

The Influence of Four Aspects of Religion on Students' Sociopolitical Attitudes

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### Abstract

Religion is often a crucial aspect of high school students' lives, and is monumental in the formation of political and social attitudes. Past studies have found direct relationships between youth religious beliefs and political opinions of America (Funderburk, 1986). The purpose of this study was to analyze the effects of certain religious beliefs and practices have on high school students' sociopolitical attitudes. The four beliefs and practices examined were belief in higher power, importance of religion, prayer frequency, and religious services attendance. The four political topics examined were abortion, gun laws, climate change, and most prominent issue facing American society. 222 students at a mid-sized suburban high school responded to an online survey about their religious beliefs and practices, as well as their political opinions and preferences. The questionnaire asked respondents to answer questions regarding their religious beliefs and practices and their opinions of varying polarizing topics in American politics. The results from the religious beliefs and practices section of the survey were correlated with those of the social and political attitudes section. The data analysis reveals that each of the aspects of religion studied do not affect respondents' opinions of gun laws, but shows direct correlations between each religious aspect examined and opinions of abortion and climate change. The data imply that there is no relationship between any of the religious aspects examined and opinions of the most important issue facing American society. Future research could delve into how other aspects of adolescent life, such as school and family life, affect sociopolitical attitudes.

## **Introduction**

Religion is a monumental aspect of how many students construct their respective worldviews. A student's religion often guides how they view their society, as well with how they align themselves politically. As religion and aspects of it are significant for many students, it is important recognize and understand the implications of how these aspects of religion affect their sociopolitical attitudes. Since 2007, average adult religiosity has declined rapidly, and may set the stage for this generation to be more secular than previous generations (Wormald, 2015).

Many students interpret religion for themselves, and as a result may have differing religious attitudes from their parents (Smith, Denton, and Pearce, 2004). This disagreement between students and their parents could be tied to the recent increase of secularity in the United States (Wormald, 2015).

Since students have been found to disagree with their parents' religious attitudes, and now that "religious nones" make up the largest constituency within the Democratic Party while religious groups comprise a majority of the Republican Party, it is important to recognize the gap in the current conversation that does not address students' sociopolitical attitudes and how aspects of their religion affects those attitudes (Smith et al., 2004; Wormald, 2015).

## **Literature Review**

A large body of recent religious and political research explores the relationships between a person's religion and their sociopolitical attitudes, but does not address how certain beliefs within religion affect these attitudes. Recurring trends appear in this scholarship, such as the consistent finding that religion does shape a person's political and social attitudes and voting patterns. Scholarship from Wormald (2015) and Newport (2014) indicates that religion has a

causal relationship with political leanings and voting patterns.

Froese and Bader (2008) from Baylor University claim that all religious beliefs stem from belief or disbelief in higher power. Whether one believes in higher power, consequently, determines how often they pray or attend religious services (Froese and Bader, 2008). Because belief in higher power is the root from which all other religious beliefs stem from, it also has the capability to influence sociopolitical attitudes and cleavages (Froese and Bader, 2008).

Further, Froese and Bader (2008) found that differing images and perceptions of God or gods cause people to learn certain ways politically. Those who have a very engaged, authoritative image of God may be more likely to lean conservative than for any other Godly (Froese and Bader, 2008). As a result, they are more likely to oppose abortion and arguments for climate change (Froese and Bader, 2008).

Norris and Inglehart (2004) from Harvard University found that people who live in post-industrial societies are less likely than those who live in industrial or agrarian societies to pray and attend religious services. However, they also found a majority of devout people vote for “parties on the right” (Norris and Inglehart, 2004).

Wormald’s (2015) analysis of Pew Research Center’s Religious Landscape Study (RLS) (2014) indicates that Millennials are far less religious than previous generations, and religiously unaffiliated people compose the second largest cohort of the Democratic coalition, only behind Christians. Although Christians comprise a majority of the Democratic coalition, the percentage of Christians within that coalition have decreased 11% since 2007 while the percentage of religious nones have increased 9% (Wormald, 2015). This analysis of the RLS indicates that as

younger voters join the electorate, the number of less religious people among both the Republican and Democratic coalitions will increase.

Researchers Smith, Faris and Lundquist Denton (2004) from University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill examined whether American teenagers felt alienated and/or “simply disengaged” from organized religion. This study, the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) (2010), found that about 15% of high school seniors felt alienated from religion, and another 15% felt indifferent towards religion as a whole (Smith et al., 2004).

Like the NSYR (2010), a study done by Liu (2014) from Pew Research Center demonstrates a similar disconnect from organized religion. This study found that about 25% of Americans under age thirty identified as atheist, agnostic, or as a religious none (Liu, 2014). In this respect, the percentage of high school seniors who felt a disconnect from religion in 2004 is comparable to the number of Millennials who felt a disconnect from religion in 2014.

Hout and Smith’s (2015) analysis of the 2014 General Social Survey found similar data suggesting that younger adults had no religious preference. Hout and Smith (2015) also found that political conservatives are more likely to identify with organized religion than political liberals. These findings contrast those of Froese and Bader (2014), as they found more religious people to be more liberal.

Newport (2014), political analyst and editor-in-chief at Gallup Polls, found more religious people lean or vote Republican while less religious people to lean or vote Democrat. Newport (2014) also found moderately religious American to be more partisan towards Democratic policies and candidates.

