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**ESTIMATING THE EFFECT OF CHRISTIAN MESSAGES ON CIVIC  
ENGAGEMENT: EVIDENCE FROM A COMMUNITY-  
COLLABORATIVE STUDY IN ZAMBIA**

Elizabeth Sperber, Gwyneth McClendon, and O'Brien Kaaba

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The Kellogg Institute for International Studies  
University of Notre Dame  
130 Hesburgh Center for International Studies  
Notre Dame, IN 46556-5677  
Phone: 574/631-6580  
Web: [kellogg.nd.edu](http://kellogg.nd.edu)

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**Contacts:** Elizabeth Rankin, Editorial Manager  
[erankin3@nd.edu](mailto:erankin3@nd.edu)

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**Elizabeth Sperber** (PhD/MA, Columbia University) is an assistant professor of political science at the University of Denver. She is currently completing a book manuscript that offers new theory and evidence to explain why Pentecostal Christianity has emerged as a politically salient identity in some sub-Saharan African states since the 1990s, but not others. In 2020, Sperber was a visiting fellow at the Kellogg Institute for International Studies at the University of Notre Dame. This study also received support from the Notre Dame's Global Research on Religion Initiative. Sperber's research has been published in journals such as *Politics and Religion*, *American Journal of Public Health*, *International Journal of Social Welfare* and *Child and Youth Services Review*.

**Gwyneth McClendon** (PhD/MA, Princeton University) is associate professor in the Wilf Family Department of Politics at New York University. She is the author of two award-winning books, *Envy in Politics* (Princeton University Press, 2018) and *From Pews to Politics: Religious Sermons and Political Participation in Africa* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), coauthored with Rachel Beatty Riedl. McClendon has also published numerous scholarly articles on religion and politics, political participation, identity, and political psychology in academic journals, including the *American Journal of Political Science*, the *Journal of Politics*, *African Affairs*, the *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, and *Comparative Political Studies*.

**O'Brien Kaaba** (LLM, University of Zambia; LLD, University of South Africa) is a lecturer in the School of Law at the University of Zambia and a senior research fellow at the Southern African Institute for Policy and Research (SAIPAR). He formerly served in Zambia as elections manager for the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), political specialist for the US Department of State at the American Embassy in Lusaka, and as a human rights and rule of law advisor for the Germany Development Cooperation (GIZ). O'Brien is co-editor of *Democracy and Electoral Politics in Zambia* (Brill, 2020).

## **ABSTRACT**

A significant literature suggests that religious conviction can drive political participation, perhaps because religious people internalize a moral obligation to act toward the common good and/or because religious conviction gives people a sense that their actions will make a difference. This paper presents findings from a community-collaborative pilot study in Zambia that examines these ideas. Zambia is an overwhelmingly Christian state experiencing dramatic democratic backsliding. Zambian churches are among the major providers of civic engagement education and programming. Together with our community partners, we randomly assigned Zambian youth (aged 18-35) volunteers into one-time civic engagement workshops. Identical basic civic educational material was presented in each workshop. Yet, we ended this curriculum with two different sets of pre-recorded Christian motivational messages: In 50% of the workshops, these messages emphasized a religious obligation to sacrifice for the common good. In the other 50%, the messages emphasized the power of faith to make change in the world. We found that the latter message (emphasizing the power of faith) moved workshop participants to be more willing to participate in peaceful protest, to disavow political violence, and to critically evaluate other people who choose not to participate in electoral politics. By contrast, the message focused on sacrifice for the common good did not affect political participation relative to baseline. We discuss how the study advances research on religion and political participation as well as knowledge about Christian civic education programs, which are prevalent but understudied throughout.

## **RESUMEN**

Un importante conjunto de estudios sugiere que la convicción religiosa puede guiar la participación política, quizás porque la gente religiosa internaliza una obligación moral de actuar a favor del bien común y/o porque la convicción religiosa le da a la gente la sensación de que sus acciones pueden hacer una diferencia. Este artículo presenta los hallazgos de un estudio piloto colaborativo comunitario en Zambia que examina estas ideas. Zambia es un Estado abrumadoramente cristiano que está experimentando un marcado proceso de retroceso democrático. Las iglesias zambianas se encuentran entre las más importantes proveedoras de educación y planificación para el compromiso cívico. Junto con nuestros socios comunitarios asignamos aleatoriamente a jóvenes voluntarios zambianos de entre 18 y 35 años a talleres de compromiso cívico de un encuentro. En cada taller se presentó material educativo idéntico. Pero completamos este curriculum con dos conjuntos diferentes de mensajes motivacionales cristianos pre-grabados. En 50% de los talleres los mensajes enfatizaban la obligación religiosa de sacrificarse por el bien común. En el otro 50% los mensajes enfatizaban el poder de la fe para cambiar el mundo. Encontramos que este último mensaje (el que enfatiza el poder de la fe) hizo que los participante en los talleres estén más dispuestos a intervenir en protestas pacíficas, rechazarán más la violencia política y evaluarán más críticamente a la gente que elige no participar de la política electoral. En contraste, el mensaje que pone el foco en sacrificarse por el bien común cambió la tendencia a participar en política en relación con la línea de base. Discutimos cómo este estudio contribuye a la investigación sobre la religión y a participación política así como el conocimiento acerca de los programas cristianos de educación cívica, que han sido poco estudiados a pesar de ser muy numerosos.

