

“The Discursive and Practical Influence of Spirituality on Civic Engagement”

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ABSTRACT

Religion has long been recognized as promoting civic engagement. Recent declines in organized religion and growing interest in spirituality raise the question of whether spirituality might also promote civic engagement. Using data from a new nationally representative survey, we assess the independent and joint influence of spirituality and religion on civic life. We find that 40 percent of respondents perceive spirituality as influencing their civic engagement. Spirituality’s influence typically works in tandem with religion, but when spirituality and religion are distinct, the influence of spirituality is greater and more prevalent. Using two distinct measures, we assess the influence of spirituality on civic engagement at both discursive and practical levels. We find positive associations for both. Spirituality is both a conscious influence and tacit resource in civic life. We close by briefly outlining an agenda for better understanding socially engaged spirituality.

Replication: The data from this study are publicly available at the Association of Religion Data Archives (thearda.com) under the title “National Religion and Spirituality Survey 2020.” The Stata syntax for the analysis is available upon request.

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“THE DISCURSIVE AND PRACTICAL INFLUENCE OF SPIRITUALITY ON CIVIC ENGAGEMENT”

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary trends in the American religious landscape make understanding spirituality and its influence on civic life increasingly important. A longstanding line of analysis, dating back to nineteenth-century French writer Alexis de Tocqueville (1966), demonstrates the important role that religion has played in the civic arena. Religious participation inclines people to engage in the civic life of their communities (Putnam and Campbell 2010). Religious congregations and other faith-based institutions serve as conduits for civic action by, among other things, building civic skills and providing opportunities for engagement (Verba et al. 1995). Religious culture—including narratives, motivations, and values—play an important role in generating and guiding public life (Bellah et al. 1985). Yet over the last forty years, the United States has experienced a gradual weakening of organized religion. Levels of religious affiliation and religious participation have both declined (Hout and Fischer 2014; Voas and Chaves 2016). This decline may have implications for civic activity. If organized religion weakens, so too may its role as a key contributor to the civic sphere.

Concurrent with the decline in organized religion has been growing interest in spirituality. National surveys show that an increasing number of Americans—27 percent in 2017—consider themselves “spiritual but not religious” (Pew 2017). An associated trend is increasing participation in and promotion of spiritual practices, such as yoga and mindfulness meditation (Kucinkas 2019). Spirituality has become a new *lingua franca* in contemporary society, with some evidence that it is supplanting organized religion in the modern West (Heelas and Woodhead 2005; Houtman and Aupers 2007).

These two trends—the weakening of organized religion and the movement toward spirituality—raise a key question for the civic sphere: Can spirituality have the type of impact on civic engagement that religion traditionally has? There is reasonable speculation on both sides of the answer, but there has been little solid data upon which to address the question. Most national surveys do not ask questions about spirituality and civic engagement simultaneously. When they do, they typically only contain a question about spiritual identity. Fortunately, a handful of qualitative studies of contemporary American spirituality offer insightful discussions of spirituality’s connections to civic life, even though civic engagement is not their central focus. These discussions provide insights into spirituality’s connections to civic life that lay groundwork for further exploration.

A recent survey provides an opportunity to address the links between spirituality and civic engagement more thoroughly. The “National Religion and Spirituality Survey 2020,” fielded by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC), contains a range of innovative questions about spirituality, religion, and civic participation. Because spirituality and religion overlap for many Americans (Steensland et al. 2018), we use the survey to examine the independent and joint relationship of spirituality and religion with civic engagement. Drawing on Giddens’ (1984) distinction between discursive and practical consciousness, we utilize measures that allow us to identify two distinct pathways of potential spiritual influence. We find that spirituality is associated with increased civic engagement in multiple ways, working through discursive and practical channels. Spirituality is both a conscious influence on and a tacit resource for civic life. Spirituality often works in tandem with religion, but it is nearly as predictive of higher civic engagement by itself. We discuss the implications of our findings and outline directions for future research.

RELIGION, SPIRITUALITY, AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

While there is growing interest in spirituality and civic life, the majority of relevant scholarly work focuses on the adjacent topic of religion's impact on civic engagement. We first outline some key findings on religion and civic involvement from previous research, and then we turn to insights from qualitative studies of spirituality and its connections to public life.

Religion and Civic Engagement

A number of key studies point to the ways that religion influences the civic sphere. Verba et al.'s (1995) analysis of civic voluntarism identified religious congregations as incubators of civic skills, nodes of recruitment networks, and repositories of organizational infrastructure that contribute to civic engagement. They identified congregational participation as particularly important for civic involvement and contextualized it in a broader framework that includes personal motivation, capacity for action, and social networks. Robert Putnam's analysis of social capital likewise recognized religious organizations' "unique importance in American civil society" (Putnam 2000: 65). Paralleling Verba and colleagues, he found religious participation and religious salience to be influential. Regular religious worshippers and those who consider religion important in their lives are more likely to be engaged in a range of pro-social behaviors and civic activities. Beyond these general patterns, Putnam identified variation between religious groups. Drawing the distinction between "bridging" and "bonding" social capital, he found that mainline Protestants and Catholics engage more in inclusive "bridging" activities that draw connections across disparate groups and communities, whereas evangelicals and other conservative Protestants focus their energies on more exclusivist "bonding" activities in their

own congregational communities. All told, Putnam concluded that religion is “a central fount of American community life and health” (2000: 79). In a subsequent study that focused more centrally on religion, Putnam and Campbell (2010) found that religious people are more altruistic and civically engaged than their counterparts. This impact mainly works through religious participation rather than through the influence of theological beliefs. It is religion’s “network of morally freighted personal connections, coupled with an inclination toward altruism, that explains the good neighborliness” of religious Americans (Putnam and Campbell 2010: 492).