Multiple, different studies confirm that religion, or the lack thereof, emphasize the impact of religion on sociopolitical attitudes. Current research also clearly emphasizes that as younger adults begin to distance themselves from major religion, they tend to lean towards having more liberal political and social attitudes. However, little research examines how certain aspects of religion impact high school students' sociopolitical attitudes. It is important to examine what aspects of religion are driving students to hold the political and social attitudes they have. In addition, although many schools and school districts are becoming more risk-averse, more research is needed that analyzes the sociology of high school students as a whole. In comparative religions and political science, further research is necessary that characterizes religious, political and social attitudes for high school students, especially considering how many of them will join the electorate for the 2018 midterm elections.

### **Research Question and Goals**

This research seeks to analyze the religious and political landscapes of Thousand Oaks High School (TOHS) students. In addition, this research will attempt to explain if and how students' religious beliefs and practices affect their stance on hotly contested topics in American society.

Unlike prior research, this original study will strictly focus on high school students at TOHS. Past research sampled adults from around the United States or asked strictly about students' religious practices, but there is no current research combining the two. Pew Research Center (2014) determined the most prevalent and practiced religions in America. Through their findings, they found what types of people practice each major religion or sect of a religion,

respondents' religious beliefs and practices, and attitudes toward major political issues in American society.

Since certain aspects of religion are monumental in an teen's worldview, it is important to understand how they affect sociopolitical attitudes, as well as possible implications of these effects. In other words, how do certain aspects of religion affect TOHS students' political and social attitudes?

### **Hypothesis**

This study's predictions are as follows: of the four aspects of religion being studied, belief in higher power will be the most impactful in the formation of the sociopolitical attitudes. Of the four political topics studied, opinions of abortion and the single-biggest issue facing America currently will be the most varied, in comparison with those of climate change and gun laws. Opinions of climate change and gun laws will be the least varied when correlated with the aspects of religion studied because Thousand Oaks is a moderately liberal city, so most students will most likely believe in human-caused climate change and stricter gun laws, regardless of their practices and beliefs.

### **Methods**

Before conducting this study, it was important to have a full perspective of the literature in the field. Databases, including Pew Research Center and Gallup Polls, provided this study with several similar studies about how religion impacts political attitudes. The NSYR (2010) was another notable source, as it provides detailed studies about adolescents' religiosity and possible effects of it. Commonalities and differences were noted between studies to assess the current conversation, and gaps unfilled by pre-existing studies have been examined.

Surveys were used in this study to generate a large pool of responses to analyze and proved to be an efficient way to collect data that could present trends among TOHS students that a series of interviews could not accomplish. The questionnaire was created using Google Forms. Both the purpose of the research and the survey were reviewed by Research Advisor Dr. Krister Swanson of TOHS, Political Science Professor Dr. Mark Smith of University of Washington-Seattle, and Comparative Religions Professor Dr. James Wellman of University of Washington-Seattle.

This research specifically targeted students. The survey consent form was administered to multiple English classes, with the exception of English Learning Development and special education students. Each parent consent form had the link to the questionnaire attached. Data was analyzed with a focus placed on identifying general correlations between students' religious practices and sociopolitical attitudes. Because each cohort did not have equal numbers (i.e. there was an unequal number of respondents in each cohort), the percentage of the demographic's specific category answers were taken from the total category's responses.

Before the survey was distributed, it was reviewed by an Institutional Review Board consisting of TOHS and California Lutheran University faculty. After receiving parental consent, the participants could answer the questionnaire. The consent described the lengths to which information was kept private. All questions were required and anonymous.

The survey was administered in a mid-sized suburban high school within a primarily upper middle class community. This study assessed each grade level present. By assessing each grade level, results were expected to be generally representative of high school students.



The student survey was divided into three categories: demographics, religious beliefs and practices, and sociopolitical attitudes. However, due to the restrictive word count, decisions in regards to which data would be included in this paper were made. In the religious practices section, students were asked seven questions, but only four are examined in this paper: belief in higher power, importance of religion, prayer frequency, and attendance of religious services. In the sociopolitical attitudes section, students were asked eleven questions, but only four are examined in this paper: abortion, gun laws, climate change, and the single-biggest issue facing America today.

Questions in each section were borrowed and modified from surveys distributed by Pew Research Center, Gallup Polls, and the NSYR. Because these are trusted, nonpartisan research organizations, previously asked questions were relevant and viable for students.

## **Results**

By the end of the survey administration period, 222 (TOHS) students of varying grade levels and religious beliefs responded to the survey. In regards to religion, 49% of respondents were Christian, 28% were religious nones, 18% were interfaith, 4% were Jewish, and 1% subscribed to other religions.

### **Belief in higher power**

Students were asked “do you believe in God/higher powers?” with answer choices “absolutely”; “fairly certain God exists”; “not certain God exists”; and “God doesn’t exist.” 35% of respondents expressed absolute belief, 17% were fairly certain God exists, 31% were uncertain, and 17% answered “God doesn’t exist.”

