



Received: 19 November 2016
Accepted: 25 July 2017
First Published: 23 August 2017

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Reviewing editor:
Shang Ha, Sogang University, USA

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POLITICS & INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Religion and political engagement

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Abstract: The present research examined Relationship between Religion and political engagement in Iran. Political engagement is very important for political stability and dynamism of societies. Political engagement has been one of the concerns of thinkers and cultural and intellectual circles of the world in recent years. The necessity of the participation of the youth is something which has been seriously taken into account in different phases of the development process of societies. The importance of Political Behavior is to the extent that in national strategic planning, developing regulated participation of people in decision-making procedures has considered as a strategy. Survey method was employed here for collecting and analyzing data. The research population included the entire citizens of the city of Isfahan in September and October of 2011. The sample included 360 people who were selected by cluster-sampling. For data collection, questionnaire was employed whose validity and reliability were evaluated using formal method and Cronbach's Alpha. Results showed that there exists a direct relationship between the level of religiousness and Political Behavior. According to these findings, we may expect higher Political Behavior among people in religious societies.

Subjects: Politics & International Relations; Social Sciences; Behavioral Sciences

Keywords: religiousness; political behavior; intrinsic religiousness; extrinsic religiousness

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

In this study, we utilize precise measures of various religious behaviors, traditions, intrinsic religiousness, extrinsic religiousness and beliefs to examine their influence on political engagement. The authors tried an appropriate understanding of the concept political engagement. Political engagement can take on many different forms, including voting, cognitive, indirect political engagement, and direct political engagement. The research population included the entire citizens of the city of Isfahan in September and October of 2011. Results showed that there exists a direct relationship between the level of religiousness and Political Behavior. According to these findings, we may expect higher Political Behavior among people in religious societies. Religious commitment is not a source of political objectivity, but helps people make sense of a large and confusing world that is constantly challenging strongly and deeply held beliefs. The results of my research will prove that religion does matter to the political identities of the Iranian populous. Also, religious sentiment is extremely influential in the political process.

1. Introduction

Political engagement, as one variety of participation, is considered an indicator of social, cultural and political development of countries and shows the involvement of people in deciding their future (Abdullahi & Abdullahi, 2001). One of the most effective ways to achieve real and sustained development is encouraging people's participation in the process of development from decision-making to implementation (Coelho & Favareto, 2007). From the perspective of political sociology, political engagement is characteristic of a civil society. Generally, political engagement is a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon that actualizes the relation between civil society and political society. Political engagement represents a certain pattern of political engagement based on a society's collective values, worldviews, norms and customs (Putnam, 2000). McClosky describes political engagement those types of voluntary actions through which members of a society directly or indirectly play their part in selecting leaders (McClosky, 1968, p. 249). According to Weiner, political engagement is any successful or unsuccessful, organized or disorganized, periodical or continuous voluntary action including legitimate or illegitimate methods to influence selection of leaders, policies, administering public affairs in every local or national government (Weiner, 1971, p. 164). In its general sense, and with respect to the above definition, political engagement is defined as

Voluntary and free actions of the members of a society, whether individually or collectively performed, in governmental or political matters with the purpose of directly or indirectly influencing political decision of a country. These activities might support existing policies of government authorities and government structure or they may intend to change the existing conditions.

One of the most important establishments affecting political engagement is religious values or religiousness (Jones-Correa & David, 2001). Religiousness as a factor influencing political engagement is a general term attributed to any individual or phenomenon that manifests religious and sometimes moral values or signs (Asad, 1993). Religion as a cultural system (Geertz, 1973) and social phenomenon (Durkheim, 1968) enjoys a special place in anthropological studies. In Durkheim's view, religion is the expression of the moral values of a society and their collective beliefs. It is a unified system of beliefs and actions attributed to religious things and matters, i.e. things and matters that are made distinct and sacred which joins all believers together in a united spiritual society with a religious establishment (Durkheim, 1968, p. 62). In Geertz's opinion, religion solves the problem of spirit for believers by providing a religious landscape. He believes that religion is not only an attempt to justify aspects of the wonderful universe, but it also provides in a more extended ground for uniformity of life (Geertz, 1973, p. 90).

