Consequences of Secular and Religious Civic Education Among Youth:
A Pilot and Research Design in Zambia

Elizabeth Sperber  Gwyneth McClendon  O’Brien Kaaba

April 17, 2021
Motivation

- More than a decade of democratic decline globally
- World-wide concerns about relatively low turnout and political engagement among younger voting age adults (18-35)
Motivation

- More than a decade of democratic decline globally
- World-wide concerns about relatively low turnout and political engagement among younger voting age adults (18-35)
- Resulting calls for more attention to civic education programs (c.f., Campbell 2019; Kaumba et al., 2020)
  - "Less [civically] educated citizens are prone . . . to acquiesce to specious arguments by political incumbents that law and order requires the sacrifice of individual liberties" (Bratton, Dulani and Nkomi, 2017:16).
- **Youth important**
  - Often recruited for political violence
  - Perhaps especially in urban areas
Motivation

Yet much debate remains about:

- whether civic education programs actually increase knowledge and political participation;
- and what additional content may be necessary to impact youth.
Motivation

Yet much debate remains about:

- whether civic education programs actually increase knowledge and political participation;
- and what additional content may be necessary to impact youth.

“Conventional Wisdom”

- Information + normative value of democracy will increase participation
  (e.g., Lipset 1959, Nie et al. 1996, Gill et al. 2020)

Secular/Psych Resources

- Youth lack experience/follow-through with the costs of participation
Motivation

Yet much debate remains about:

- whether civic education programs actually increase knowledge and political participation;
- and what additional content may be necessary to impact youth.

“Conventional Wisdom”

- Information + normative value of democracy will increase participation
  
  (e.g., Lipset 1959, Nie et al. 1996, Gill et al. 2020)

Secular/Psych Resources

- Youth lack experience/follow-through with the costs of participation
- Need also to increase self-efficacy, resilience
  
  (e.g., Holbein/Hillygus 2020, Berinsky et al. 2016, Finkel/Lim 2020)
Prevalent but Understudied Civic Education Programs
Contribution: Synthesize with research on religion

We bring three streams of literature together in this study, conceptually and empirically.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Conventional Wisdom”</th>
<th>Secular/Psych Resources</th>
<th>Religious Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▶ Information + normative value of democracy will increase participation (e.g., Lipset 1959, Nie et al. 1996, Gill et al. 2020)</td>
<td>▶ Youth lack experience/follow-through with the costs of participation</td>
<td>▶ Efficacy/resilience based on secular world may not suffice amidst backsliding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▶ Need also to increase self-efficacy, resilience (e.g., Holbein/Hillygus 2020, Berinsky et al. 2016, Finkel/Lim 2020)</td>
<td>▶ Stress moral obligation to act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>▶ Or communicate that change comes through acting in faith (e.g., Sosis 2000, Marshall 2009, McClendon/Riedl 2019)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sperber (DU)  Secular/Religious Civic Education  April 17, 2021
Study overview:

- **Research Question**: Do religiously- or secularly-motivated civic programs increase youth political knowledge and political participation more than “education-only” versions of the same program?
Study overview:

- **Research Question**: Do religiously- or secularly-motivated civic programs increase youth political knowledge and political participation more than “education-only” versions of the same program?

- **Case selection: Zambia**
  - Multi-party democracy w/ recent democratic backsliding
  - Large “youth bulge” and low youth turnout
  - Overwhelmingly Christian population, very religious
    - Prevalence of Christianity makes content uncontroversial
  - Strong relationships w/ community partners
    - Eager to learn from study; major providers of civic education

- **Only a first step**: Future studies should expand to other countries and include rural populations.
Community-Collaborative Approach
Pilot Study in early 2020 (pre-COVID)

- 291 Zambian youth recruited either from public markets or after church services in Lusaka

- Youth randomly assigned to one of two versions of an in-person 2 hour workshops

  1. Civic info plus “Christian obligation to the common good” message
  2. Condition 2: Civic info plus “power of faith” religious message.