### *Abortion*

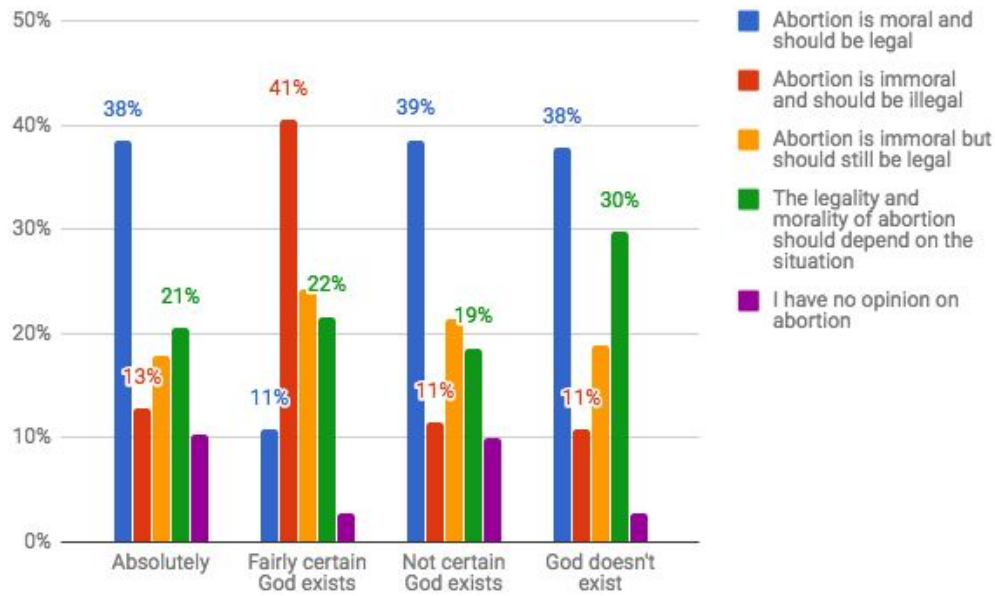


Figure 1. Belief in God correlated with opinions of abortion

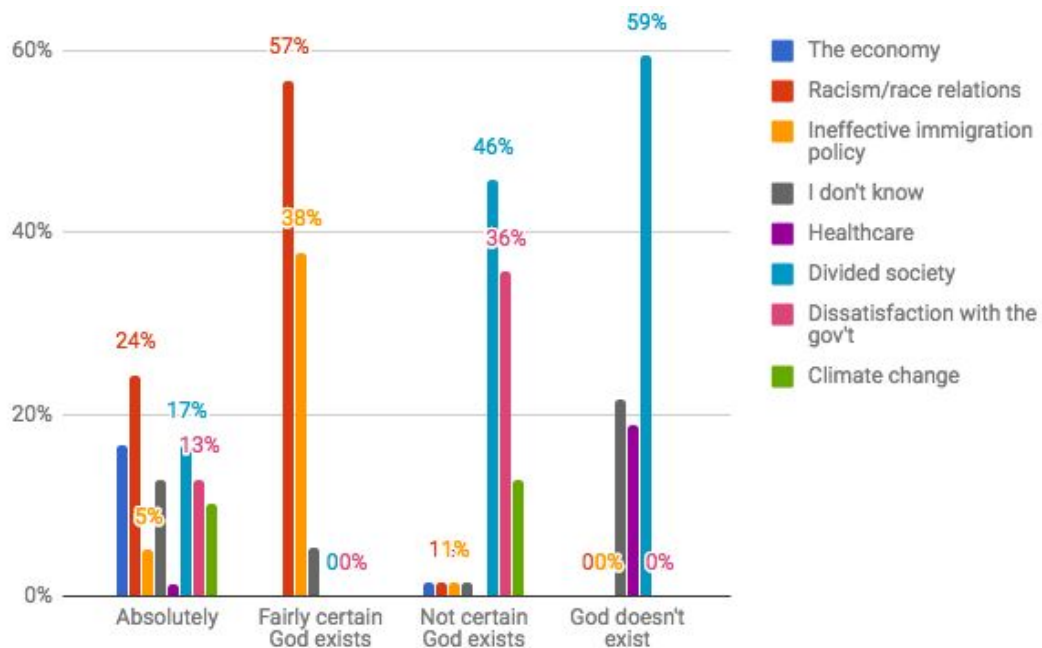
As Figure 1 shows, of those who were absolutely certain God exists, not certain God exists, and those who were certain God does not exist, respondents supported of the use of abortion in all or most cases (39%, 39%, and 38%, respectively) in terms of its morality and legality. Those who answered “fairly certain God exists,” however, were most opposed to abortion, as 41% answered “abortion is immoral and should be illegal.”

Students were then asked: “generally speaking, how strict should gun control laws be?” and were given the choices of “more strict than they are now”; “less strict than they are now”; and “they should be kept as they are now”. The data imply no relationship between belief in God and opinions of gun laws, as a majority of respondents in each cohort supported stricter gun laws (62%, 65%, 61%, and 65%, respectively).

In the questionnaire, students were asked, “do you believe that Earth is experiencing climate change?” with answer choices “yes, mostly because of human activity”; “yes, mostly

because of natural patterns in Earth’s environment”; “yes, but I don’t know why”; “no”; and “I don’t know”. A majority of each cohort answered “yes, mostly because of human activity” when asked this question. The data show a negative correlation between belief in God and attributing climate change to human activity (54% “absolutely”; 59% “fairly certain God exists”; 61% “not certain God exists”; and 73% “God doesn’t exist”).

*Biggest issue facing the United States currently*



*Figure 2. Belief in God correlated with biggest issue facing the United States currently.*

Students were provided the choices of “the economy”, “race relations”, “ineffective immigration policy”, “healthcare”, “dissatisfaction with the government”, “divided society”, “climate change”, and “I don’t know” and asked: “of these issues, which is the biggest issue facing America today?” Figure 2 displays a negative correlation between belief in God and choice of “divided society” and a positive correlation between belief in God and choosing racism. For this question, “divided society” differs from “racism/race relations” in that racism

pertains to race only whereas divided society pertains to any widening chasm between multiple groups in American society, such as political polarization.

