

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

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Background

- The American public is becoming increasingly secular
- Young people tend to be less religious, more Democratic/liberal
- The National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) found high school students' attitudes towards religion and its importance in students' lives
- The Religious Landscape Study (RLS) found how religion affects American adults' sociopolitical attitudes, but did not delve into aspects of religion
- Research on students, especially their sociopolitical attitudes, is incredibly limited, and

Purpose and Project Goals

The purpose of this project was to examine the effects of Belief in God/higher power, relative importance of religion, prayer frequency, and religious service attendance on students' attitudes toward hotly contested topics in American society.

- Several studies have found that religion has some effect on sociopolitical attitudes; however, findings of multiple studies contrast each other, so there is currently no definite conclusion about how religiosity affects sociopolitical attitudes.
- With the 2018 midterm elections coming up in November, it is important to recognize the biggest issues students care about when they can vote
- There is little research on the most impactful aspect of religion, in terms of sociopolitical attitudes, which can be used by candidates to attract members of the electorate

Methods

- 222 students responded to a survey asking about their religious practices and beliefs, as well as their attitudes towards hotly contested topics in American society currently
- Students were asked the following four questions about their religious beliefs and practices and the following four questions about some of their sociopolitical attitudes

Religious beliefs and practices

- Do you believe in God/higher powers?
- How important is religion in your life?
- How often do you pray?
- How often do you attend religious services?

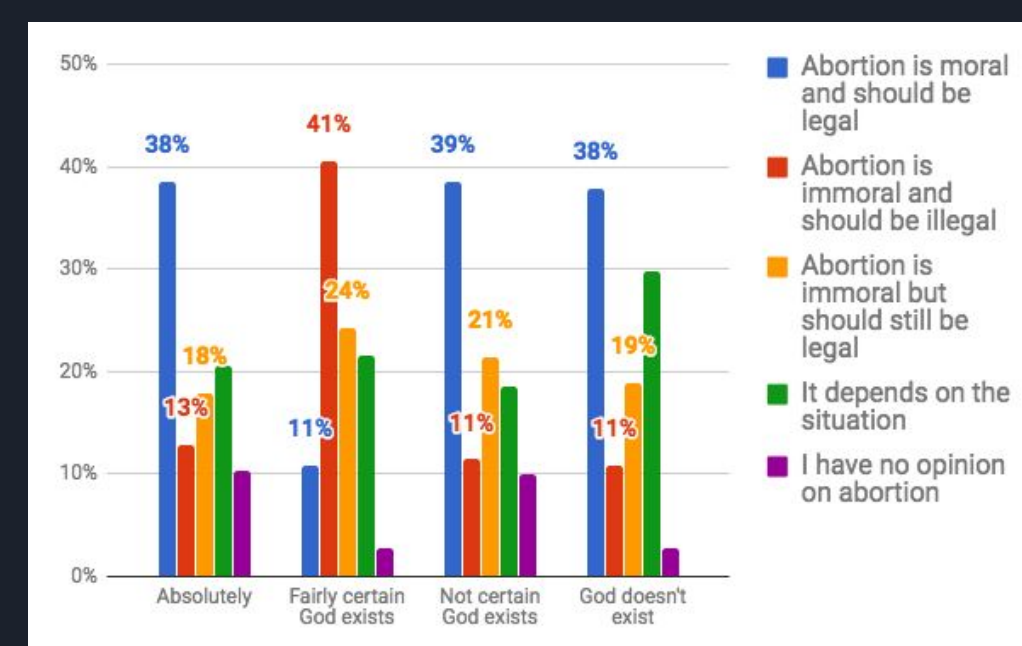
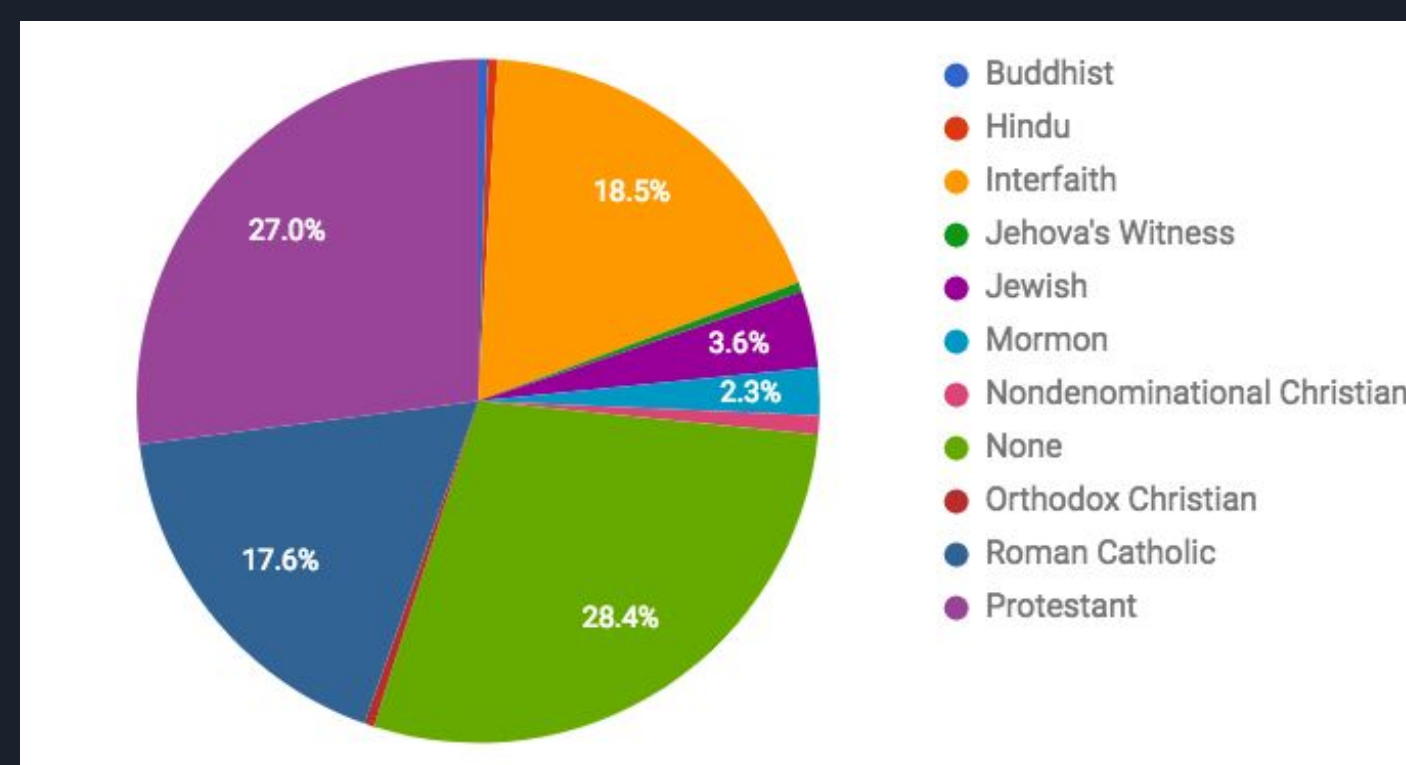
Sociopolitical Attitudes