A line of focused empirical studies further illuminates the influence of religion on civic engagement. This work validates the importance of religious participation and religious salience, while also noting variation among religious groups. Attendance at religious worship services is one of the most consistent predictors of civic engagement (Becker and Dhingra 2001; Lewis et al. 2012); however, some studies suggest that once other measures of religious participation are included in models, the impact of church attendance itself weakens and perhaps even turns negative (Beyerlein and Hipp 2006; Driskell et al. 2008). The general pattern is that religious participation is positively associated with civic engagement, while the precise modes of participation sometimes differ. Independent of participation, the salience of religion to a person’s life is also associated with higher levels of engagement in activities like volunteering (Park and Smith 2000; Becker and Dhingra 2001), though these types of “private” religion measures have not received as much attention in the literature as more “public” measures like participation (Paxton et al. 2014).

Differences in civic involvement between religious groups consistently show up in the literature. Following Verba et al. (1995), most studies indicate that Protestants are more civically involved than Catholics (Davidson and McCormick 2007). Within Protestantism, evangelical or

conservative denominations tend to be more focused on their own congregational or parachurch activities, which means that, in comparison to mainline or liberal Protestants, they are less likely to be involved in broader civic life (Lichterman 2005; Beyerlein and Hipp 2006).

Attention to religious group differences creates conceptual space for attention to the civic engagement of the non-affiliated and those who are “spiritual but not religious” (SBNRs). Non-religious groups (or “nones”) have typically been treated as a reference category in denominational comparisons. Nones typically exhibit lower levels of civic engagement than religious individuals, though some studies show them exhibiting levels of civic involvement between mainline Protestants and Jews at the high end and evangelical and black Protestants at the low end (Driskell et al. 2008). Because nones are a growing and internally heterogeneous group, Frost and Edgell (2018) argue for treating them as a group worthy of their own analysis, disaggregating them into atheists, agnostics, “nothing in particulars” (NIPs) and the “spiritual but not religious.” Once they are split out, atheists and the “spiritual but not religious” are as likely as religious people to volunteer for certain types of non-religious activities, such as political and hobby/interest groups. NIPs are less likely to be engaged in civic activities than the other subgroups. They drive down the overall level of civic involvement among the nones, which helps to explain previous findings. These findings mirror others that show that generally non-religious people are less engaged in civic life than more intentional and well organized “secularists,” though both groups exhibit lower levels of non-political civic engagement than religious people (Campbell, Layman, and Green 2021).

Spirituality and Civic Engagement

In a landmark analysis, Wuthnow defines spirituality as “all the beliefs and activities by which individuals attempt to relate their lives to God or to a divine being or some other conception of transcendent reality” (Wuthnow 1998: viii). Thus spirituality, as distinct from religion, commonly references individual-level experience, beliefs, and practice in connection to the sacred or transcendent. Recent empirical studies find that spirituality is most frequently oriented toward God or a higher power, but that a significant domain of spirituality falls outside the traditional boundaries of organized religion and doctrine. For instance, Steensland et al. (2018) found that the majority of Americans define spirituality in predominantly theistic terms (62 percent); a further 13 percent define spirituality in terms of mystery, the unknown, and “something beyond,” and 17 percent view spirituality in largely immanent terms pertaining to “holistic connection” and “ethical action.” Along similar lines, Ammerman (2014) found that while theism is the most common domain of spirituality, another quite prevalent domain is oriented by “extra-theistic” points of reference, such as nature, community, ethics, and beauty.

Survey analyses like Frost and Edgell’s that use nationally-representative data to explore the links between spirituality and civic engagement are still rare. Yet qualitative studies of spirituality and public involvement provide insights into the connections between the two. Stanczak (2006) interviewed 76 progressive activists to discern the connections between their spirituality and their activism, focusing largely on their motivations and aspirations. Three insights from his study are especially relevant. First, he found that people adopt spiritualized roles like “good neighbor” that incline them toward engagement in their local communities. Second, he found that spiritual engagement, rooted in spiritual practices, works through feelings and emotional frameworks. Emotions reconfigure horizons of possibility and recalibrate the costs

and benefits of civic involvement. Most of Stanczak's respondents were ministers. So, third, his study illustrates the entangled but distinctive roles that religion and spirituality play for many people. These were leaders of *religious* organizations, but they talked about their engagement in *spiritual* terms. When it comes to civic action, this also means that the mobilizing infrastructure that facilitated the leaders' engagement was rooted in the social organization of religious institutions. The study's insights for spiritual engagement outside religious settings is less clear.

A few recent books on contemporary American spirituality contain sections that address the relationship between spirituality and civic mindedness. Ammerman's (2014) discussion is the most extensive. She finds that in everyday life, most spiritually meaningful civic action is local in nature. Work in the community, engagement with neighbors, and charitable efforts on behalf of the needy—these often show up as spiritually meaningful types of activity. As issues and activity move to a larger and more diffuse scale, such as national political campaigns or engagement with global climate change, the spiritual connotations typically weaken or disappear altogether. Ammerman also finds differences across groups. Catholics and Jews tend to discuss local community efforts in more spiritual terms than Protestants, which is consistent with the historical embeddedness of parishes and synagogues in their geographical areas. She also finds that the “spiritual but not religious” are more likely to find spiritual meaning in neighborhood engagement because, she suspects, they are not participants in religious communities that draw their civic attention elsewhere.