**Importance of religion**

In the survey, students were asked “how important is religion in your life?” with answer choices “not important at all” (28%); “not too important” (28%), “somewhat important” (22%), and “very important” (22%).

*Abortion*

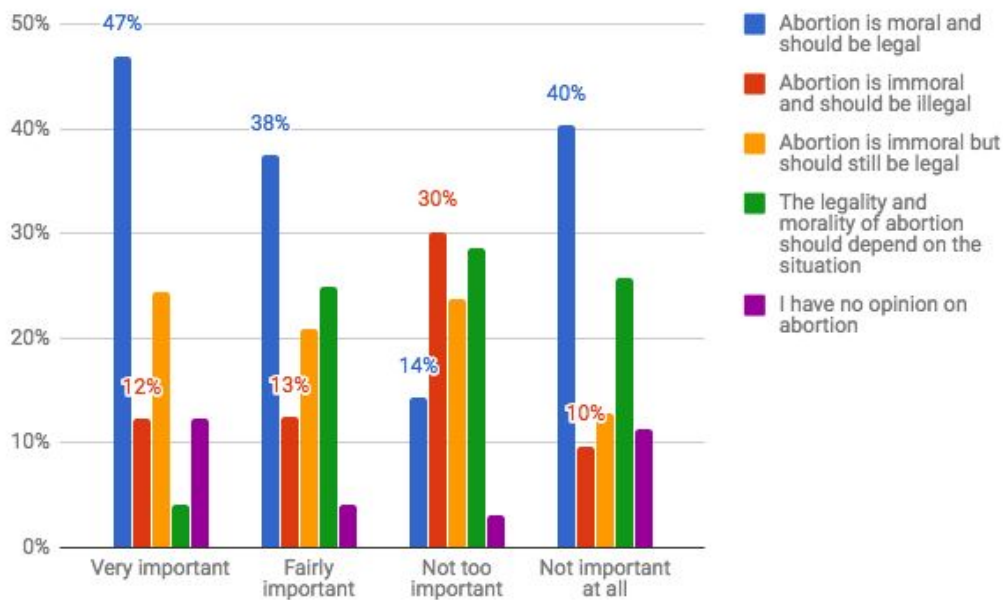


Figure 3. Importance of religion correlated with opinions of abortion.

When importance of religion was correlated with opinions of abortion, as Figure 3 shows, the data show a positive correlation between importance of religion and support for abortion. The data also show that as support for abortion increases, the share of those who oppose it decreases. A plurality of respondents whose religion was very important to them supported abortion (47%) while only 14% of respondents whose religion was not very important to them

did as well. Thirty percent of those whose religion was of little importance to them opposed abortion; no more than 13% of any other cohort agreed.

*Biggest issue facing the United States currently*

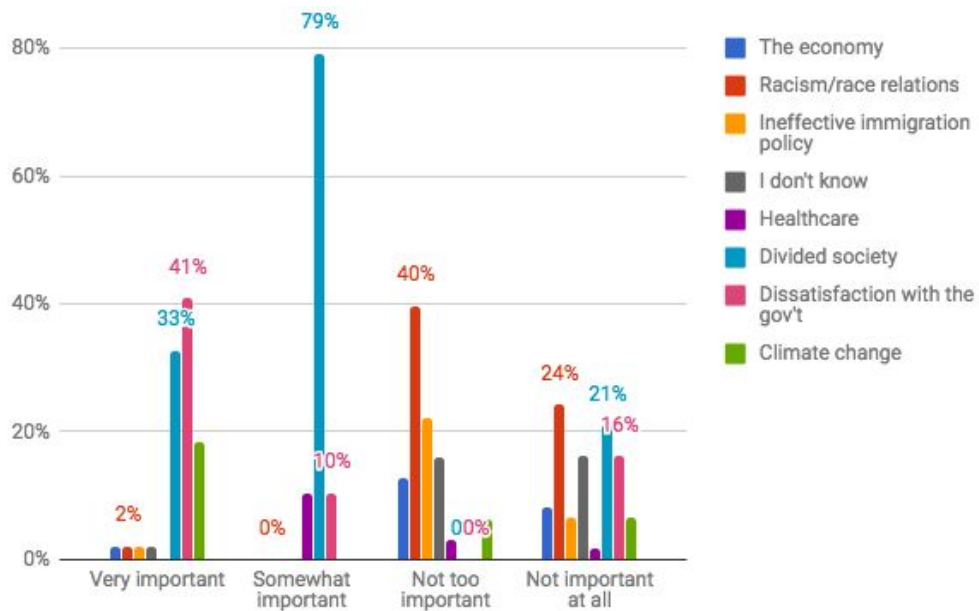


Figure 4. Importance of religion correlated with respondents’ opinions of biggest issue facing the United States.

When importance of religion was correlated with respondents’ opinions of the biggest issue currently facing the United States, as Figure 4 shows, no trends arose, as answers varied. More respondents in the “very important” cohort chose government dissatisfaction than any of the other three cohorts combined. 79% in the “somewhat important” cohort chose “divided society”, and 10% chose government dissatisfaction.