## Introduction

For over a decade, democratic institutions have suffered gradual yet serious blows around the world (Freedom House [2020](#)). Unlike overt military coups, democracy is increasingly threatened by elected leaders' gradual erosion of democratic institutions from within (Bermeo [2016](#)). Especially in unconsolidated democracies, citizens who prefer democracy to autocracy often nevertheless lack the civic knowledge or motivation to participate in electoral politics or in efforts to resist erosion of democratic institutions (Bratton, Dulani, and Nkomo [2017](#), 15-16). These challenges are particularly acute among young voting age citizens (ages 18-35) in sub-Saharan Africa, where lingering political gerontocracies have in many places disenchanted the region's outsized youth population, or "youth bulge" (Adebayo [2018](#); YouthMap [2014](#); Resnick and Casale [2011](#)). Research with South African youth, for example, finds that even many well-educated youth perceived electoral politics as the terrain of older, corrupt elites and "deliberately disengaged" from electoral participation (Adebayo [2018](#); Berinsky et al. [2016](#)). Both because of their numbers and their policy priorities, the disengagement of youth portends serious consequences for the region's political future. Hence, many scholars, policymakers and activists agree that the future of democracy "depend[s] critically" on increasing younger citizens' "active political engagement" – a task that requires civil society to educate and mobilize youth voters (Bratton, Dulani, and Nkomo [2017](#), 15-16).

Although their role is understudied,<sup>1</sup> the activities of faith-based organizations (FBOs) are one potential answer to questions about the drivers of youth participation in peaceful political action. African FBOs increasingly seek to foster peaceful political participation by youth. In many African states, these FBOs served as "handmaidens" of democratization in the late 1980s and 1990s (Toft, Philpott, and Shah [2011](#); Gifford [1995](#)) and now aim to combat democratic backsliding (Smidt [2018](#)). The Catholic Church and its NGO, Caritas, currently work with Protestant coalitions in many African states to educate citizens about voting rights, host candidate forums, encourage joining with others to hold government accountable, and train nonpartisan election observers.<sup>2</sup> The growing interest of FBOs

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<sup>1</sup>Bryan, Choi, and Karlan ([2018](#)) used experiments to better understand the influence of religious programming on economic outcomes, such as income, entrepreneurship, and agricultural productivity but did not look at educational programs or political outcomes.

<sup>2</sup>Recent examples are observed in the [Congo](#) and [Zambia](#).

in mobilizing youth into peaceful political engagement is particularly consequential since religious activities are by far the most common way that African youth engage with their communities (c.f., YouthMap [2014](#), 27).

Among FBOs, Christian organizations are particularly significant in sub-Saharan Africa, where Christianity has grown rapidly in recent decades. Between 1950 and 2010, for instance, the overall share of sub-Saharan Africans identifying as Christian *more than doubled*, with Christians accounting for roughly 26% of all sub-Saharan Africans in 1950 and 57% in 2010 (Pew Research Center [2010](#)). During the same period, the region's share of Muslims grew from approximately 22% to 29% (ibid.). Today, most sub-Saharan states are majority Christian. And in many of these states, Christian organizations use pastoral letters, sermons, educational workshops, and opportunities for volunteerism to educate parishioners about current events, the core tenets of democracy, and the ways in which citizens can make a difference.

Yet, along with the growth of Christianity has come the diversification of Christian messages relevant to political action. Alongside the older Catholic and mainline Protestant Churches, which tend to emphasize congregants' moral obligation to serve the public good, Pentecostal and Charismatic leaders commonly motivate their growing ranks by stressing that strong faith will enable individuals to make a difference (McClendon and Riedl 2019). Research suggests that random exposure to these messages differently impacts individuals' political attitudes and behaviors (ibid.). Yet, we know little about how these motivational messages may affect the influence of civic education programs on the peaceful political participation of youth.<sup>3</sup>

This paper presents results of the first study to examine how Christian messages influence the impact of church-based programs to promote peaceful youth political participation. We conducted the study in Zambia, an overwhelmingly Christian Southern African state where churches routinely collaborate to provide these kinds of programs in election years. We worked closely in a *non*-election year with Caritas-Zambia (the NGO affiliated with the

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<sup>3</sup>Specific activities associated with peaceful political participation include providing or pursuing education about democratic institutions, candidates, or policy issues; registering to vote; voting; joining with others to raise an issue (e.g., in a rally or protest); contacting political leaders; and donating money or time to political causes.