Two interview-based studies explicitly focus on the spirituality of groups that are growing in the US—the “spiritual but not religious” (SBNRs) and the religiously unaffiliated (or nones). These books paint somewhat discrepant and less sanguine pictures of civic involvement for these groups than those found in Stanczak and Ammerman. Mercadante (2014) is not

optimistic about the civic engagement of SBNRs. She finds little evidence of pro-social orientations or public action. The SBNRs in her study are grounded in a more individualistic and therapeutic discourse that focuses inward as opposed to outward. SBNRs also generally lack ready access to the established organizational infrastructure for engagement that is prominent in congregational settings. She calls for a more “engaged spirituality” because she finds little evidence of it in her interviews. The SBNR ethos is typified by “a focus on therapeutic rather than civic goals” (2014: 231). In contrast, Drescher’s (2016) study of the spirituality of the nones finds that their social ethic is permeated by what she calls an “ethics of care,” characterized by sentiments of interconnectivity and mutual responsibility. For instance, she observes that the biblical parable of the good Samaritan comes up regularly in connection to public life. Beyond this social ethic, though, she says that modes of activism and engagement among the nones are more provisional and ad hoc than the sustained and organized engagement that is often found in religious contexts.

Despite the somewhat mixed assessments of spirituality and civic engagement found in these studies, the inward orientation of spirituality points to one of its potential paths of influence on civic life: internal motivations and the cultivation of ethically-informed subjective states. These motivations and orientations may be available in the discursive consciousness of individuals—i.e., they may be able to recognize and discuss them—or they may be largely subconscious and thus apparent mainly in their practical effects (Giddens 1984). Discursive and practical consciousness are both important drivers of action (Vaisey 2009). In an illuminating examination of contemporary sociological theory, Martin (2011) warns that mainstream theory has erred by downplaying the importance of subjective states and motivations in explanations of social action. Sociological theory has come to distrust the self-understanding of actors to its peril,

too quickly dismissing “first person” accounts of behavior. This skepticism of motives stands in contrast to key analytic approaches to explaining civic engagement. Verba et al.’s framework, for instance, identified motivations as one of three key explanatory factors for understanding civic voluntarism (Verba et al. 1995:3). In the rare instances when moral motives are incorporated into empirical studies of civic engagement, evidence suggests that they can be influential (e.g., Beyerslein and Vaisey 2013). Thus, it stands to reason that self-assessed spiritual orientations may influence civic activity.

To preview our analysis, we explore the independent and joint associations of spirituality and religion with civic engagement. There are discrepant expectations about whether spirituality will be associated with higher levels of civic engagement (e.g., due to a heightened ethic of care) or lower levels of civic engagement (e.g., due to an inward, therapeutic orientation). Using multiple measures, we assess the potential impact of spirituality at both the discursive level (respondents explicitly say that spirituality influences their civic engagement) and at the practical level (respondents indicate that spirituality is salient in their lives). We assess the potential impact of religion with parallel measures. Beyond these measures, we expect attendance at worship services to matter. We also expect denominational differences to matter, though the literature presents a mixed picture for exactly how. The strongest expectation is that evangelical Protestants will be less likely to be involved in activities outside their subcultural context. The religiously unaffiliated may be as likely to be civically engaged as religious people outside religious contexts, especially those who identify as atheist or agnostic as opposed to “nothing in particular.”

DATA AND METHODS

The data for our analysis comes from the “National Study of Religion and Spirituality 2020,” which was designed and conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago on behalf of the Fetzer Institute. The survey was fielded online and by phone in January-February 2020 and contains a nationally representative sample of 3609 adults. The completion rate was 28 percent. Survey respondents were offered the cash equivalent of three dollars for completing the survey.¹ The sample was drawn from NORC’s larger AmeriSpeak panel (a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the US household population) using sampling strata based on age, race/ethnicity, education, and gender (48 sample strata in total).²

The survey provides a unique opportunity to explore the connections between spirituality, religion, and civic engagement due to its extensive measures of all three. Our measures of discursive influence are based on two questions that specifically ask about the influence of spirituality and religion on civic action. Respondents were asked their levels of agreement or disagreement with the following two questions: “My spirituality influences my civic engagement (such as volunteering in my community or donating to charity)” and “My religion influences my civic engagement (such as volunteering in my community or donating to charity).” Using responses “strongly agree” and “somewhat agree,” we created two binary variables measuring whether people indicate that spirituality and religion each influence their civic engagement. Using these two variables, we then created a four-way categorical variable (conceptually

¹ Additional information about the National Religion and Spirituality Survey 2020 can be found here: <https://www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Descriptions/NRSS2019.asp>.

² For further details on the AmeriSpeak panel, see <https://amerispeak.norc.org/Pages/default.aspx>. NORC’s post-stratification weights were used in all the analyses.

designed as a 2x2 table) assessing whether spirituality, religion, both, or neither influence the respondents' civic engagement according to the respondents themselves. For the sake of brevity and parsimony in the exposition below, we describe these categories of spiritual and/or religious influence on civic engagement (hereafter "S/R influence") as *no influence*, *spiritual influence*, *religious influence*, and *joint spiritual-religious influence*. Using this measure, we document the percent of the population in each category and then examine the categories' sociodemographic, religious, and spiritual predictors.

Are self-assessments of spiritual and/or religious influence on civic engagement associated with higher or lower levels of civic activity? In the next part of the analysis, we address this question. The survey contains a battery of seven questions about civic behavior. The questions ask how well a series of statements describe the respondent. The statements reference making positive changes in their community, staying informed of events in their community, attending community events, knowing neighbors, interacting with strangers, participating in volunteer opportunities, and donating to causes or organizations.³ The response categories were: "describes me very well," "describes me moderately well," "describes me slightly," and "does not describe me at all." From these four-level variables (coded 0-3), we created an additive seven-item *civic engagement scale*. Diagnostic analysis showed that the scale exhibits a high degree of internal consistency (Chronbach's Alpha = 0.8619). This civic engagement scale is the dependent variable in the analyses summarized in Table 4.