**Frequency of Prayer**

In the questionnaire, students were asked “how often do you pray?” with answer choices “1 or more times per day”, “weekly”, “monthly”, and “rarely/never.” 21% of respondents pray daily, 12% pray weekly, 9% pray monthly, and 58% rarely or never pray.

*Abortion*

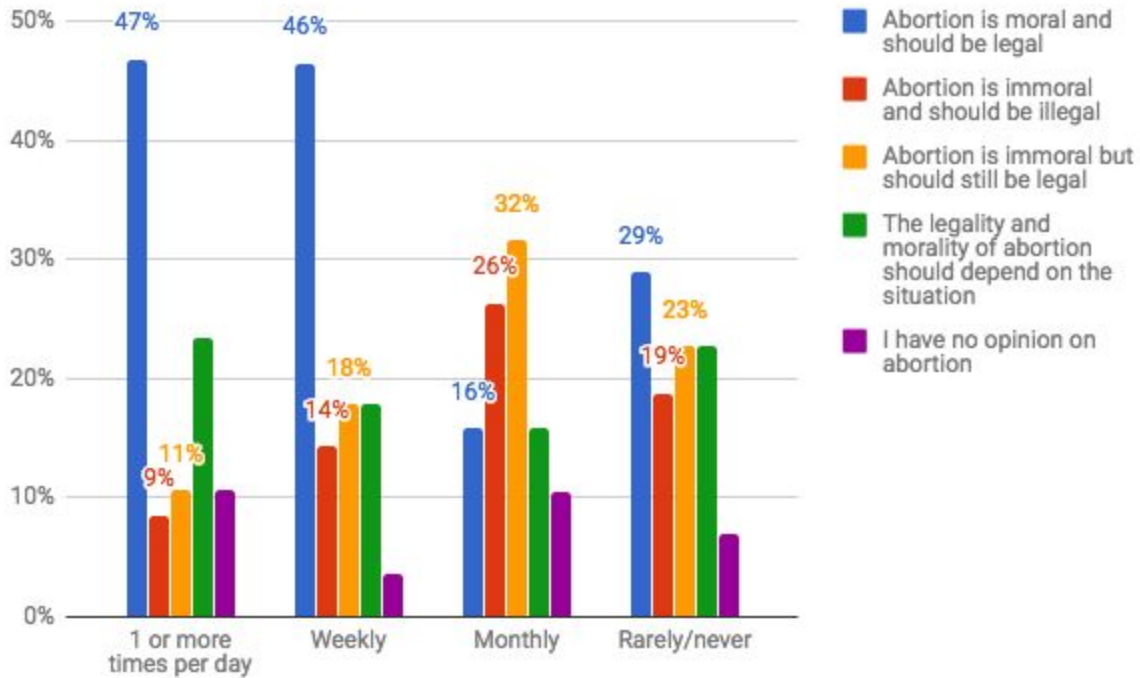


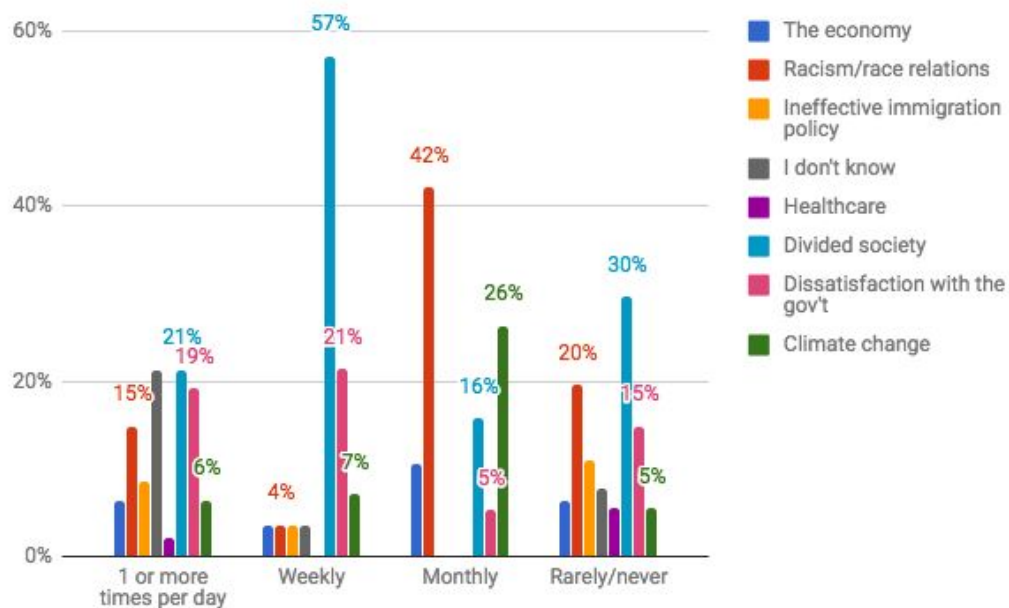
Figure 5. Prayer frequency correlated with opinions of abortion.

When prayer frequency was correlated with opinions of abortion, as Figure 5 shows, the data show a positive correlation between prayer frequency and support for abortion. A plurality of respondents who pray daily or weekly believed that abortion is moral and should generally be legal (47% and 46%, respectively), while only 16% of respondents who pray monthly shared the same opinion. The data also show a negative correlation between prayer frequency and opposition to abortion.

