

# **Reducing the Political Gender Gap through Religious Socialization**

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## **Project Purpose**

This project's goal is to better understand the relationship between religious socialization and the gender gap in political involvement. As of early 2013, Utah was 45<sup>th</sup> in the nation in regards to the percentage of women serving in political positions. I want to conduct a survey experiment to see if the political gender gap in Utah is exacerbated by religious socialization. This may be because female church members interpret the messages of their leaders as discouraging their political involvement in favor of family responsibilities. Understanding religious socialization's effect on political involvement can help us better know how to reduce this gender gap.

## **Project Importance**

Family socialization, institutional rules, and representation systems have all been widely analyzed to see how they contribute to the large gender gap in political participation (Lawless and Fox 2010). Much less research has been done on the effect of religious socialization on political involvement (Moore 2005).

My theory is that religious leaders are powerful socializers and influence their church members' level of political efficacy, thus affecting their political participation (Brown and Wolford 1994; Scheufele, Nisbet, and Brossard 2003). Political efficacy is defined by Craig and Maggiotto (1982): "Internal efficacy indicates individuals' self-perceptions that they are capable of understanding politics and competent enough to participate in political acts such as voting."

While some argue that religions should not directly influence their members politically, studies show that religious teachings and cultures have an indirect political influence (Campbell, Monson, and Green Forthcoming). Religious socialization may be playing a bigger role than has been acknowledged in the past.

## **Project Profile Body**

This project will be an extension of my capstone project, allowing me to gather a larger sample size and gain statistical significance. I plan to conduct a survey experiment of a diverse sample of BYU students by using the Psychology department's survey pool and by displaying fliers throughout campus that provide students with a survey link. The survey will include questions on standard demographic factors and family socialization. It will also measure political socialization, engagement, efficacy, and ambition.

The experimental portion will randomly expose participants to different quotes from LDS church leaders. The quotes include a control, a treatment regarding family responsibilities from *The Family: A Proclamation to the World*, another treatment quote from the First Presidency on the need for members to be involved politically, and a final treatment with a combination of the political and family responsibility messages.

My experimental study seeks to determine if women will increase in their political efficacy when they are exposed to specific cues about the importance of being involved politically. This increase in political efficacy could then potentially increase their political participation. I expect to find an increase in political efficacy among those who are introduced to a quote emphasizing the importance of political participation, especially among women.

### **Anticipated Academic Outcome**

I will submit my paper to the Journal of Mormon studies to be published. I will also submit it to one of the political journals that focuses on the relationship between religion and politics. Finally, I will present a poster based on this project to the Annual Mary Lou Fulton Mentored Research Conference in April 2014.

### **Qualifications**

I am qualified to pursue this project because I have taken classes on research design (PISc 200) and quantitative political methodology (PISc 328) which gave me the skills to perform and analyze this research. I also did a preliminary study of this subject for my capstone project (PISc 450). Since May 2013 I have worked with Dr. Preece as a research assistant on various research projects studying how to reduce the political gender gap. My work requires me to create, run, and analyze surveys. I also closely worked with Dr. Preece on a gender gap field experiment resulting in a forthcoming paper.

My mentor is qualified to pursue this project because her main research focus is gender and politics. She specifically studies what messages influence women's decision to get involved in politics.

### **Project Timetable**

1. Submit my IRB application (late January 2014)
2. Launch the survey (February 2014)
3. Analyze the data and write corresponding paper (March 2014)
4. Participate in Mary Lou Fulton Mentored Research Conference (April 2014)
5. Continue writing the paper and then submit for publication (April 2014)

### **Scholarly Sources**

- Brown, Ronald, and Monica L. Wolford. 1994. "Religious resources and African American political action." *National Political Science Review* 4: 30-48.
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- Lawless, J.L., and R.L. Fox. 2010. *It Still Takes A Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office*. Cambridge University Press.
- Moore, Robert G. 2005. "Religion, race, and gender differences in political ambition." *Politics & Gender* 1, no. 4: 577-96.
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