Generally speaking, religiousness means religious involvement in such a way as to affect an individual's attitude, inclination and actions (Himmelfarb, 1975). In Allport's opinion, religion as a value system unifies human life. In other words, the highest value system which unifies and unites human life is religious value system; a system which impacts all aspects of an individual's life. Allport maintains that religious feelings have neither rational nor completely irrational nature, but they are a mixture of feeling and rational thinking. In fact, religiousness provides the individual with a philosophy of life that not only has a rational nature, but it is also satisfies feelings and excitements. Therefore, Allport concludes, that all great religions of the world bring a kind of worldview to their followers which is both rationally simple and harmonically beautiful (Allport, 1950, pp. 18-19). He states that mature religious faith, despite its imitative and derivative nature, has a dynamic characteristic. Indeed, all kinds of religiousness stem from psychological immaturity, i.e. physical problems, self-centered desires, childish interpretation, etc., but he believes that religious feelings can overcome these immaturity-driven roots and the motivations they stem from in the process of transformation. When this phenomenon occurs, religion becomes the "prime motivation" in an individual's life. In other words, religious feelings attain an autonomous functionality in the framework of an individual's personality (Allport, 1950, p. 72).

According to Verba, Schlozman, Brady, and Nie (1993), time, money and civic skills are the main resources of political participation. They believe that people, who have strong religious inclinations, improve their civic skills by participating in group meetings, giving speeches in public events, discussing with other people, or writing letters to authorities. Religious inclinations thus provide a plethora of resources that help improve collective Engagements of individuals. Findings by Dietram, Matthew, and Dominique (2003) al show that while cognitive dimension of religion has negative effect on democrat citizens, its structural dimension provides suitable ground for improvement of the feeling of political effectiveness and various forms of participation in citizens. Shupe (1977) show that individuals with religious beliefs have a special willingness to be a member of political parties and engage in political activities. O'Neill (2004) emphasizes the relation between religious beliefs as an element of social capital and political participation of women. He argues that religious beliefs develop the civic skill potentials of women and this can help increase political and social participation.

Culture of Persia is one of the oldest in the world. Today of the 98% of Muslims living in Iran, around 89% are Shi'a and only around 9% are Sunni. The Revolution of 1979 brought about a fundamental change in Iranian attitudes toward politics. Mass political involvement has been both an objective and a characteristic of postrevolutionary Iran. Religious, rather than secular, organizations thus have the most important political roles. The fusion of traditional Shia Islamic ideals with political values during the Revolution resulted in the emergence of a Participatory political culture. The transformation of the political culture owed much to the charisma of Religion. the Religion was determined not simply to overthrow the monarchy but also to replace it with a new society that derived its values from Islam. The principal characteristics of this political culture are pervasive feelings that the government is obligated to ensure social justice and that every citizen should participate in politics.

Some other studies indicate that religiousness, in addition to a direct relation to political engagement, affects political awareness as well. In this regard, Greenberg (2000) argues that political relations affected by religiousness not only increase people's motivation to participate, but it also enables them to feel that their impact on political processes is better and more effective. Results from the research by Duries et al. demonstrate that in the socio-cultural and political environment studied, despite the high influence of value inclinations, religiousness is the more important factor affecting political attitude. Based on their research findings, Hoffman and Dowd (2008) argue that individuals with stronger religious inclinations have higher political awareness, and religion and faith has considerable effect on their political engagements. Their findings show that both Islam and Christianity invite people to participate, but participation has been higher among Moslems than Christians. Epley (2005) has studied the relationship between religion, civic society and politics in five official religions of Indonesia, Buddhism, Catholicism, Christianity, Hinduism and Islam. He refers to religious motivation as a factor influencing participative spirit in individuals. His findings indicate that Islamic beliefs and customs have had different cultural, religious and political impacts from other religions. However, Nooris and Inglehart (2003) argue that there is no significant difference between Moslems and non-Moslems in supporting democratic values including political engagement. According to this study, Questions of this research is: (1) What impact religion has on the Iranian political behavior? (2) Religiosity effects on cognitive participation of Iranians? (3) Religiosity effects on direct and indirect participation of Iranians? (4) Internal and external Religiosity effects on political participation?