As predictors of the civic engagement scale, we use the S/R influence measures as indicators of discursive influence. To assess practical influence, we use two measures of salience. The first is religious salience ("to what extent do you consider yourself a religious

³ For the exact wording of the question, see Table 1.

person?”), which has been shown to correlate with higher levels of civic engagement. The second measure, spiritual salience (“to what extent do you consider yourself a spiritual person?”), has not been studied in connection to civic behavior as far as we know.

Additional variables that potentially predict civic engagement are included in the analysis. The sociodemographic control variables include a continuous variable for age, a binary variable for female, a binary variable for white, an interval variable for income, and a binary variable for four-year college degree. To measure religious affiliation, we used a modified version of a classification scheme developed by Lehman and Sherkat (2018), which uses major denominational families to distinguish between types of Protestants—conservative Protestants, moderate Protestants, liberal Protestants—as well as the typical categories of Catholic, religiously unaffiliated (nones), and Other religious groups. Due to the small size of the liberal Protestant category (which, given the survey response choices, contains only Episcopalians and Presbyterians), we combined it with moderate Protestants to create a Moderate/Liberal Protestant Category.⁴ The survey also included a “Just Christian” response category for affiliation, which contained twenty percent of the sample. Because this is a substantively large (and potentially growing) group and because there was no clear way to further categorize these respondents as Protestants or Catholics, we treated this as a distinct category of religious affiliation worthy of analysis. In line with Frost and Edgell (2018), we also distinguish between atheists/agnostics and “nothing in particular” (NIPs). To assess religious participation, we include a binary variable for weekly religious attendance. Finally, a valuable measure in the survey asks whether the

⁴ We could not use RELTRAD (Steensland et al. 2000), another common religious classification scheme, because the Protestant categories available in the survey did not provide enough information to distinguish between evangelical Protestant, mainline Protestant, and black Protestant denominations. The survey’s response choices included broad denominational families (e.g., Baptist and Presbyterian), which are well-suited to the Lehman and Sherkat approach.

respondent is “a member of a religious or spiritual community.” In an era in which rates of participation in formal religious organizations are declining, this provides an alternative and potentially complementary measure of religious or spiritual belonging beyond standard measures of religious affiliation. We used this question to create a binary variable assessing membership. Table 1 provides details on all the variables.

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

The analyses below are oriented by three questions: (1) To what extent do people say that their religion or spirituality influences their civic engagement? (2) What are the sociological predictors of religious and/or spiritual discursive influence on civic engagement? (3) Does religion and/or spirituality—at both discursive and practical levels—have a positive association with civic engagement?

FINDINGS

We begin by reporting the extent to which people say that spirituality or religion influences their civic activity. Forty percent of respondents said that spirituality influences their civic engagement and 34 percent said that religion influences it. A straight-forward comparison of the two numbers is perhaps surprising. In the literature, and in public discourse, it is more common to associate the influence of religion on public life than spirituality, which has more individualistic and inward-oriented connotations. Yet in the self-understanding of respondents, spirituality appears to be more prominent as an influence than religion. This could be the case for a variety of reasons. It could reflect a perception that spirituality is more central to personal motivation than religion. Respondents may be less attentive to the mobilizing structures associated with organized religion than to their internal motivations (which they deem spiritual).

Or it could reflect the decline in religious participation and the relative increase of the “spiritual” over the “religious.” Whatever the case, the comparison shows that spirituality is more commonly viewed as an influence on civic life than religion and that spirituality may be more closely linked to civic life than suggested by existing studies. This is *prima facie* evidence that understanding spirituality is important for understanding the contours of public engagement.

Asking the two questions about religion and spirituality separately, though, presumes that their influence is separable, something that may not be the case. In the United States, religion and spirituality overlap for many people (Ammerman 2013; Steensland 2018). The four-way categorical variable we created allows us to look at both independent and joint S/R influence.

Table 2 shows the distribution of respondents across the four categories. Religion and spirituality are viewed separately in only 18 percent of the cases: 12 percent of respondents indicated that spirituality alone influences their civic engagement and 6 percent indicated that religion alone influences it. In contrast, for 28 percent of the respondents, religion and spirituality work in tandem. These numbers are consistent with studies that show religion and spirituality commonly overlap. The numbers also reinforce the greater relative prominence of spirituality as an influence over religion when respondents are asked to consider both questions. Among respondents for whom only one or the other was influential, spiritual influence was twice as prevalent. All told, spirituality and/or religion are seen by respondents as influences on civic activity in 46 percent of the cases. The largest percentage of respondents, 54 percent, indicated that neither spirituality nor religion has an influence on their civic engagement. Thus, the population appears roughly split on whether religion and/or spirituality influence their civic engagement.

[INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Next, we turn to the sociological predictors of a respondent's placement in each of these S/R influence quadrants. In other words, what factors contribute to discursive perception of spiritual or religious influence? In exploratory regression models, step-wise introduction of variables indicated that the influence of sociodemographic predictors did not change substantially as religious and spiritual variables were introduced. Therefore, we present two models for each quadrant of S/R influence: A basic model that contains sociodemographic measures and religious affiliation, and a full model that adds variables that tap religious and spiritual salience, religious attendance, and membership in a spiritual community.

