	2.713	1.064*
Constant	0.161	0.102**	0.038	0.031***
<i>N</i>	790		790	
Pseudo <i>R</i> -squared	0.12		0.8	

* $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, *** $p \leq 0.001$.

Table 5: Logistic regression results: Local meetings, voting, and blood donation.

	Model 3: Local meetings		Model 4: Vote		Model 5: Blood donation	
	Odds ratio	RSE	Odds ratio	RSE	Odds ratio	RSE
Political interest	3.303	0.654***	3.206	0.518***	1.223	0.228
Religious attendance	1.272	0.109*	1.106	0.091	0.983	0.065
White	0.741	0.299	2.767	1.683	0.741	0.367
Black	0.555	0.364	4.643	2.724**	0.431	0.269
Latinx	0.527	0.469	3.895	2.623*	0.366	0.258
Female	0.64	0.155	0.925	0.279	0.726	0.16
Child(ren) present	1.456	0.386	1.131	0.336	1.311	0.329
Married	1.248	0.328	1.085	0.332	0.908	0.249
Age	0.995	0.009	1.016	0.008	0.964	0.011**
Full-time employee	1.978	1.255	2.1	0.735*	1.607	0.591
Part-time employee	1.973	1.293	0.972	0.421	2.434	1.122
Retired	1.745	1.266	1.223	0.519	2.12	1.316
Unemployed	1.218	1.099	1.111	0.504	1.197	0.68
Disabled	1.661	1.419	0.992	0.592	0.963	0.648
Homeowner	1.365	0.405	1.774	0.595	1.325	0.314
Education	1.031	0.087	1.242	0.096**	1.082	0.084
Political ideology	0.847	0.113	0.835	0.133	0.942	0.131
No ideology	0.511	0.506	0.15	0.08***	0.79	0.629
Republican	1.074	0.371	1.913	0.546**	1.073	0.218
Democrat	1.421	0.482	1.333	0.349	0.825	0.264
Protestant	0.634	0.225	0.992	0.359	1.304	0.399
Catholic	0.609	0.227	0.977	0.351	0.93	0.289
Nondenominational	0.538	0.535	0.408	0.245	2.482	1.549
Jewish	0.545	0.436	1.218	0.733	0.797	0.475
Muslim	2.034	2.386	0.35	0.193	0.822	0.988
Eastern religion	5.997	4.299*	1.914	2.831	0.568	0.737
Other religion	1.295	0.53	1.118	0.586	0.825	0.508
Constant	0.005	0.006***	0.03	0.036**	0.436	0.43
N	790		790		790	
Pseudo R-squared	0.155		0.333		0.068	

* $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, *** $p \leq 0.001$.

both political interest and religious attendance increase the odds an individual will attend local public meetings. The odds of individuals with high levels of political interest are three times those of individuals with low levels of political interest (Table 5).

Perhaps not surprisingly, political interest also has a large influence on whether an individual voted. While religious attendance is not significantly related to voting, demographic and socioeconomic factors play a role. White and Black Americans are

more likely to vote compared to multiracial and other races. Interestingly, Latinx respondents are nearly 4 times as likely to vote as non-Hispanic respondents. Regarding socioeconomic variables, full-time employees, homeowners, and those with higher levels of education are more likely to vote. Regarding politics, those with no ideology are less likely to vote and Republicans were more likely to have voted in the 2016 Presidential Election.

Lastly, Model five shows the results for blood donation illustrate complex individual motivations may play a greater role than individual characteristics or sociocultural factors as neither political interest nor church attendance had a significant relationship with blood donation.

5 Discussion

This study illustrates how two sociocultural factors, political interest and religious attendance, relate to civic engagement. Higher levels of political interest correspond to higher levels of formal and informal volunteering, public meeting attendance, and voting. Meanwhile, higher levels of religious attendance correspond to higher levels of formal and informal volunteering and public meeting attendance. Interestingly, political interest has a larger influence on informal volunteering and political participation, while religious attendance has a larger influence on formal volunteering. Different types of civic engagement correspond to different sociocultural factors. Research and practice should move beyond socioeconomic characteristics to examine and engage people through sociocultural characteristics. Findings also highlight important differences across types of civic engagement demonstrating the need for broader measures of civic engagement to be more inclusive.