2. Research method

The present study is a survey analysis. Population consisted of the entire over-18 citizens of the city of Iran. Number of samples was determined using Cochran sampling test with estimation precision of $d = 0.05$ and maximum variance of $0.25 S^2$ ($S^2 = pq$) and confidence level of 95 percent to be 384 people. After rejecting defective questionnaires, 360 questionnaires were analyzed. For religiousness evaluation, religiousness motivation scale (Duffy & Blustein, 2005) was used. This scale evaluates religiousness inclination in individual level in two intrinsic or extrinsic dimensions. Religiousness motivation scale contains 42 statements with the following measures: (1) intrinsic religiousness, 14

statements; (2) extrinsic-social religiousness, 9 statements; (3) extrinsic-personal religiousness, 11 statements; (4) extrinsic-moral religiousness, 9 statements. The following example questions were used to evaluate extrinsic religiousness; “Mosques are the best place to establish good social relationships;” or “what religion offers to the individual is peace at times of sorrow, misery and disaster;” or a statement like this: “One of the reasons why I have become member of a mosque is that this membership helps a person to fix his place in the society.” *Intrinsic religiousness* measure has been designed to evaluate mature faith. For those people who are intrinsically religious, nonreligious needs have lesser ultimate importance however crucial they might be. These people try to harmonize as much as possible these needs and their religious beliefs and duties. Believing in a faith motivates the individual to internalize and completely subject herself to that faith. People with such motivation do not use their religion, but live with it (Allport, 1950). Intrinsic religiousness measure contains such questions as “it is important for me to spend some of my time in solitude to think and contemplate on my religious beliefs;” or “I want to seriously think about my religious beliefs;” or “I am determined to harmonize my religion and all my behaviors in my life;” and “my religious beliefs are actually the foundation of my way of living.” Duffy and Blustein reported the validity of the subscales to be 0.87, 0.80, 0.89 and 0.85 percent respectively for intrinsic religiousness, extrinsic-social religiousness, extrinsic-personal religiousness, and extrinsic-moral religiousness.

Likert-scale questionnaire was used to assess political engagement. This questionnaire which contains 21 questions was designed by the researcher using Likert scale. Reliability coefficients of this scale was found to be 0.77 using Cornbach’s alpha. Based on the present conditions of the Iranian society, political engagement was divided into three dimensions: cognitive, indirect political engagement, and direct political engagement. Cognitive dimension attempts to examine people’s opinions about politics, their interest in politics, and their understanding of politics. Indirect political engagement assesses the willingness of the individual to gain political information through various channels. Finally, involving oneself in deciding one’s future and selecting and monitoring the governing political system in the form of voting, etc. can be called direct political engagement. This measure is an instrument for evaluation of individual’s political engagement. Scoring of each question rests on a continuum of 1 (absolutely agree) to 5 (absolutely disagree).

3. Findings

First, descriptive data are presented and then, the model will be fitted.

Mean and standard deviation of intrinsic religiousness were found to be 37.51 and 5.52, respectively, and the mean of extrinsic-social religiousness was found to be 21.47 with its standard deviation being 4.80. Extrinsic-personal and extrinsic-moral means were found to be 26.63 and 19.82 with standard deviations of, respectively, 5.44 and 3.7. According to these results, the score of intrinsic religiousness is higher than other dimensions among the subjects. In the political engagement questionnaire, the means of cognitive, direct Behavior and indirect Behavior dimensions with the above values are shown in Table 1. The overall score for political engagement is 56.66 and its standard deviation is 7.80 and the same for the overall score of religious beliefs were found to be 104.70 and 15.09, respectively.

Table 2 shows simple (Pearson) correlation of each religious belief dimension with political engagement dimensions. As it is observed, all correlations with direct Behavior except for the correlation between extrinsic-social and extrinsic-personal with cognitive and extrinsic-personal dimensions are meaningful ($p < 0.01$). The highest level of correlation belongs to the relationship between cognitive political engagement and intrinsic religiousness and the relationship between direct political engagement and extrinsic-social dimension has the lowest correlation. In order to investigate the multiple relationships between religious beliefs and each political participation dimension, multiple regression analysis was used. Table 3 illustrates regression model results for the relationships between religious beliefs and intrinsic, extrinsic-social, extrinsic-personal and extrinsic-personal religiousness dimensions with each political engagement dimension and the overall level of participation.