Table 3 presents the results of multivariate analyses. We first highlight the independent variables that exert general influence across the quadrants and then summarize the profiles for each quadrant. The most broadly influential demographic predictor is age (predicting three of four quadrants). Beyond the age effect, education predicts two quadrants, race/ethnicity predicts two, and gender predicts one. Notably, income is not associated with placement in the quadrants. For religious affiliation, conservative Protestants are the omitted reference category. In the basic models, most of the religious groups were significantly different from conservative Protestants, except for "religious influence." Once the additional measures were introduced in the full models, the differences among the religious groups were more concentrated in the "spiritual influence" quadrant, though atheists/agnostics and NIPs were more broadly distinctive. In the full models, the measures of religious and spiritual salience, religious attendance, and religious/spiritual membership were consistent predictors across all of the quadrants with only one exception.

[INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Each of the four quadrants has a number of distinctive predictors that give us a sense of their sociological profiles. Based on the odds ratios, respondents in Quadrant 1 (“no influence”) are younger, more likely to be non-white, and 25 percent less likely to have a college degree. Compared to conservative Protestants, all the other religious categories were significantly more likely to be in this group in the basic model, but the additional measures in the full model washed out these affiliation effects. In the full model, respondents in Quadrant 1 are about 30 percent less likely to exhibit high religious salience, 75 percent less likely to exhibit high spiritual salience, 45 percent less likely to attend religious services weekly, and 55 percent less likely to consider themselves part of a religious or spiritual community.

Quadrant 2 (“spiritual influence”) represents respondents who indicate that spirituality, but not religion, influences their civic activity. This is a group about whom relatively little is known. Among sociodemographic factors, the distinguishing predictor is age. Perhaps contrary to expectations, older people are more likely to be in this group. Religious affiliation is also significant, in both the basic and full models. Conservative and moderate/liberal Protestants are not distinctively associated with this category. But compared to conservative Protestants, all other religious groups are significantly more likely to identify solely spiritual influence. Among them, the two unaffiliated categories are the most distinctive, being roughly two and a half times more likely to identify spiritual influence than conservative Protestants. Notably, this is the only quadrant where “just Christians” are distinctive from conservative Protestants; they are more likely to be in this quadrant. Both measures of salience have strong associations, especially spiritual salience. Respondents with a strong spiritual identity are nearly five times as likely to be in this quadrant. Meanwhile, organized religion, whether measured by religious salience or

religious attendance, decreases the likelihood. This quadrant is also the only one without a significant association with membership.

Quadrant 3 (“religious influence”) represents respondents for whom religion but not spirituality influences their civic activity. Age is not significantly associated with this quadrant in either the basic or full model. It is also the only one associated with gender. Women are over 25 percent less likely to be in this category than men. Among religious groups, the unaffiliated are distinctive, with both atheists/agnostics and NIPs much less likely to be in this category. Respondents in this group are 70 percent more likely to exhibit high religious salience and 65 percent less likely to exhibit high spiritual salience. They are 50 percent more likely to have weekly attendance in worship services and almost three times as likely to consider themselves a member of a religious or spiritual community.

Quadrant 4 (“joint spiritual-religious influence”) represents people for whom both spirituality and religion influence their civic activity. In the basic model, age was positively associated with higher odds of being in this category, but it loses significance in the full model. These respondents are almost 40 percent more likely to be white and over 25 percent more likely to have a college degree. In the basic model, they are more likely to be conservative Protestants than any other type of religious affiliation, but in the full model they appear to be similar to all categories of affiliation categories except atheists/agnostics, who are nearly 75 percent less likely to be located here. This category has strong, positive, and highly significant associations with the measures of religious identity, spirituality identity, weekly religious attendance, and religious or spiritual membership.

The analyses thus far have focused on identifying respondents who consciously experience spirituality and/or religion as influencing their civic activity. We now turn to

assessing whether the perception of spiritual and/or religious influence is associated with levels of civic activity based on the civic engagement scale. We begin by examining the extent of civic engagement associated with each of the four quadrants of S/R influence. We then add spiritual salience and other potentially explanatory variables. Our chief interest is whether spirituality—measured at discursive and practical levels—is associated with civic engagement.

Table 4 presents the results of regression analyses. In Model 1, we include demographic control variables and S/R influence, with the omitted reference category as Quadrant 1 (“no influence”). All three quadrants show significantly higher odds of civic activity than the “no influence” reference group, though with substantive differences in magnitude. Quadrant 4 (joint spiritual-religious influence) shows the highest odds, with those respondents being over four times as likely to score higher on the civic engagement scale than the reference category. Respondents in Quadrant 2 (spiritual influence) are over two and a half times more likely to score higher. Respondents in Quadrant 3 (religious influence) are one and a half times more likely to score higher. When spirituality and religion are perceived to work alone, based on this comparison, spiritual influence is associated with more engagement. Overall, the patterns show that perceptions of spiritual influence on civic engagement are associated with higher levels of engagement.

[INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE]

In Model 2, we add measures of religious affiliation, religious and spiritual salience, weekly attendance, and membership. Quadrant 2 (spiritual influence) and Quadrant 4 (joint spiritual-religious influence) remain significant with comparable odds. Respondents in both categories are roughly two and a half times more likely to score higher than the reference group.

This suggests that spiritual influence on civic engagement, alone and in tandem with religious influence, is positively associated with civic activity net of the other factors.⁵

Even with measures of S/R influence at the discursive level in the model, each of the other religious and spiritual factors also matters. Most central to our analysis, respondents with salient spirituality are 70 percent more likely to score more highly on the civic engagement index. Respondents with high religious salience are 25 percent more likely to score more highly. Thus, based on comparable measures, spiritual salience has a stronger association than religious salience on civic activity. Weekly attendance at worship services increases the odds by 65 percent—comparable in odds to spiritual salience—and being a member of a spiritual or religious community increases the odds by over 25 percent.