When asked about how strict gun laws should be, respondents were generally supportive of having stricter gun laws and regulations, as a plurality of each cohort answered “more strict than they are now” (68% “1 or more times per day”; 61% “weekly”; 42% “monthly”; and 64% “rarely/never”). Besides those who pray monthly, respondents generally supported stricter gun laws. However, those who pray monthly were much more divided on this topic, as 32% supported less restrictive gun laws. When compared to the other 3 cohorts, the next highest percentage of those who supported looser gun laws was 17% of those who pray daily.

When prayer frequency was correlated with opinions of climate change, the data showed no trend between the two, as a majority of respondents in each cohort attributed climate change to human activity. However, 16% of those who pray monthly denied climate change. The next highest percentage of a cohort to deny climate change was the “rarely/never” cohort, in which 7% denied it.

*Biggest issue facing the United States currently*



*Figure 6.* Prayer frequency correlated with opinions of single-biggest issue facing the United States currently.

When frequency of prayer was correlated with respondents' opinions of the single-biggest issue facing America today, as Figure 6 displays, the data imply that prayer frequency impacts what respondents chose as the most prominent issue facing American society. Of respondents who pray daily, 21% chose divided society, 19% answered "dissatisfaction with the government", and 15% chose racism. In comparison to those who rarely or never pray, 30% chose America's divided society, 20% chose racism, and 15% chose "dissatisfaction with the government." Of those who pray weekly, the majority believed the biggest issue is "divided society" while only 4% answered "racism/race relations".

Besides those who pray monthly, a plurality of each cohort chose "divided society" as the single-biggest issue facing America. A plurality of those who pray monthly chose racism as the single-biggest issue, while 26% chose "climate change" as the biggest issue facing America today. In comparison with the other 3 cohorts, the next largest percentage of a cohort who chose climate change was the "weekly" cohort, in which 7% chose climate change.

### **Religious service attendance**

In the questionnaire, students were asked "how often do you attend religious services?", with answer choices "once or more per week", "once or twice a month", "a few times per year", and "rarely/never". 24% of respondents attend religious services weekly, 12% attend monthly, 19% attend a few per year, and 45% rarely or do not attend services.

### *Abortion*



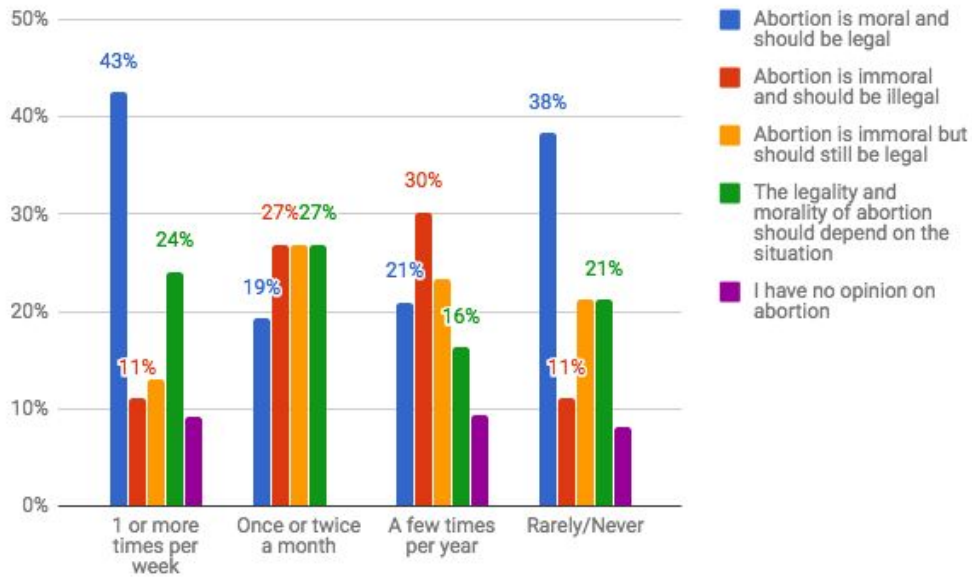


Figure 7. Frequency of religious services attended correlated with opinions of abortion.

As displayed by Figure 7, religious service attendance impacts respondents’ opinions of abortion. Although a plurality of respondents in both the “1 or more times per week” and “rarely/never” cohorts supported abortion, those who attend services monthly or some throughout the year were significantly less supportive. Those who attend services monthly were the most divided in their opinions of abortion, as 19% generally supported its use while 27% opposed it. 27% believed it depends on the situation, and the final 27% believed abortion is immoral but should still be legal. Those who attend a few services per year were the least supportive of abortion, as 30% of these respondents answered “abortion is immoral and should be illegal.” 21% of this cohort believed abortion is moral and should be legal, and 16% believed it should be situationally evaluated.

Frequency of attending services did not seem to impact opinions of how strict gun laws should be. In each cohort, the majority supported stricter gun laws (69% “1 or more times per

week”; 54% “once or twice a month”; 53% “a few times per year”; and 66% “rarely/never”).

Those who pray monthly were the most supportive of keeping gun laws as they are now, while those who pray a few times per year were the most supportive of less restrictive gun laws.

When religious service attendance was correlated with respondents’ opinions of climate change, a plurality of each cohort believed Earth is experiencing climate change and humans are responsible. Those who attend a few services per year, in comparison with the other three cohorts, were least likely to blame humans for climate change. 16% of these respondents denied Earth is experiencing climate change, and 21% attributed climate change to natural environmental patterns.