Political interest plays a large role in volunteering, both formal and informal, public meeting attendance, and voting, in line with past research (e.g. Prior 2010). Political interest likely plays a motivational and informational role for volunteering, participation in public meetings, and voting. If people are interested in public affairs, then they are more likely to care and be aware of opportunities to volunteer, participate, and vote. People with greater political interest may also get involved with others through voluntary associations which has consistently been found to increase political action and civic engagement (Howard and Gilbert 2008; van der Meer and van Ingen 2009; van Stekelenburg et al. 2016). For example, Wiepking, Einolf, and Yang (2023) finds both secular and religious organizational involvement influence giving and volunteering through social capital.

Religious attendance also positively corresponds with levels of engagement for volunteering and political participation. The frequency of attending religious services likely plays a role in expanding one's social network that in turn influences

engagement like research has found for volunteering (Lewis, MacGregor, and Putnam 2013; Wiepking, Einolf, and Yang 2023). People with larger social networks have a greater exposure to opportunities to engage and may receive more invitations to volunteer (e.g. Musick and Wilson 2008; Verba et al. 1995). If people attend religious services more, then they may expand their social circle just as having a job adds coworkers or being married adds the social network of one's spouse.

Different sociocultural factors correspond to different types of civic engagement. The significance of religious attendance had a larger and more significant relationship with volunteering than political participation, while political interest was significant to volunteering and especially local meeting attendance and voting. Despite some prior research on the role of religious attendance in political participation (Huckle and Silva 2020; Jones-Correa and Leal 2001; Smidt 1999; Verba et al. 1995), no relationship was found between attending religious services and voting. The relationship between religious attendance and civic engagement is more nuanced. While attending religious services may provide people with information, opportunities, and networks to engage, some find the influence of religious attendance dissipates in devote countries (Ruiter and de Graaf 2006) and others find church attendance corresponds to formal but not informal volunteering (van Tienen et al. 2011). Unlike McKenzie (2001) finding religious attendance corresponds to voting, but not public meetings, this study finds religious attendance has a weak relationship with attending public meetings and no significant relationship with voting. Religion and religiosity are not a panacea for building civic engagement and political participation, but likely play a role in building social capital as do secular associations (Wiepking, Einolf, and Yang 2023).

However, neither religious attendance nor political interest were significantly related to blood donation. This may be due to the more private nature of donating blood that makes it a very individualized decision. For example, donating blood has found to be connected to family influence and feelings of moral obligation as opposed to more public activities like volunteering (Lee et al. 1999). While blood donors are more likely to engage in other prosocial behaviors like volunteering (Studte et al. 2019), barriers to blood donation are often highly personal, such as fear of blood or injections (Zucoloto et al. 2019), and measures of altruism do not correspond to donating blood (Piatak and Holt 2020).

The limitations provide avenues for future research. First, the sample is more engaged than the general U.S. population. Findings should be tested among different samples and outside of the U.S. Second, efforts were taken to capture a wide range of civic activities from informal volunteering to voting, but future research could examine other measures ranging in terms of publicness, formality, and the political nature. Third, future research should examine the role of different sociocultural factors, such as arts participation and associational membership. More research is

needed to understand the role of religious organizations compared to secular organizations, especially to be able to offer concrete recommendations on how to best engage and mobilize the public. Lastly, directionality should be tested through longitudinal studies or perhaps experimental research to see whether sociocultural factors influence civic engagement or more civically engaged people seek out sociocultural opportunities.

6 Conclusion

People are complex and driven by a wide array of motives and opportunities to engage (or not) in society. This study illustrates research should look beyond demographic and socioeconomic factors to examine the role of sociocultural factors. This research is limited to examining political interest and religious attendance, but future work should consider other sociocultural factors, such as arts participation, to paint a broader picture. Rates of civic engagement are on the decline, but inequities in pathways to engagement remain. Perhaps moving beyond the dominant status (Smith 1994) and resource based (Musick and Wilson 2008) approaches can help engage a broader population.

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