Table 1. Descriptive characteristics of research variables

Statistic variables	Minimum statistic	Maximum statistic	Mean statistic	Std. deviation statistic
IR	26.00	54.00	37.51	5.52
ERS	13.00	37.00	21.48	4.80
ERP	15.00	43.00	26.63	5.44
ERM	10.00	32.00	19.82	3.76
Total R	72.00	166.00	104.70	15.09
Cognitive	5.00	25.00	13.54	3.66
Direct	11.00	31.00	24.01	3.41
Indirect	10.00	40.00	19.06	4.42
Total PP	35.00	76.00	56.66	7.80

Table 2. Correlation between religious beliefs dimensions and political engagement

Variables		Cognitive	Direct	Indirect
IR	Pearson correlation	0.68**	0.39**	0.57
	Sig.	0.00 ^a	0.00 ^a	3.1E-8
ERS	Pearson correlation	0.14	0.12**	0.24
	Sig.	0.02	0.00 ^a	7.2E-6
ERP	Pearson correlation	-0.07	0.09	0.17
	Sig.	0.19	0.35 ^a	2.0E-8
ERM	Pearson correlation	0.27**	0.15**	0.34
	Sig.	0.00 ^a	0.00 ^a	1.3E-4

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

Table 3. Regression model results for the relationships between religious beliefs and political engagement

The independent variable	The dependent variable	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. error of the estimate	F	Indirect
IR-ERS-ERP-ERM	Cognitive	0.57	0.45	0.45	3.57	59.17	1.7E-6
IR-ERS-ERP-ERM	Direct	0.26	0.19	0.18	3.05	11.03	5.0E-4
IR-ERS-ERP-ERM	Indirect	0.39	0.31	0.31	5.92	25.64	2.0E-7
IR-ERS-ERP-ERM	Total PP	0.44	0.29	0.28	3.68	37.15	3.3E-4

As Table 3 demonstrates, dimensions of religious beliefs are good predictors for political engagement parameters. Multiple correlation value (*R*) of religious beliefs with cognitive political engagement is 0.57 and determinative coefficient of 45% shows the explainable value of cognitive political engagement variances from religious belief dimensions. Multiple correlation value (*R*) of religious belief dimensions with direct political engagement is 0.26 and determinative coefficient of 19% shows the explainable value of direct political engagement variances from religious belief dimensions. Multiple correlation value (*R*) of intrinsic, extrinsic-social, extrinsic-personal and extrinsic-moral religiousness with indirect political engagement is 0.39 and the explainable coefficient of 31 percent shows the explainable value of indirect political engagement variances from religious belief dimensions. Multiple correlation value (*R*) of religious beliefs with political engagement is 0.44 and determinative coefficient of 0.29 shows the explainable value of overall score variances of political

Table 4. Nonstandard (B) and standard (b) regression coefficients for each dimension of religious beliefs on political engagement dimensions

The dependent variable	The independent variable	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	β		
Cognitive	IR	0.51	0.038	0.43	7.31	2.0E-9
	ERS	0.11	0.041	0.09	2.96	0.001
	ERP	0.18	0.035	0.114	1.17	0.213
	ERM	0.27	0.051	0.31	5.89	1.6E-7
Direct	IR	0.26	0.027	0.315	6.31	3.4E-4
	ERS	0.14	0.038	0.24	4.14	8.0E-9
	ERP	0.113	0.067	0.17	2.28	0.013
	ERM	0.20	0.048	0.22	4.36	7.1E-5
Indirect	IR	0.37	0.042	0.29	6.51	1.4E-6
	ERS	0.12	0.028	0.06	1.54	0.069
	ERP	0.19	0.043	0.23	1.05	0.537
	ERM	0.25	0.061	0.227	3.79	3.2E-6
Political engagement	IR	0.49	0.078	0.41	5.93	2.7E-4
	ERS	0.15	0.082	0.13	1.25	0.001
	ERP	0.19	0.077	0.174	3.11	0.092
	ERM	0.31	0.107	0.24	4.80	5.0E-6

engagement from intrinsic, extrinsic-social, extrinsic-personal and extrinsic-moral religiousness. The significance of the values of *F* shows that all coefficients are meaningful in $p < 0.001$.