- Surveys (pre, post, & follow up) examined attitudes towards political participation, vignette judgments, and donations to promote free and fair elections.

- Results: “Power of faith” message was particularly effective...
Found that Power of Faith Message Was More Mobilizing

Share Willing to Participate in Protest

- Power of Faith Treatment Group
- Obligation Treatment Group

Baseline | Endline

Sperber (DU) | Secular/Religious Civic Education | April 17, 2021
Found that Power of Faith Message Was More Mobilizing

- **Baseline**
- **Endline**

- ● Power of Faith Treatment Group
- ○ Obligation Treatment Group

Sperber (DU)  
Secular/Religious Civic Education  
April 17, 2021
New, larger study has broader focus & is Covid-safe

- Pivoted to online/phone-based methods, only

- Recruitment via **WhatsApp groups, Facebook pages, Zoom meetings**. (Happy to discuss constraints in Q&A)

- Sample: **1,200 youth** with access to WhatsApp, targeting urban and peri-urban areas in **Lusaka, Copperbelt, Central and Southern Provinces**

- **WhatsApp-based** civic education course delivered over two weeks with WhatsApp homework questions and incentives.

- Participants randomly assigned to one of **three primary arms:**
  1. Educational curriculum only
  2. Same curriculum + psychological motivational messages
  3. Same curriculum + religious motivational messages

*Content Examples*

---

Sperber (DU)  Secular/Religious Civic Education  April 17, 2021
Three theoretical approaches and conditions

**Track A:** Conventional wisdom
- Civic Information + Importance of Democracy
- Political Participation

**Track B:** Social psychology approach
- Civic Information + Importance of Democracy
- "Secular" Non-Cognitive Resources
- Political Participation

**Track C:** Religion scholars' approach
- Civic Information + Importance of Democracy
- Christian Motivations
- Political Participation

---

Sperber (DU)  Secular/Religious Civic Education  April 17, 2021
Study Design

Recruitment via CCZ National Network and Catholic National Network (WhatsApp Groups, FB Page posts and Zoom town halls)

Baseline Survey (Phone) N=~1200

Pure Control (Course Outline and Logistics) N=~400

Civics Information N=~400

Civics Information N=~400

Homework Questions

Civics Information

No motivational messages

Civics Information + Secular Motivational Messages

Civics Information + Religious Motivational Messages

Evaluation of interim outcomes

Randomization

Evaluation of outcomes and mechanisms

Final outcome evaluation

Endline Survey (Phone, conducted during week following course completion)

Follow-up Survey (Phone, conducted 3 weeks after course completion)

Participants asked if they voted (Multiple choice via WhatsApp, Aug 13th-16th, 2021)

Sperber (DU)

Secular/Religious Civic Education

April 17, 2021
Outcomes to Be Measured

- **Willingness** to take political actions (vote, post on social media, volunteer, protest, contact a politician)
- **Reported turnout and partisanship**
- **Sign-ups & show-ups** for volunteer opportunities
- **Actual social media** postings
- **Donations** to efforts to promote free and fair elections
- **Factual political knowledge** based on course content
- **Interim outcomes:**
  - political- and self-efficacy
  - normative value on participation/democracy
  - strength of attachment to youth/Christian identity
  - affect
  - risk aversion
Concluding Thoughts

- This study contributes **empirical evidence** about the influence of civic education programs on youth in contexts of democratic erosion,
  - in **collaboration** with organizations conducting such civic education programs already around a real election,
  - focusing in particular on the nature and influence of **religious** (Christian) civic education programs,
  - developing a way to study civic education programs through **mobile technology**.