- What is your opinion of abortion?
- How strict should gun laws be?
- Do you believe Earth is experiencing climate change?
- What is the biggest issue facing America today?

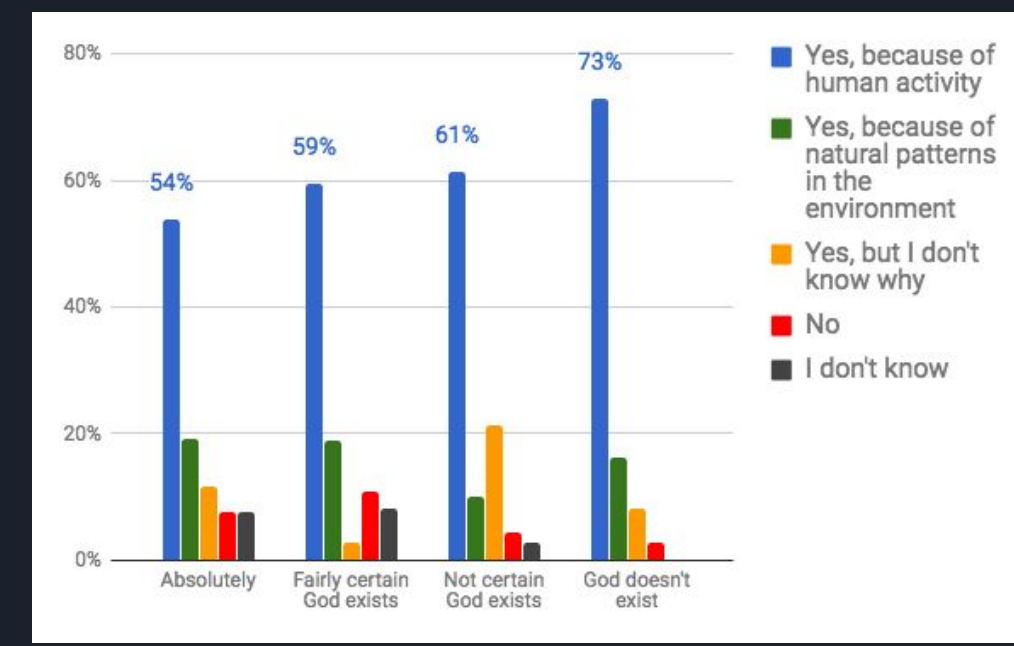
- After all data was collected, results from the religious beliefs and practices section was correlated with those of the sociopolitical attitudes section