Zambian Council of Catholic Bishops), the Council of Churches in Zambia (the umbrella body for Protestant churches affiliated with the World Council of Churches), and Pentecostal churches to implement workshops that disseminated information from the existing civic education curriculum concerning the electoral process and citizens' rights and duties. We then varied pre-recorded religious motivational messages that were played at the end of each workshop. These messages were drawn from partner organizations' preaching and focused either on a moral obligation to serve the common good, or the power of faith to make change. The study included a gender-balanced sample of roughly 300 Zambian youth (aged 18-35). Using three rounds of surveys and a behavioral measure, we evaluated participants' willingness to engage in various forms of political action, as well as their judgments of others' political actions and their evaluations of the use of political violence.

We found that a message focused on the power of faith moved workshop participants to be more willing to participate in peaceful protest, to disavow political violence, and to critically evaluate other people who chose not to participate in electoral politics. By contrast, a message focused on moral obligation to others did not move political participation relative to baseline. This finding runs counter to some theories of religious sacrifice as a mechanism for pro-social behavior.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, drawing on literature that reveals a gender gap in political participation (men are more likely to participate than women), and in religious participation (women are more likely to participate than men), we also examined whether religious messages systematically influenced women's political participation more than men's. Ultimately, we found no evidence of systematic variation in the impact of either message by gender.

Below, we situate the study in literatures on religious content and political participation and present the hypotheses guiding our study. We then offer some contextual details, including about Africa's "youth bulge," the challenge of youth disengagement, and the attempt by major FBOs to promote youth political participation. These sections are followed by discussion of case selection and the Zambian context, an overview of study methods and data, and presentation of results. We conclude with discussion of the real-world implications of our

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<sup>4</sup>We discuss this literature below. For a review, see Oviedo (2016).

findings and prospects for future research on faith-based efforts to promote youth political participation in sub-Saharan Africa.

## 1 Religious Messages and Peaceful Political Participation

A significant literature suggests that religion affects political participation. In many parts of the world, religious people tend to be more politically active than non-religious people.<sup>5</sup> In Sub-Saharan Africa, specifically, there is a robust observational connection between religious and civic engagement (Dowd and Sarkissian [2017](#)). This association could be due to many factors. Participation in a religious organization can build skills that translate into political participation (Campbell [2004](#)); it can cultivate strong attachment to politically salient identity groups (McCauley [2017](#); McCauley and Posner [2015](#)); it can also embed individuals in tight social networks that facilitate mobilization (Lewis, MacGregor, and Putnam [2013](#)); and particular religious practices may involve patron-client relationships (McCauley [2013](#)), which pressure or entice individuals to participate politically.<sup>6</sup>

There is also reason to believe that the *content* of religious ideas can motivate political participation. One strand of research on religion argues that most religions impart the idea that individuals have moral obligations to contribute to the common good, even when doing so involves personal sacrifices. Norenzayan ([2013](#)) argued that religions that impart the idea of a moral obligation to others and imply that omnipotent “big gods” monitor prosocial behavior are uniquely capable of facilitating large-scale cooperation and collective action. Social psychologists have further documented that attitudes backed by such moral convictions have a larger influence on behavior than deeply held but non-religious attitudes (Skitka, Bauman, and Sargis [2005](#)). Similarly, studies of religious communities find that people adhere more durably to communal obligations framed as a sacred forms of sacrifice (Sosis [2000](#)). And, while it may seem counterintuitive that messages encouraging sacrifice would ever persuade rational individuals, Bénabou and Tirole ([2011](#)) stress that religious

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<sup>5</sup>For a review of this literature, see Neiheisel ([2019](#)).

<sup>6</sup>For a review of this literature in U.S. and Latin American contexts, see Audette, Brockway, and Castro Cornejo ([2020](#)). Also see Djupe and Gilbert ([2008](#)) on the importance of small group participation in the U.S. and Smith ([2017](#)) on political information sharing in Brazilian churches.

individuals often invest time and energy in sacrifice as a way to signal virtue to themselves. Indeed, action that involves sacrifice for others can “bind” people to moral communities (Bulbulia [2004](#); Graham and Haidt [2010](#)), and impart a strong sense of belonging. Religious ideas can thus encourage individuals to overcome barriers to collective action by altering perceptions of costs and benefits associated with joining in (e.g., “belonging”).