*Biggest issue facing the United States currently*

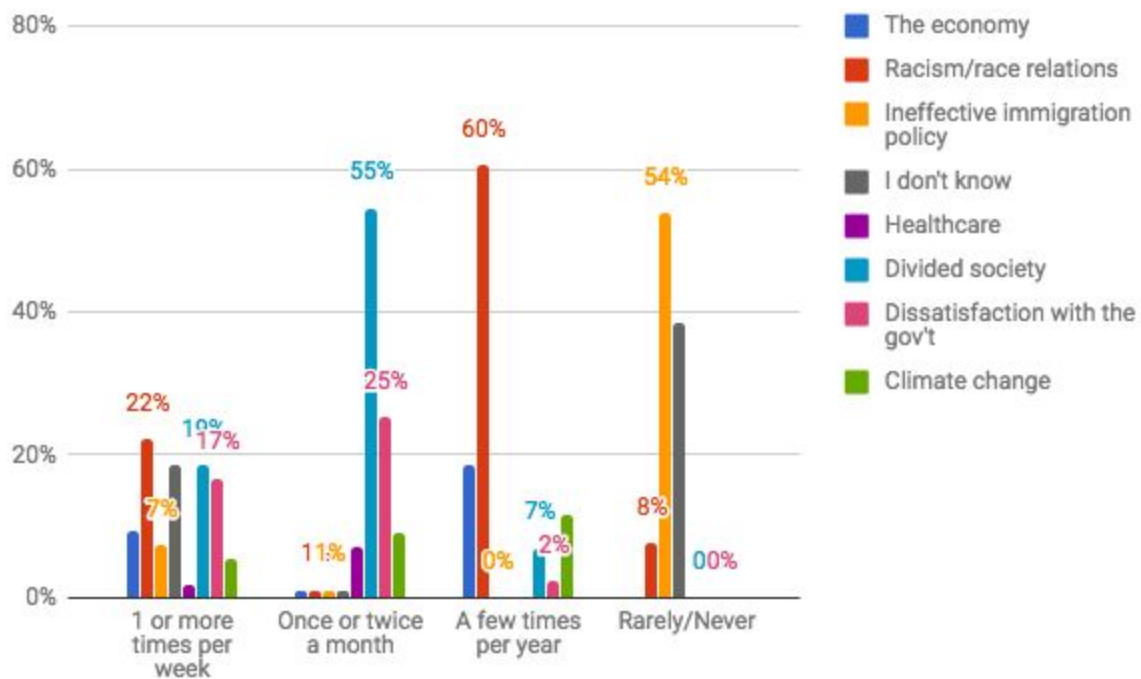


Figure 8. Attendance of religious services correlated with opinions of single-biggest issue facing the United States currently.

When religious service attendance was correlated with respondents' opinions of what the most prominent issue facing American society today is, as shown by Figure 8, the data imply that attendance of religious services has some impact on opinions the single largest issue facing American society currently. Those who attend religious services weekly were divided in what they believed the most important issue facing America today is, as a plurality answered "racism/race relations", 19% answered "divided society", 17% believed it is the public's dissatisfaction with the government, and 7% answered ineffective immigration policy. A majority of those who attend services a couple times per month answered "divided society" while only 1% answered "racism/race relations". 25% of those who pray monthly believed the most important issue is the public's dissatisfaction with the government. 60% of those who pray a few times per year answered "racism/race relations", and 7% answered "America's divided society". 2% of respondents in this cohort believed the most prominent issue is public dissatisfaction with the government, and no respondents answered "ineffective immigration policy." Unlike the aforementioned cohorts, those who rarely or never pray were the least decisive, as 38% answered "I don't know". 54% of these respondents chose "ineffective immigration policy", and 8% answered "racism/race relations". No respondents in said cohort answered "divided society" or "dissatisfaction with the government."

### **Discussion**

This study assesses features of sociopolitical research that are underrepresented in current literature: certain characteristics of religion and how they impact high school students' sociopolitical attitudes. As prior research has shown, religion and aspects of it play significant roles in how people view their political and social climate (Funderburk, 1986).

The four aspects of religion examined in this paper were not completely accurate indicators of respondents' political opinions, but some trends did emerge. In total, when correlated with any of the four aspects of religion, students were most likely to identify racism or divided society as the single-biggest issue facing America today. Students were also most likely to favor stricter gun laws and blame human activity for climate change. Each religious aspect did seem, however, to affect respondents' opinions of abortion.

### *Belief in God*

This study found a slight majority of students expressing some belief in God or higher power. These findings contrast those of the NSYR (2010), as that study found a vast majority of students expressing some belief in higher power. A vast majority of respondents of the NSYR (2010) expressed some belief in God, while only a slight majority of respondents in this study did as well. Of those surveyed in the NSYR (2010), about 15% of respondents denied the existence of God, whereas 4% of respondents in this study did as well. In the NSYR (2010), about 15% of respondents were uncertain if God exists, whereas 31% of respondents in this study did as well.

This study found no correlation between belief in God and respondents' opinions of abortion, as a plurality of students who were either certain God exists or certain God does not exist supported its use. However, those who were fairly certain God exists were more unsupportive of its use than any other cohort was to support its use. Froese and Bader (2008) found that the image of a "personally engaged God" was positively related to the belief that abortion is always wrong, even when controlling demographic and geographic factors. This study's findings both echo and contrast those of Froese and Bader (2008), as their study kept

belief in God constant. That said, besides those who are fairly certain God exists, belief in God does not affect students' opinions of gun laws and whether abortion is moral and if it should be legal. Those who were fairly certain God exists tended to be more conservative than any other cohort, as they were most likely to be against abortion and deny climate change.