Results

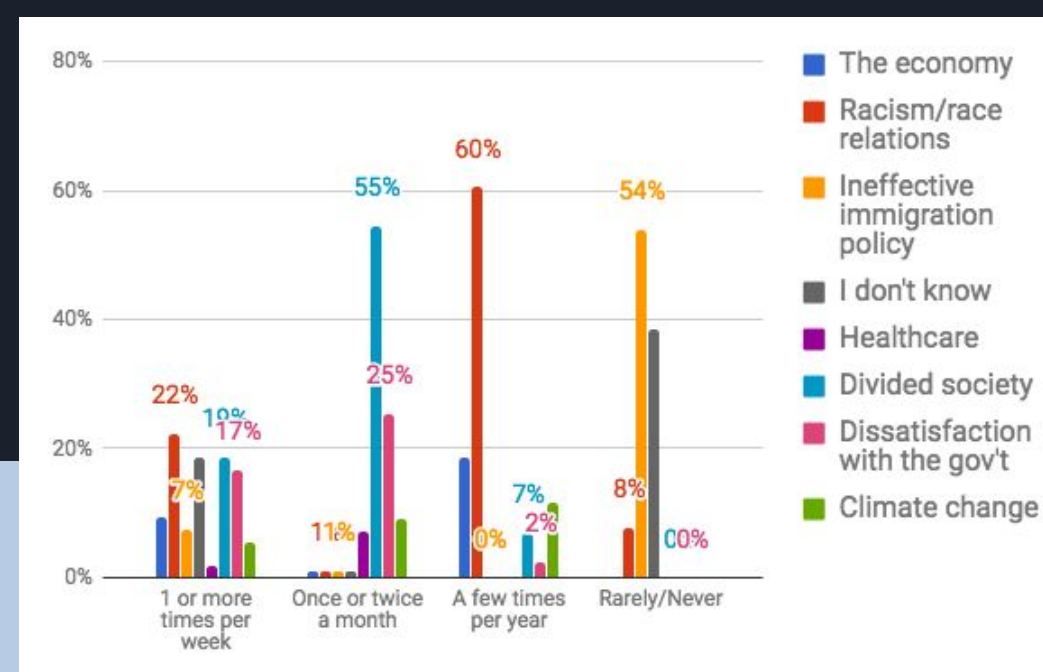
- Students who are fairly certain of the existence of higher power are the most opposed to the use of abortion, as 41% of this group opposed its use
- As belief in higher power decreases, the likelihood of believing in human-caused climate change increases. 53% of students who were certain of the existence of higher powers were proponents of human-caused climate change while 73% of those who are certain of the nonexistence of higher powers were proponents of human-caused climate change
- Opinions of climate change, gun regulations, and the single-biggest issue facing American society seemed unaffected by any of the religious aspects studied.
 - Students were generally supportive of stricter gun regulations and believed that humans are primarily responsible for climate change
 - Students generally believed that the biggest issues facing America today are America's divided society and racism



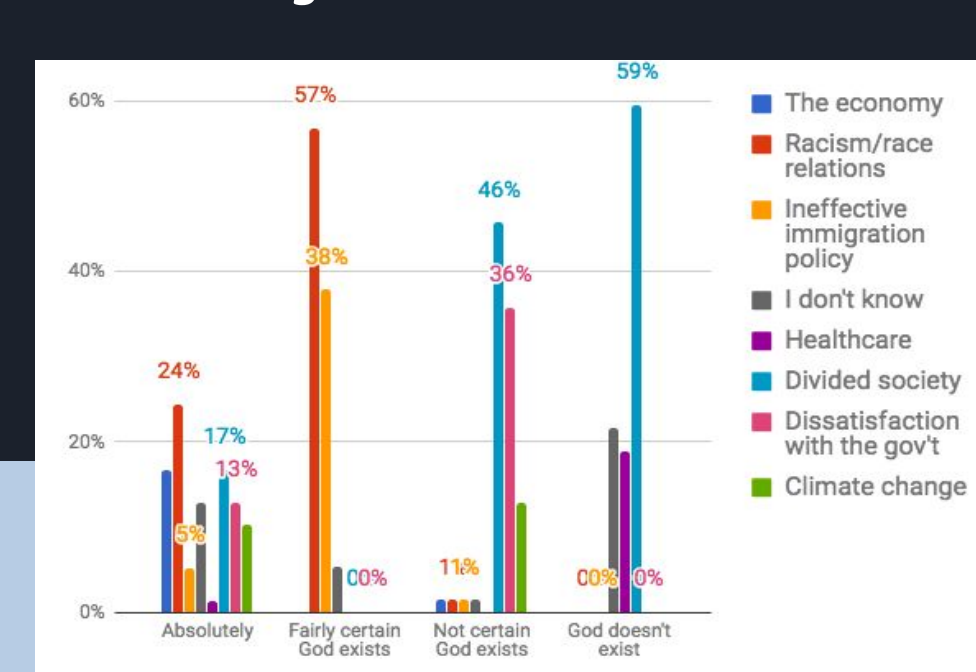
Belief in God correlated with opinions of abortion