Another strand of research on religion argues that religious communication can influence political participation by altering individuals’ expectations that their actions will succeed. In Kenya, McClendon and Riedl ([2019](#)) analyzed the text of Christian sermons and found that Pentecostal church sermons routinely deliver messages that stress the power of faith to lead to successful social and political action. Moreover, exposure to this “power of faith” message increased political participation among *both* Pentecostals and other types of Christians. In other words, “power of faith” messages were able to increase political participation among many different types of religious adherents. These findings accord with research that finds self-efficacy (not necessarily religiously motivated) is a critical ingredient in individuals’ decisions to participate in collective action (Lieberman and Zhou [2020](#); Niemi, Craig, and Mattei [1991](#)). These findings are also consistent with research documenting that if people believe that their own individual actions can make a difference, they are less deterred by the costs of joining with others (Croke et al. [2016](#)). Religious ideas may therefore increase an individual’s belief that they can make a difference and thus increase their likelihood of political participation.

Will the resulting political participation be peaceful? A vast literature has established that there is no single role that religion tends to play vis-à-vis political violence or peace.<sup>7</sup> Religious communication has been used historically both to foment and to quell political violence. Nevertheless, there are reasons to suppose that exposure to a “power of faith” message might inspire particularly peaceful political participation. This message stresses that action with the backing of faith is likely to succeed. With the understanding that faith will bolster even mundane action with divine assistance, listeners to the “power of faith” message should be more likely to view their aims as achievable without use of violence.

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<sup>7</sup>See, for instance, Philpott ([2007](#)) and Wald, Silverman, and Fridy ([2005](#)) for reviews.

By implication, they should be less likely to condone political violence or to participate in violence. By contrast, we see no analogous logic inherent in the moral obligation to the common good message, which we expect to promote participation in collective action whether it is peaceful or not. For instance, many mainline Protestant and some Catholic leaders actively supported armed resistance to Apartheid despite the anti-apartheid movement's use of violent means. Accordingly, we expect that individuals exposed to the power of faith message will have less support for political violence than those exposed to the message stressing a moral obligation to act for the common good.<sup>8</sup>

These two possibilities—that religion might motivate political action by cultivating prosociality, and that religion might motivate peaceful political action by giving people confidence in the power of faith—are not necessarily at odds with one another. Religious ideas could influence political participation, peaceful or not, in both of these ways. However, from a theoretical standpoint, untangling these two possible connections between religion and political participation can help us better understand *how* religion operates in politics. In this sense, this research represents an examination of the potential effects of “multivocality” (Stepan 2000) within African Christianity today. Further, understanding whether and to what extent both messages mobilize participation is useful for accounting for observational variation in levels of participation across different religious organizations and their subgroups (Sperber and Hern 2018). Additionally, from a practical standpoint, our partner organizations want to understand whether and to what extent these different Christian messages influence young adults' internalization of civic engagement training. We therefore examine the effect of each religious message on peaceful political participation in contexts that mimic the conditions in which major Christian civic organizations routinely work.

Finally, gender identity powerfully shapes individual experiences in both politics and religion. Many countries around the world exhibit a gender gap in various forms of political participation, with women participating at lower rates than men. Empirically, men are significantly over represented among public office holders around the world. In most sub-Saharan African states, men consistently report greater willingness than women to discuss

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<sup>8</sup>We solicit only people's *attitudes* toward political violence and offer no opportunities to participate in political violence.

politics, join with others to address problems, attend community meetings, and contact their leaders (Logan and Bratton 2006; Hern 2018). These findings persist even when scholars control for other predictors of participation, such as education, poverty, urbanity, group membership, and efficacy, which suggests that gendered socialization tends to exert a strong independent dampening effect on women’s political participation in the region (Hern 2018, 295). The gender gap in political participation also appears to be impacted by age, as it is most extreme among relatively *young* women in the region (Lekalake and Gyimah-Boadi 2016). In states where policies or demographic conditions differ dramatically from the regional norm, patterns of women’s participation deviate from this pattern (Lekalake and Gyimah-Boadi 2016), but in many countries (including Zambia, where this study took place) the gender gap in political participation among the young is stark. At the same time, we know that women around the world also tend to be highly religious (Pew Research Center 2016, 54), sometimes more religious than men.<sup>9</sup> Scholars hypothesize that factors such as risk aversion, workforce participation, and other aspects of gendered socialization may drive women’s greater religiosity.<sup>10</sup> But, whatever the drivers of women’s high level of religiosity, these patterns suggest women may be very receptive to authoritative religious appeals.

Accordingly, we consider the possibility that an explicitly Christian intervention promoting peaceful political participation may impact women more than men in our sample. This expectation derives from both research on religiosity, which suggests women may be very receptive to religious appeals, as well as from research on the gender gap in political participation, which reveals that in most sub-Saharan contexts, young women are likely to start with lower levels of political participation than their male peers, which gives them more room to be influenced by the intervention. In Section 3.4, below, we show that these patterns apply to the Zambian context specifically.