Turning to religious affiliation, we see that Catholics are 55 percent more likely to score higher on the civic activity scale than conservative Protestants. (There are not significant differences among Protestants.) Respondents in the Other religion category also have higher odds than conservative Protestants, though the mix of groups in that category does not yield much further for substantive interpretation. Atheists and agnostics are also significantly more likely than Protestants to score higher on the scale, with their odds being greater than Catholics'. "Just Christians" and NIPs look similar to Protestants.

⁵ The positive association of religious influence alone (Quadrant 3) is attenuated by the additional variables in Model 2. The number of people in this category is fairly small (207). Due to this smaller cell size, we are cautious to not attribute inferential importance to its lack of predictive significance relative to spirituality.

DISCUSSION

We return to the main question that orients the paper: Does spirituality impact civic life? Evidence from a new survey indicates that it does. Forty percent of respondents perceive spirituality as playing a role in their civic behavior. When we look at civic engagement using our index, indicators of spiritual influence at both discursive and practical levels show higher likelihoods of engagement. In a nutshell, our analysis finds that spirituality—more so than religion, by many measures—is a prevalent and influential resource in civic life. This is baseline evidence that spirituality should be considered more explicitly as a contributing factor to civic engagement, especially given the shifting landscape of contemporary American religion. Here we summarize key findings and their implications, discuss caveats, and highlight next steps in a research agenda on spirituality and civic life.

Spirituality is a resonant resource for civic engagement because it aligns with people's understandings of their own actions. More respondents indicate that spirituality influences their civic participation than religion does. This difference is notable because a large body of research addresses the impact of *religion* on civic life. When the two are independent, spirituality is twice as likely to be seen as a civic influence than religion. When we look at overlap between them, we see that over two-thirds of spiritual influence happens jointly with religious influence. This suggests that while spirituality is more often seen as an internal resource for civic engagement, organized religion still provides social and organizational conduits for civic engagement in many cases. Finally, it is important to recognize that for over half of the American public, neither spirituality nor religion is viewed as being an influence on their civic engagement. Significantly, this absence of perceived religious or spiritual influence is associated with lower levels of civic activity.

Who is likely to see their spirituality as influencing their civic engagement? For those who perceive spiritual influence only, which is the most understudied category, the sole significant demographic predictor in the full model is age, which is positively associated with spiritual influence. This is evidence that younger people may be trending away from spirituality as a conscious influence in civic life. Having a salient spiritual identity proved to be a strong predictor, which is relevant to the increasing percentage of people who view themselves as SBNRs (Supplementary analyses not included indicated that being “spiritual but not religious”—based on a combination of the two salience measures—was highly predictive of the “spiritual influence” only quadrant.) Taken as a whole, the patterns suggest that independent spiritual influence is more detached from organized religion, particularly Protestantism. The predictors of joint spiritual-religious influence are distinct from those predicting independent spiritual influence. There are few differences across religious groups in the full model, except for the lower odds among atheists/agnostics. The key predictors are salience, attendance, and membership. These reflect the attributes of highly observant joiners (Putnam 2000).

Turning to civic engagement, spirituality’s positive association works in two distinct and additive ways in the models—through the spiritual influence articulated by respondents and through having a salient spiritual identity. At the discursive level, when compared to the reference group of no S/R influence, expressed spiritual influence is positively associated with civic behavior both on its own and in conjunction with religion. Each mode of spiritual influence increases the likelihood of civic engagement more than twofold. The fact that spiritual influence is nearly as strong on its own as through its joint influence with religion is notable because this pathway may have less congregational or parachurch infrastructure supporting it. At the practical level, spiritual salience is associated with higher odds of civic engagement. The increase in odds

is equivalent to weekly worship attendance, which is one of the strongest religious predictors of civic engagement in the literature. Notably, the odds are higher for spiritual salience than religious salience, though religious salience that has received greater attention in the literature. Beyond the spirituality measures, religious attendance and membership in a religious or spiritual community also increase the likelihood of higher levels of civic activity. This is consistent with research indicating that religious organizations provide opportunities and mobilizing structures for civic engagement. It is also consistent with regular attenders being civic “doers.”

While it is not the central focus of our study, the impact of religious affiliation (and non-affiliation) warrants attention. Consistent with previous research, conservative Protestants are less likely to be civically engaged than other religious groups. Yet it is Catholics who are the more engaged religious group. While discrepant with some previous studies (e.g., Verba et al. 1995; Putnam 2000), other work can help make sense of the pattern. Warren (2001), for instance, has argued that Catholics have a more robust history of civic engagement in their local communities, whereas Protestants typically have a more individualistic orientation that attenuates community engagement. Atheists and agnostics also show higher levels of civic engagement than Protestants. While this runs counter to assumptions about “nones” in the literature, it is consistent with Frost and Edgell’s (2018) finding that self-described atheists and agnostics, as distinct from NIPs, engage in civic behavior at comparable levels to religious affiliates once we look outside religious contexts of engagement. It is also consistent with Ammerman’s (2014) observation that SBNRs may exhibit more spiritually meaningful local civic involvement in the absence of congregational involvements that draw their attention and energy elsewhere.

Given this evidence of spiritual influence on civic activity, we can turn to existing qualitative work to sketch a pathway that links spirituality and civic involvement (see Stanczak 2006; Ammerman 2014; Drescher 2016). Spiritual cultivation and salience may initially focus on inward equipoise or transformation, but spiritual consciousness can also invoke ethical frameworks oriented beyond the individual to connect people with things larger than themselves, such as concern for the treatment of others (e.g., the golden rule or the parable of the good Samaritan). Spiritually meaningful engagement is most likely to show up in personal relationships and local communities, particularly when it is not channeled by religious organizations. This pathway of spiritual influence is consistent with other findings regarding the impact of moral orientations in civic involvement (e.g., Beyerlein and Vaisey 2013) and the impact of “private” religiosity on activities like volunteering (Paxton et al. 2014).