Belief in God correlated with opinions of if and why Earth is experiencing climate change



Religious service attendance correlated with opinions of the single-biggest issue facing America today



Belief in God correlated with opinions of the single-biggest issue facing America today

Discussion

Students are becoming increasingly secular, as 56% of respondents believe that religion is of little or no importance in their lives. 58% of students rarely or never pray, and 45% of students rarely or never attend religious services.

With the 2018 midterms coming up in November, the results of this study show what students are most concerned about. About 25% of the survey sample will be eligible to vote come November and will be voting on many of the topics asked about in this survey. While some of the studied topics, such as abortion, can only be changed through new Supreme Court precedent, the results of this study show that students still care about these topics nonetheless.

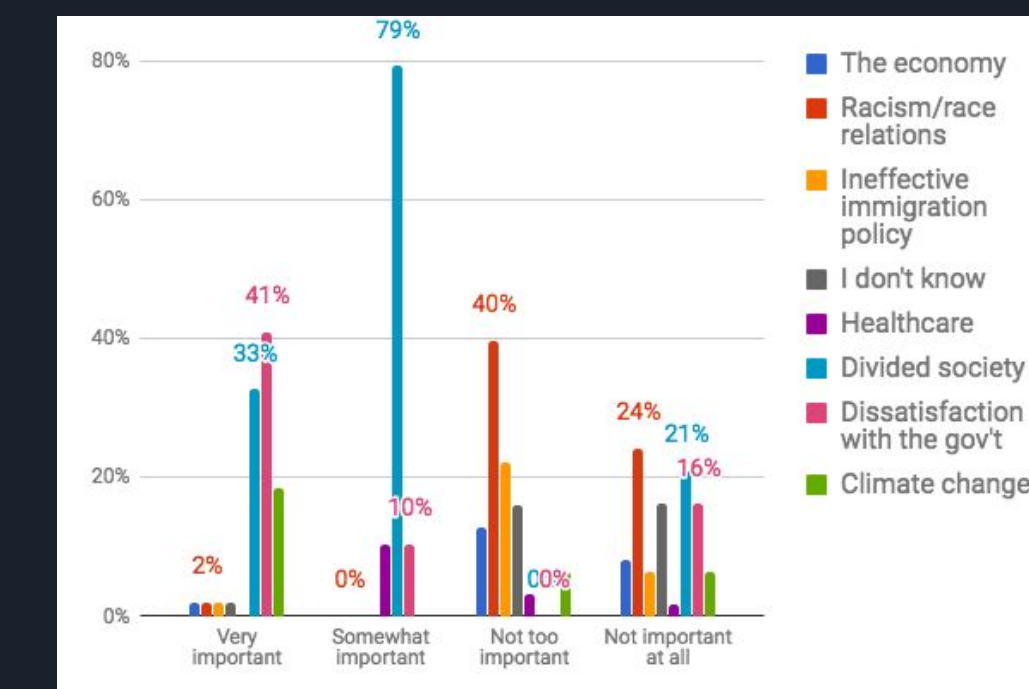
Students showed concern about America's divided society and racism, as well as climate change and gun regulations, which are issues they can directly or indirectly vote on in the 2018 midterms.

Future Research

While the survey did ask about respondents' demographics, that data was not analyzed and correlated with sociopolitical data. Also, socioeconomic class was not considered in the data analysis. Thousand Oaks High School mostly attracts upper-middle class students, so future studies should be conducted in more representative regions of the United States.

Conclusions

- Students are becoming more secular. Whether students feel alienated from religion or disagree with various religious teachings, a plurality of students are distanced in some manner from organized religion
- Students most likely to agree with:
 - Abortion should be legal
 - Gun regulations should be stricter
 - Human-caused climate change
 - Divided society, racism are most prominent issues



Importance of religion correlated with opinions of the single-biggest issue facing America today

References

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