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<sup>9</sup>This gender gap in religiosity is particularly stark within Christianity. Researchers attribute this to the more prominent public rituals prescribed for men in some non-Christian religions (ibid., Trzebiatowska and Bruce 2012).

<sup>10</sup>For a review of the literature, see Pew Research Center 2016, 54-67.

## 2 Hypotheses

Bringing together insights from the literature on religion and politics, we investigated the following hypotheses:

- First, we hypothesized that both types of religious message (one underscoring a moral obligation to the common good, the other emphasizing the power of faith to make change) will increase youth willingness to participate in politics relative to baseline.
- Second, because previous research has argued and found that religious messages emphasizing the power of faith are particularly effective at motivating individual willingness to take political action (McClendon and Riedl [2019](#); Sperber and Hern [2018](#)), we hypothesized that the message emphasizing the power of faith would increase youth willingness to participate in politics relative to baseline *more than* the message underscoring moral obligation to the common good.
- Third, because the power of faith message suggests that change can be achieved by faith alone, we hypothesized that listeners might be less likely to view the use of violence as necessary when engaging in politics as compared to those exposed to the alternate message.<sup>11</sup>
- Finally, in light of documented gender gaps in both political participation and religiosity (including in Zambia, where we worked) we hypothesized that both messages would affect women’s willingness to participate in politics more than men’s. We were agnostic on whether gender would affect treatments’ impact on attitudes towards violence. (This hypothesis would not extend to exceptional states, like Malawi, where political participation tends not to be gendered.)

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<sup>11</sup>Neither treatment implied that suffering a violent fate is necessary to promote the public good through civic engagement.

### 3 Context

#### 3.1 Africa’s youth bulge: Challenges and opportunities

Of all world regions, sub-Saharan Africa has the largest share of youth, with individuals under the age of twenty-five accounting for 63% of all sub-Saharan Africans (United Nations [2018](#)). Moreover, the UN Population Division projects a yawning gap between the growth of African youth in contrast to all other world regions: by 2040, sub-Saharan Africa is expected to have “almost three times the youth of the United States and Europe combined” (Goldstone [2019](#)).<sup>12</sup> Some view this as a crisis in the making given the dearth of employment opportunities, increasing urbanization, and perceived political exclusion or disengagement by youth in many sub-Saharan contexts. Zambia (where we conducted research) has one of the most youth-skewed and fastest growing populations in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as rapid rates of urbanization (*ibid.*).

This pattern of urbanizations matters because it is in urban areas that politicians mobilize youth as foot soldiers in violent partisan attacks, while simultaneously denying youth opportunities for constructive participation in democratic politics. Hence, Olaiya ([2014](#), 7) notes that many political parties in the region “lack clear-cut process[es] of renewal to accommodate the youth members and take them through a process of political socialization that brings value-added opportunities” to governance. Indeed, in contrast to older literature that interpreted low levels of youth voting as “apathy,” recent research underscores youth disenchantment with and disconnection from formal political participation. In a stratified random sample of 200 students at the University of Cape Town (UCT), for example, nearly 50% reported that they didn’t vote in recent elections “because they believed their votes would not count, that the machinery was already in place for rigging the election, and that it did not matter whether or not they voted” (Adebayo [2018](#), 154). Similarly, research by Berinsky et al. ([2016](#)) found that many South African youth were highly informed about politics, passionate about political issues, and engaged with community organizations, such as churches, but nevertheless “deliberately disengaged” from explicitly political behavior (e.g.,

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<sup>12</sup>Here, youth is defined to include ages 15–24; projections are from UN Population Division (2018).

voting). Revealingly, the authors' field experiment also found that *certain* motivational messages had "profound" effects on youth's willingness to register to vote. This suggests that the right motivational messages can nudge skeptical youth towards political participation.

### 3.2 Faith-based programming

Importantly, however, existing research has considered only secular (i.e., not explicitly faith-related) messages to encourage youth political participation. To our knowledge, no study has measured the impact of faith-related programs on political participation or studied the duration of these programs' effects on any populations. Indeed, for decades, Western political scientists and policy scholars neglected spiritual worldviews as potential influences on political behavior (Grzymala-Busse [2012](#); Gill [2001](#)). The gap has been particularly acute in the study of African politics, with political scientists tending to ignore the political influence of spiritual worldviews until recently.