#### *Importance of religion*

Overall, results were varied when students were asked how important religion was in their lives, which contrasts the findings of the NSYR (2010). A majority of respondents to the NSYR (2010) held religion to be very important in their lives whereas 22% of students did as well. A majority of students in this study held religion of little or no importance whereas the NSYR found 25% of students feel the same. However, because the NSYR was conducted in 2008, it seems logical that students now would not hold religion as highly considering the increase of religious nones since 2007 (Denton, Pearce, and Smith, 2008; Wormald, 2015).

The relative importance of religion respondents did not seem to affect their opinions of gun laws or climate change. Respondents were most likely to favor stricter gun laws and implicate human activity as the sole cause of climate change. However, with the exception of those whose religion was of little importance, a plurality of respondents were supportive of abortion. This finding contrasts those of Froese and Bader (2008), as they found less religious people to be more supportive of abortion.

#### *Frequency of prayer*

Prayer frequency results in this study were not comparable to those of the NSYR (2010); students in this study pray much less frequently than those studied in the NSYR (2010). Again, this can be attributed to decreasing average religiosity since 2007 (Wormald, 2015). However,

the percentage of those who pray daily were most comparable to the findings of the NSYR (2010). The NSYR (2010) found 30% of students pray at least once daily, and this study found 21% of students pray daily.

Prayer frequency seemed to affect respondents' opinions of abortion, gun laws, and climate change. Respondents who pray monthly were most against abortion, stricter gun laws, and most likely to deny climate change. A majority of those who pray monthly identified as conservatives, which could explain why they were more likely than other groups to deny climate change, oppose abortion, and support less strict gun laws. Although a plurality of each cohort supported stricter gun laws and human-caused climate change, the data showed a negative correlation between prayer frequency and favorable opinions of abortion.

#### *Religious service attendance*

Respondents to this survey attended much fewer religious services than those who responded to the NSYR (2010). The only comparable findings for religious service attendance between this study and the NSYR (2010) were those who attend services weekly or a few per year. The NSYR (2010) found 29% of students to attend services at least weekly, while 24% of TOHS students do as well. This study found 19% of students attend a few services per year, whereas 17% of respondents to the NSYR (2010) did as well. The NSYR (2010) found 20% of students to attend religious services monthly while 12% of TOHS students do as well. However, while about 45% of students in this study rarely or never attend services, whereas the NSYR (2010) found 28% rarely or never attend services.

When religious service attendance was correlated with political ideology, a positive relationship emerged between attendance and conservatism. However, those who attend a few

services per year were the most likely to deny climate change and oppose abortion. There was no relationship between service attendance and opinions of gun laws. In comparison, Froese and Bader (2008) found a negative correlation between service attendance and more conservative attitudes, such as opposing abortion, denying climate change, and fewer gun regulations.

### **Limitations**

Originally, this study intended to analyze the religious landscape of TOHS; however, due to the lack of religious diversity in this survey sample, this study could not aptly conclude on the effect of religions as a whole on sociopolitical attitudes. The data indicate that future research must study a larger, more diverse sample, and take socioeconomic status, as well as the geography of where the study is taking place into account. Thousand Oaks and its surroundings tends to lean more Democratic than Republican, though it is still moderate. Also, as noted by Saad (2018), younger adults tend to be much more liberal and secular than any other generational cohort, so their age may be more impactful on their sociopolitical attitudes than their religion or how their religiosity is measured.

Moreover, since this study was conducted using surveys, it relied on self-reported data from respondents. As a result, the data are subjective to student interpretation of the questions asked, rather than pure objectivity.

### **Implications and Further Studies**

Future studies should be conducted in more diverse communities with more participants, as this study was conducted at one school in one community. Further, replications of this study can be used by political candidates, so that they can learn and understand how to appeal to the electorate in a given region.

In further studies, it is important to correlate age, race, socioeconomic status, as well as other demographic factors that may be more impactful on the formation of sociopolitical attitudes than religion or aspects of it. This study took only certain standardized aspects of religion into account, and further research could analyze the impacts of both demographic and geographic factors on the formation of sociopolitical attitudes.

### **Conclusion**

Ultimately, the data imply that the aspects of religion do not have as much of an impact on social and political attitudes as they were hypothesized to have. Belief in higher power, importance of religion, frequency of prayer, and attendance of religious services were correlated with respondents' opinions of abortion, gun laws, climate change, and most prominent issue facing America currently. Of the religious aspects examined, only belief in higher power correlated with students' opinions of if and why is experiencing climate change, as there was an inverse relationship between the two. However, while respondents who were certain of the existence or nonexistence of higher powers slightly differed in their opinions of abortion, those who were fairly certain higher powers exist were more against abortion than any cohort was for abortion. Furthermore, although respondents were generally very supportive of stricter gun laws, those who pray monthly were the most supportive of less restrictive gun laws. Generally speaking, each of the religious aspects studied did not correlate with respondents' opinions of the single-biggest issue facing American society, as they were most likely to choose divided society or race relations. This research is applicable in both comparative religions and political science, and may be valuable to congressional candidates in the 2018 midterm elections, as it provides usable appeals to attract new members of the electorate. Moreover, the results can guide further



research on how other demographic or geographic factors affect high school students' political identities and attitudes.

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