In interpreting the connections between spirituality and civic engagement, we have used the language of spiritual influence, as opposed to association, for a few reasons. The survey measure that taps discursive spiritual and/or religious influence uses this language in the question wording itself, so “influence” aligns with the text of the question and respondents’ own assessments. We then examine whether these subjective assessments are associated with higher levels of civic engagement. They are. This relationship is consistent with the large body of research that finds religious influence civic behavior. We also discuss practical influence in relation to the spiritual salience measure, much as prior work has discussed the impact of religious salience on civic engagement (e.g., Putnam 2000). We recognize that cross-sectional surveys, like most observational analyses, cannot definitively specify cause. We use the language of influence with caution, but consider the survey question wording and the existing literature to warrant this interpretation.

Our findings should be read with three further caveats in mind, all with an eye toward future research. First, our measures of spirituality are all based on survey respondents' subjective assessments. While we are convinced by the argument to take subjective states seriously as drivers of social action (Martin 2011), complementary work on spirituality and civic involvement should look at behavioral measures of spirituality, such as commitment of time to spiritual practices and other forms of spiritual cultivation. To be consistent with our findings, we would generally expect measures of spiritual practice to be positively associated with civic involvement. Second, the measures in our civic engagement scale ask respondents how well engagement in a particular activity (e.g., participating in organized volunteer activities) describes them. This too is a relatively subjective measure. Complementary work using other survey items could ask more concrete questions, for instance, about how often people volunteer, where and how much people donate, or how often they attend community events. Third, the measures that make up our civic engagement scale lean toward involvement in local communities. Based on work by Ammerman (2014) and Drescher (2016), this is where we would expect to see evidence of spirituality's influence in civic life most clearly. Whether this influence extends to extra-local civic engagement and/or political engagement remains an valuable question worthy of exploration.

Additional lines of research are important for the future. While there is illuminating ethnographic work on the cultivation of spirituality (e.g., Johnston 2016; Pagis 2019), there is little research outside Stanczak's (2006) that looks explicitly at the phenomenon of "engaged spirituality" in the American context, though some studies contain relevant insights and leads (e.g., Kucinkas 2019). A prospective research agenda focused explicitly on engaged spirituality would benefit from attention to at least three processes: the interplay between religion and

spirituality in people's lived experience, especially as sources of intentionality (Wuthnow 2020); the discourses, affordances, and contexts that draw a person's "sacred consciousness" (Ammerman 2014) toward civic engagement; and the social and organizational infrastructure that facilitates spiritually meaningful engagement, especially outside of religious contexts. We consider these issues to be especially important if spiritual engagement outside of organized religion is to be sustained rather than provisional and ad hoc (Drescher 2016). If the slow but steady contemporary trends away from organized religion continue apace, scholars of public life will be well served by better understanding the features of spirituality that enhance civic involvement.

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Table 1. Descriptive statistics

Variables	Mean	Survey question	Variable values
<i>Influence of Spirituality/Religion on Civic Engagement</i>			
No influence	0.54	Four categories constructed from answers to two questions: My spirituality (or religion) influences my civic engagement	1 = strongly or somewhat agree; 0 = neither agree nor disagree, somewhat or strongly disagree
Spiritual influence only	0.12		
Religious influence only	0.06		
Joint spiritual/religious influence	0.28		
<i>Sociodemographic Measures</i>			
Age	47.46	Age	Continuous variable, ages 18-93
Female	0.52	Gender	
White	0.63	Combined race/ethnicity	1 = White, non-Hispanic; 0 = all other racial categories
Income	9.54	Household income (net)	18-level categorical variable from less than \$5,000 to \$200,000 or more. 8 = \$35,000-39,999; 9 = \$40,000-49,999; 10 = \$50,000-59,999
Bachelors degree or more	0.33	Highest degree received	
<i>Religion/Spirituality Measures</i>			
Religious tradition		What is your present religion, if any?	
Conservative Protestant	0.16		Recode of 10 Protestant denominational groups based on Lehman & Sherkat (2018)
Moderate/Liberal Protestant	0.15		
Catholic	0.15		
Other	0.07		
Atheist/Agnostic	0.10		
Nothing in Particular	0.16		
Just Christian	0.20		
Religious/spiritual salience		To what extent do you consider yourself...	
Religious salience	0.49	...a religious person?	1 = very or moderately religious
Spiritual salience	0.63	...a spiritual person?	1 = very or moderately spiritual

Attendance	0.22	How often, if at all, do you attend church, synagogue, or other religious or spiritual services?	1 = weekly or more
Membership in spiritual or religious community	0.46	I am a member in a spiritual or religious community	1 = yes
<i>Civic Engagement Measures</i>		How well do the following statements describe you?	
Positive community change	1.56	Working with others, I make positive changes in my community.	4 level categorical variables: 0 = Not at all
Stay informed	1.18	I stay informed of events in my community	1 = Slightly
Attend community events	1.59	I make an effort to attend community events	2 = Moderately 3 = Very well
Know neighbors	1.56	I make an effort to know my neighbors	
Interact with strangers	1.44	I make an effort to interact with strangers	
Volunteer	1.20	I participate in organized volunteer opportunities	
Donate	1.63	I donate to causes or organizations that are important to me	
Civic Engagement Scale	10.13		21 level categorical variable; combination of 7 community engagement measures

Note: All means are weighted.