As noted above, this dearth of research on faith-based civic education is surprising given the well-noted role that religious institutions play in civic and national political life throughout the developing world (Smith [2019](#); McClendon and Riedl [2019](#); Sperber and Hern [2018](#); McCauley [2017](#); Freston [2004](#)). Of particular relevance is the prominent role that faith-based organizations play in efforts to educate, mobilize and sustain peaceful civic engagement. These efforts are frequently led by the Catholic Church, which is the largest single denomination in sub-Saharan Africa, and its NGO, Caritas.

The churches are also increasingly turning their attention towards African youth. The Catholic Church in Africa, for instance, has begun to implement youth ministries, which support the "holistic development and dignity" of youth by sub-regional African Catholic bodies, such as the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC). Additionally, in 2019, Catholic leaders representing 40 African national and regional bodies of Catholic bishops met for a continent-wide symposium in which the bishops discussed assigning a Catholic bishop to "oversee youth outreach at a continental level" (Dachs [2019](#)). Similarly, the World Council of Churches (WCC), the largest umbrella body of mainline Protestant and Evangelical churches, identifies "youth engagement" as one of its four priority areas in

global programming. Youth engagement is also a programmatic priority for the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), which runs a civic education “intervention” called “Africa: My home, my future” to inspire constructive youth participation in political life.

In practice, the Catholic and mainline Protestant churches often embrace similar messages and work collaboratively on civic issues. In some instances, Evangelical and Pentecostal associations support these efforts. This is the case in Zambia, where we worked collaboratively with all major religious bodies to design and implement research on youth civic engagement.

### 3.3 Case Selection and Zambian Context

Zambia is an analytically appropriate site for this study for several reasons. First, it exemplifies democratic backsliding after a period of relatively stable multiparty competition. Second, it has a significant “youth bulge,” high youth unemployment, and low youth turnout, even while urban youth have reportedly been mobilized as partisan “cardres” in election-related violence. Third, faith-based programming is central to civic education and political mobilization in Zambia, where major FBO’s (including our partner organizations) provide civic education opportunities in all of Zambia’s provinces. Fourth, Zambians are highly religious and overwhelmingly Christian. Ninety-three percent of Zambians reported that religion is “very important” in their lives, and the vast majority report attending church frequently. In addition, in the 2011-2013 Afrobarometer in Zambia, only about 1% of respondents in that survey reported belonging to a religion other than Christianity. This meant that we could conduct our experiment without provoking inter-religious tension present in some states with significant Muslim populations. Additionally, the ubiquity of Christian messages in Zambian public life (from politicians’ speeches to the logos on minibusses), we could be sure that participants are routinely exposed to the content of different Christian denominations. As a result, the treatment messages in our study did not risk exposing study participants to content perceived as foreign or jarring.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, Zambia is a place where there is local demand for this research: local Zambian governments, churches, and community groups

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<sup>13</sup>The content was in fact derived from local religious institutions’ preaching and was approved by our partner organizations.

prioritize increasing peaceful youth participation in politics. Local civil society leaders, including our partner organizations, wanted to understand the impact of their intervention approaches. Zambia was also a feasible case given our prior research, strong local connections, and Zambia’s election schedule.

Below, we detail the history of Zambia’s democratic institutions, its religious landscape, and the relationship between identity and political participation, with a focus on how religion and political participation relate to ethnicity, partisanship, age, and gender.

### **History of democratic institutions**

After gaining independence from Great Britain in 1964, Zambians freely elected Kenneth Kaunda as Zambia’s first President. From 1972 to 1991, Kaunda ruled Zambia as a single party state. By the early 1990s, however, economic crisis spurred demands for democratization by Zambian civil society – including churches. In 1991, Zambia held its first competitive multiparty elections in over a generation. This shift manifested in V-Dem’s Electoral Democracy Index,<sup>14</sup> as Zambia’s rating more than doubled from 0.2 to 0.48 between 1989 to 1992. Over the next twenty years, Zambian political institutions gradually achieved an all-time high rating of 0.54 in 2012. To be clear, Zambia’s democracy was unconsolidated and faced many challenges. Nevertheless, Zambia held regular, largely peaceful elections in which incumbents generally permitted electoral competition and the free exercise of the vote.

Since 2012, however, incumbents have increasingly embraced autocratic policy and practice, such as the repeated jailing of opposition leaders and electoral violence surrounding the 2016 elections (Goldring and Wahman 2016). Accordingly, the Electoral Democracy Index shows Zambia’s score falling from 0.54 to 0.37 between 2012 and 2019. Measures of civil society participation, civil liberties, and political rights mirrored this dramatic decline, with V-Dem’s *Liberal Democracy Index* falling by nearly 50% between 2012–2019. Decline in voter turnout has been particularly troubling: Whereas turnout averaged around 73% between 1996 and 2011, it has subsequently lingered around 55%.<sup>15</sup> Simultaneously, Zambia’s

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<sup>14</sup>The index ranges from 0 (low) to 1 (high).