- We thus advance ongoing debates about:
  - whether (and how) civic education programs influence behavior,
  - the drivers of youth political behavior, and
  - whether there is anything particular about religious efforts to mobilize citizens.
Thank you.
Consequences of Secular and Religious Civic Education Among Youth:
A Pilot and Research Design in Zambia

Elizabeth Sperber  Gwyneth McClendon  O’Brien Kaaba

April 17, 2021
In-Person Workshop Messages

► Obligation to the Common Good Message:

*Christians must make personal sacrifices for the greater good, just as Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice for us. We may be tempted to get up in the morning and say that participating in politics is too hard. . . . But Jesus knew the meaning of sacrifice. And for the sake of the morals that uphold our democratic system, we must be willing to do the same.*

► Power of Faith Message:

*Those with little faith decry the problems of the world. They stand to the side. But you must know that with strength of faith anything is possible. . . . And for the sake of the morals that uphold our democratic system, we must declare and show our faith and know that whatever we have declared, it has already been established.*
Figure 16: Mobile Phone Ownership

Source: Centre for Young Leaders in Africa 2018 Report.
Figure 15: Internet Usage

Source: Centre for Young Leaders in Africa 2018 Report.
Examples of Course Content: Logistics/Pure Control

Introduction to YouthKnow

Course Overview:

Lesson 1. Introduction to YouthKnow & quick homework!
Lesson 2. Democracy and the Zambian Political System & quick homework!
Lesson 3. Important Issues: the National Budget, Climate Change and Local Government & quick homework!
Lesson 4: Election Timeline and Opportunities to Participate & quick homework!

Course Rules

1. This course moves quickly! Read messages and complete homework assignments ASAP.
   - You have only 24 hours to answer the questions for each homework assignment.
2. Each assignment includes a few short questions.
   - Test your answers back within 24 hours.
3. If you have separate questions or comments for us, you can send a message to [INSERT PHONE #].
   - You should use reply to [insert course WhatsApp number] only with answers to the homeworks.
4. This is your personal course. Read and answer the questions on your own.

Remember: Your homework responses are confidential. Please answer honestly.
Examples of Course Content: Information

Zambia’s Political System

Zambia holds elections every five years for:
- President
- Members of Parliament
- Ward Councillors
- Since 2016, Mayors and Council Chairpersons have also been elected directly and for a term of five years.

What about Provincial governments?
- Officials in Provincial governments are not elected, but are appointed (assigned) by the President.

Who oversees elections?
The Zambian Electoral Commission (ZEC)
- ZEC is responsible for supervising the registration of voters; conducting all public elections; and reviewing boundaries of constituencies, wards and polling districts. ZEC also decides which individuals or groups can legally observe or monitor elections.
- Who runs ZEC? The President appoints up to four Commissioners and a Chairperson to run ZEC. Parliament must ratify them.
- The challenge for ZEC: It is supposed to be “independent” and ignore all political pressures so it can make electoral processes transparent and accountable to the public.

Democracy in Zambia

Democracy is often defined as “government of the people, by the people and for the people.”
This means that ordinary people should have a say about who is in government and what that government does. Democratic governments are supposed to serve the people’s interests.
Zambia operates a representative democracy, which means representatives are chosen by the people through elections.

Getting involved:
In addition to voting, you can be a more active citizen by attending community meetings, learning about political leaders and policies, contacting your representatives with questions or comments, or volunteering with a civil society organization, such as:
- Christian Churches Monitoring Group (CCMG): Comprised of Church Mother Bodies, CCMG mobilizes thousands of volunteers to observe elections and promote voter education. Their member organizations, the Council of Churches in Zambia (CCZ) and Caritas-Zambia, also work on many other social programs. http://www.ccmgzambia.org/ & Facebook
- Green Living Movement - Zambia: fighting climate change through environmental education, advocacy and more. http://www.glmglobal.org/contact/
- Women for Change (WfC) - Zambian NGO supporting women and girls’ and fighting poverty. http://www.wfc.org.zm/contact & Facebook
- Many international NGOs recruit through the UN: https://www.unv.org/

Zambia’s Score on V-Dem’s Electoral Democracy Index 1985-2020

International scholars measure democracy over time. As illustrated above, Zambia’s democracy “score” increased in 1991 but decreased in more recent years. (Data: The Varieties of Democracy Project)
Examples of Course Content: Secular Messages

Remember: You have within you the capacity to be a strong citizen and to bring positive change to the world.