Table 2. Spiritual and religious influence on civic engagement

		Spiritual Influence on Civic Engagement		Total
		No	Yes	
Religious Influence on Civic Engagement	No	No Influence 54%	Spiritual Influence 12%	66%
	Yes	Religious Influence 6%	Joint Spiritual - Religious Influence 28%	34%
	Total	60%	40%	

Note: All percentages are weighted.

Table 3. Odds ratios for binary logit regressions predicting spiritual/religious influence on civic engagement

Variables	No Influence		Spiritual Influence		Religious Influence		Joint Spiritual- Religious Influence	
	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)
Age	0.984*** (0.00294)	0.989*** (0.00317)	1.016*** (0.00390)	1.016*** (0.00426)	0.998 (0.00591)	1.001 (0.00572)	1.012*** (0.00362)	1.004 (0.00403)
Female	0.959 (0.0914)	1.102 (0.115)	1.055 (0.141)	0.936 (0.131)	0.704* (0.135)	0.719* (0.138)	1.140 (0.124)	1.029 (0.126)
White non-Hispanic	0.902 (0.0942)	0.800** (0.0909)	0.944 (0.140)	0.935 (0.149)	0.955 (0.188)	0.942 (0.188)	1.186 (0.143)	1.396** (0.188)
Household income	1.011 (0.0120)	1.018 (0.0132)	1.000 (0.0163)	0.995 (0.0177)	0.977 (0.0245)	0.968 (0.0247)	0.994 (0.0134)	0.989 (0.0145)
Bachelor's degree	0.697*** (0.0710)	0.770** (0.0854)	1.269 (0.186)	1.169 (0.177)	1.003 (0.220)	0.898 (0.198)	1.363*** (0.160)	1.276* (0.163)
Religious affiliation (omitted: Conservative)								
Moderate/Liberal Protesta	1.401** (0.231)	1.080 (0.199)	1.392 (0.422)	1.294 (0.407)	1.169 (0.344)	1.239 (0.362)	0.618*** (0.101)	0.791 (0.147)
Catholic	1.765*** (0.299)	1.133 (0.214)	1.847** (0.557)	1.765* (0.561)	0.816 (0.243)	0.856 (0.261)	0.477*** (0.0845)	0.737 (0.151)
Other	1.649** (0.348)	1.036 (0.242)	2.650*** (0.875)	1.849* (0.621)	0.962 (0.405)	1.194 (0.523)	0.403*** (0.0871)	0.689 (0.162)
Atheist/Agnostic	6.389*** (1.274)	1.206 (0.280)	3.351*** (1.015)	2.681*** (0.889)	0.0883*** (0.0615)	0.180** (0.133)	0.0254*** (0.00996)	0.234*** (0.102)
Nothing in Particular	3.753*** (0.694)	0.963 (0.224)	3.662*** (1.046)	2.234** (0.700)	0.199*** (0.0900)	0.397* (0.194)	0.114*** (0.0311)	0.672 (0.233)
Just Christian	1.444** (0.229)	0.933 (0.168)	2.391*** (0.682)	1.691* (0.505)	1.015 (0.286)	1.270 (0.363)	0.500*** (0.0810)	0.821 (0.154)
Religious salience		0.713** (0.107)		0.249*** (0.0479)		1.672** (0.430)		3.133*** (0.649)
Spiritual salience		0.276*** (0.0365)		5.110*** (0.951)		0.347*** (0.0846)		3.597*** (0.729)
Weekly attendance		0.563*** (0.0809)		0.676* (0.146)		1.482* (0.330)		1.679*** (0.230)

Membership		0.457***		1.065		2.804***		1.928***
		(0.0568)		(0.195)		(0.683)		(0.286)
Constant	1.513*	9.115***	0.0268***	0.0243***	0.131***	0.0723***	0.420***	0.0374***
	(0.346)	(2.512)	(0.00960)	(0.0100)	(0.0498)	(0.0322)	(0.111)	(0.0132)
Observations	3,516	3,460	3,516	3,460	3,516	3,460	3,516	3,460
F-test model	15.98	30.37	4.52	10.48	3.02	4.56	13.79	29.41
P value of F-test model	0	0	0	0	0.0005	0	0	0

Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. Standard errors are in parentheses. Results are weighted.

Table 4. Odds ratios for ordered logit regression
predicting civic engagement scale

	(1)	(2)
Age	1.015*** (0.00240)	1.012*** (0.00250)
Female	1.303*** (0.104)	1.252*** (0.102)
White non-Hispanic	0.731*** (0.0643)	0.764*** (0.0701)
Household income	1.005 (0.0104)	1.003 (0.0106)
Bachelor's degree	1.623*** (0.134)	1.519*** (0.127)
Spiritual/religious influence on civic engagement (omitted: No influence)		
Spiritual Influence	2.787*** (0.311)	2.460*** (0.314)
Religious Influence	1.676*** (0.265)	1.251 (0.195)
Joint Spiritual-Religious Influence	4.370*** (0.406)	2.765*** (0.306)
Religious affiliation (omitted: Conservative Protestant)		
Moderate/Liberal Protestant		1.170 (0.163)
Catholic		1.550*** (0.235)
Other		1.349* (0.232)
Atheist/Agnostic		1.911*** (0.373)
Nothing in Particular		1.189 (0.221)
Just Christian		1.176 (0.173)
Religious salience		1.261** (0.142)
Spiritual salience		1.695*** (0.175)
Weekly attendance		1.636*** (0.172)
Membership		1.279** (0.131)

Observations	3,517	3,427
F-test model	45.94	29.02
P value of F-test model	0	0

Note: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$. Standard errors are in parentheses. Results are weighted.