<sup>15</sup>Authors’ calculations using data from the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) at <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/country-view/311/40>

notable “youth bulge,” urbanization, unemployment, and economic inequality have risen. Although comprehensive data on youth turnout is scarce, surveys indicate that youth – and especially young women – vote at significantly lower rates than older Zambians. Hence, civic organizations view the education and mobilization of young, pro-democracy voters as critical to Zambia’s political future.

### **Religious demography and mobilization**

Zambia mirrors regional demographic trends: the Catholic Church is the largest single denomination and accounts for just under 30% of Zambians. Other Zambian Christians belong to mainline Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal, African Independent or Seventh Day Adventist churches. As noted above, Zambia’s major churches have also played “leading” historical roles in the promotion of democracy and civic engagement, including Zambia’s transition to multipartism (Toft, Philpott, and Shah [2011](#)). In more recent decades, the Catholic and mainline Protestant churches, especially, have continued to promote accountable democratic governance (Cheyeka [2016](#); Sperber [2017](#)). Yet, the composition and role of religion in Zambian politics has also become more complex since 1991. The rapid, widespread growth of (mostly locally founded) Pentecostal churches and the Charismatic movement *within* the Catholic and mainline churches diversified religious voices and messages. Nevertheless, Zambia’s major religious bodies united in 2015 to establish the Christian Churches Monitoring Group (CCMG), which has emerged as Zambia’s most prominent domestic election observation and civic education coalition. As we discuss below, CCMG (a community partner organization on this study) includes Catholic, mainline Protestant, Evangelical, and Pentecostal churches. Therefore, amidst increasing popularity of Pentecostal/Charismatic (born again) Christianity, collaboration among Christian FBOs remains strong and fundamental to the promotion of democracy.

### **Religion and ethnicity**

Any study of political participation in the Zambian context must address how – if at all — other identities, such as ethnicity, gender, and partisanship, may interact with the potential

influence of religion. A vast literature has explored the degree to which ethnic identity may influence political attitudes and behavior in the region.<sup>16</sup> In Zambia, however, influential research has shown that tribal identity is not as politically salient as it is elsewhere on the continent.<sup>17</sup> Afrobarometer data from Zambia (2018) also reveal that Catholics, Pentecostals and mainline Protestants alike trust religious leaders more than traditional or partisan leaders.<sup>18</sup> These data also indicate that *urban youth* in Zambia are less likely than rural youth and older urban-dwellers to identify “more ethnically than nationally” or to trust a traditional leader.<sup>19</sup> Particularly among urban youth, it is important to understand *other* drivers of political behavior, besides ethnicity.

Furthermore, although religion and ethnicity correlated in the past, these ties are not likely to be strong or persistent. As in other sub-Saharan states, Christian denominations were often associated with the ethnic groups that resided where their missionaries settled (Posner 2005). Yet, three factors have scrambled these associations since the 1960s. First, multiple Protestant denominations with different ethnic “bases” merged in 1965 to form the United Church of Zambia (UCZ). Second, the Catholic Church has drastically expanded its reach across Zambian provinces since the 1960s, confounding the historic correlation of Catholic and certain ethno-regional identities. Lastly, as urbanization and liberalization increased opportunities for African Independent and Pentecostal churches to spread rapidly in Zambia, religious identity has become evermore likely to cross-cut (not reinforce) ethnic identity. Afrobarometer data is consistent with this claim: only a minority of each major religious group identified primarily in ethnic terms in Zambia (2018). There is no generalizable correlation between identifying ethnically (rather than nationally) and identifying as Catholic, Protestant or Pentecostal.

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<sup>16</sup>Defining ethnicity in terms of characteristics commonly perceived as hereditary – namely, tribe, “race,” religion, and native language – this literature documents significant variation in the degree to which ethnicity influences individuals’ political attitudes and behaviors over space and time.

<sup>17</sup>Posner (2005), for instance, argues that because there is a very large number of tribal identities in Zambia, many individual tribal groups are effectively too small to influence national elections. Other experimental research finds that the political sway of traditional leaders – long viewed as the active brokers of ethnic political alliances and clientelistic relations in the region (Bates 1983) – is not as uniform or deeply rooted as previously believed (Baldwin 2013).

<sup>18</sup>Author calculations, Afrobarometer R7.

<sup>19</sup>Individuals aged 18-24 years old were 6% more likely than older urban residents to identify “more” or “only” as a Zambian national and were 9% less likely than older urbanites to report trusting a traditional leader. These differences attenuate gradually as the definition of “youth” is expanded to include respondents up to 34 years old. Author calculations, Afrobarometer R7.