Table 4 shows nonstandard (B) and standard (b) regression coefficients for regressions of each religious belief on political engagement dimensions. As standard regression coefficients indicate, intrinsic religiousness is the more important predictor in all political engagement dimensions and it has weightier *b* and it is more related with political engagement parameters. In sum, the relationship between intrinsic religiousness with all dimensions of political engagement is significant ($p < 0.05$). As it can be seen, all regression coefficients are positive and it shows a positive relationship between intrinsic religiousness and political engagement. The regression of extrinsic-personal religiousness on cognitive and indirect political engagement and overall score of political engagement is not significant and shows no meaningful relationship with these dimensions.

4. Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to theoretically and experimentally explain the effect of religiousness on political engagement. Results demonstrated that there exists a meaningful relationship between the level of adherence to religious principles and political engagement in the sample studied. This finding conforms to the findings of Allport (1950), Verba et al. (1993), Shupe (1977), Greenberg (2000), O'Neill (2004), Epley (2005) and Hoffman and Dowd (2008). The results of the mentioned studies have shown that people with religious inclinations have more political awareness and religion and faith have considerable impact on their political actions. In addition, those with religious beliefs and interests have had a special tendency toward membership in some political parties and participation in political activities. In theoretical terms and with respect to Allport's view, we may say that in fact religion, as a value system, gives orientation to people's moves and guides them to the mental and human perfection. In Allport's opinion, religion, as a value system, unifies human life and acts as a source or element of social solidarity and the religious man is responsible for himself, social environment, values and counter values. In fact, politics, in the perspective of religion, means participation in and feeling responsible toward events.

In all dimensions of political engagement, the dimension of intrinsic religiousness is a better predictor and it is more related to political engagement parameters. High scores for the intrinsic religiousness measure reflect the attempt of the individual to prove her usefulness in the eyes of the society. It seems that the people are more apt to develop more socially responsible attitudes toward political engagement. Indeed, we can say that intrinsic religiousness acts as a bridge between awareness and participation. We cannot claim that religious dimensions have been realized unless religiousness is departs from its abstract and potential state and exhibits its practical religious dimension in the form of participative behaviors. With respect to the religious conditions of the existing political system in Iran, people with higher religiousness participate more in elections to maintain the religious political system and the current study's results confirm this argument.

Considering the fact that Iranian society is a religious one and people, from their young age, receive formal and informal religious education, they are familiar with the principles of religious beliefs. On the other hand, not only does Islam consider man responsible and obligated toward God, but it also considers him responsible toward society. People who are more committed to their religious doctrines feel responsible toward political engagement. In religious perspective, the individual is responsible toward herself, her God, her society, etc., and she is obligated to be sensitive regarding her future, her presence in society, her activity and she is obligated to prevent any governmental deviations.

5. Conclusion

Results showed that there exists a direct relationship between the level of religiousness and political engagement. According to these findings, we may expect higher political engagement among people in religious societies. Religion strongly affects individuals' beliefs about politics and policies, and religious individuals, like any other type of individual, have certain political issues that are more important than others. And like partisanship, religion provides a perceptual screen through which political events are interpreted. Indeed, it is obvious that religiousness is only one of the many factors influencing political engagement and changing it in society does happen neither at once nor during a short period of time, but existence of religiousness is an important predictor of political engagement because based on religious teachings of Islam, Moslems are required to endeavor to establish and consolidate an Islamic society and one of the rules of socialization is involvement in political affairs, achieving independence and social respect. All these points illuminate the direction of the political engagement in an Islamic society. Religious commitment is not a source of political objectivity, but helps people make sense of a large and confusing world that is constantly challenging strongly and deeply held beliefs. The results of my research will prove that religion does matter to the political identities of the Iranian populous. Also, religious sentiment is extremely influential in the political process

Funding

The authors received no direct funding for this research.

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Citation information

Cite this article as: Religion and political engagement, Jafar Aghazadeh & Reza Mahmoudoghli, *Cogent Social Sciences* (2017), 3: 1368109.

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