All you need to do is believe in yourself: **When you believe in yourself, what seemed impossible yesterday will become possible.**

So, take time each day to remind yourself:

- I am whole just as I am.
- I am worthy.
- I respect myself and the potential that resides within me.
- I believe I can make a positive impact in my life and the lives of those around me.
Examples of Course Content: Secular Messages

Remember: You have within you the capacity to be a strong citizen and to bring positive change to the world.

All you need to do is believe in yourself. When you believe in yourself, what seemed impossible yesterday will become possible.

Motivation

We all face obstacles. We get things wrong. We make mistakes. But we can also decide not to give up.

We may be tempted to get up in the morning and say that participating in politics is too hard. It takes time and commitment to be politically engaged — resources that we may not feel we have as we try to make ends meet and get through the struggles of daily life.

But challenges don’t have to be the end of the story!

Motivation

So, take time each day to remind yourself:

- I am whole just as I am.
- I am worthy.
- I respect myself and the potential that resides within me.
- I believe I can make a positive impact in my life and the lives of those around me.

You can decide to keep working towards your goals, even when it’s hard.

To overcome challenges, we often start by (1) examining the obstacle in our way, (2) developing a plan about how to overcome obstacles, and then (3) we take one small step at a time until we have surmounted the obstacle!

The more we practice these skills, the easier they become. But this is certain: With hard work and determination, you can surmount any challenge.
Examples of Course Content: Religious Messages

Motivation

Our faith invites the strength of Jesus to work through us: As Jesus told the apostles, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you" (Luke 17:6).

We decree and declare that by the word of God the strength of Jesus is coming upon us. In the name of Jesus, we are strong.

Those with little faith decry the problems of the world. They stand to the side.

But you must know that with strength of faith anything is possible (John 15).

"If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." (John 15:7)

If we are one with God, whatever we want, we can achieve.
Examples of Course Content: Religious Messages

**Motivation**

Our faith invites the strength of Jesus to work through us: As Jesus told the apostles, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you" (Luke 17:6).

We decree and declare that by the word of God the strength of Jesus is coming upon us. In the name of Jesus, we are strong.

Those with little faith decry the problems of the world. They stand to the side.

But you must know that with strength of faith anything is possible (John 15).

"If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." (John 15:7)

If we are one with God, whatever we want, we can achieve.

Life is hard. But faith can change the world (Mark 11:23).

We may be tempted to get up in the morning and say that participating in politics is too hard. It takes time and commitment to be politically engaged — resources that we may not feel we have as we try to make ends meet and get through the struggles of daily life.

But these are the ways of thinking of people of little faith!

We must declare our faith and know that whatever we have declared, it has already been established (Acts 2:23, Romans 8:28).

The prospect of the righteous is joy. If you serve God, whatever difficulties you’ll be facing will eventually fade away and you will succeed (Proverbs 10:28-32).

- Do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised (Hebrews 10:35-39).
Found that Power of Faith Message Was More Mobilizing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bad Christian</th>
<th>Bad Citizen</th>
<th>Donated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Power of Faith Message</td>
<td>0.064*</td>
<td>0.084**</td>
<td>0.138*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.035)</td>
<td>(0.034)</td>
<td>(0.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean (Obligation)</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Effects on evaluations of a non-voter described in a vignette (columns 1 and 2) and on donating to efforts promoting free and fair elections (column 3); ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.10$; SEs clustered by workshop session.
Concluding Thoughts

Zambia at a crossroads: Will citizens defend democracy?

Sperber (DU)  Secular/Religious Civic Education  April 17, 2021