## Religion and partisanship

There are also no clear, durable associations between particular denominations and political parties. This is due largely to Zambia’s weak and volatile party system (Riedl 2014). As in many other African states, political parties in Zambia are dynamic and mutable institutions that encompass individuals from many ethnic and religious denominations. For example, following the change of ruling parties in 2011, Zambian MPs switched parties at alarming rates to gain access to the spoils of the new ruling party. To the extent that a political party appears to ally with a religious group today (Sperber and Hern 2018), this association may well be gone tomorrow.

## Gender, religion and political participation

As noted earlier, gender identity often conditions political and religious participation. Zambia is no exception. Data from Afrobarometer (2018) and the Pew Forum (2010) affirm that Zambian women are less likely to participate in politics and exhibit higher religiosity than men across variety of measures. Using data from Afrobarometer R7 in Zambia (2018), we examined how age, gender and religious participation covary with self-reported voting (age-appropriate respondents only) and feeling close to a political party. As Figure 1 (below) illustrates, we divide the sample at 33, the median age in the dataset, to yield similar numbers of respondents in each category. Results are robust to alternative definitions of youth (i.e., including participants who were 18-30 or 18-35 years old). In each age cohort, we distinguish men from women and distinguish members of religious groups from non-members. Female survey participants are represented with a dark gray circle and males a light gray diamond.

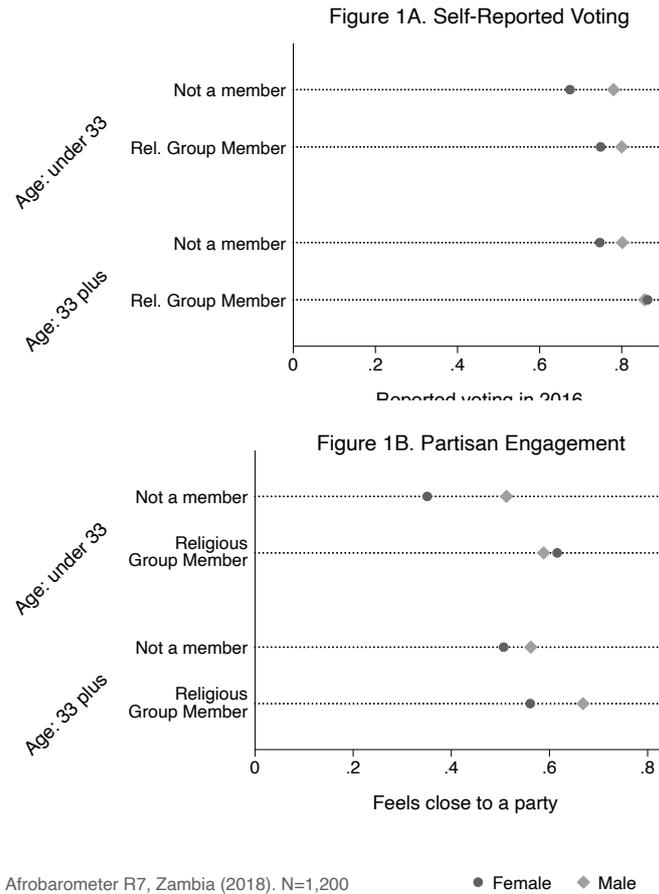
First, the data confirm that Zambian women — especially those under age 33 — participate in politics less than their male peers. Theoretically, this leaves more room for women to register an increase in participation following the intervention. Second, the data reveal that the disparity in participation is either diminished or erased for young women who belong to a religious group that meets outside of worship services.<sup>20</sup> Across measures, in other

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<sup>20</sup>This finding persists whether youth is defined as 18–29 or 18–35 years old.

words, young women’s political participation is higher among religiously active rather than non-religiously active young women. By contrast, religiosity does *not* appear to correlate significantly with young men’s political engagement. Though this descriptive analysis cannot address questions about causality, it is nevertheless consistent with the expectation that religious messages may influence young women’s political participation more than men’s.

Figure 1: Religious group membership and political behavior by age and gender



*Notes:* The median age is 33 years old. *Religious group membership* includes individuals who reported being inactive members, active members, or official leaders of a “religious group that meets outside of regular worship services.” (Afrobarometer R7 does not include other indicators of religious participation.) *Partisan engagement* reflects the question: “Do you feel close to any political party?”

Furthermore, at the country level, Zambia’s gender gap in political participation is notable: Zambia is ranked near the bottom (#11) of the 15 countries in the Southern African Development Community on progress towards women’s equal participation in politics (Loha

(2018). Therefore, in the analysis that follows, we examine the possibility that exposure to Christian messages promoting political participation may impact women more than men *either* because women may be highly receptive to religious messaging and/or because women’s lower baseline levels of political participation leaves them more room to be influenced (even marginally) by the intervention.

## 4 Research Design

### 4.1 Collaborative Approach

To test our hypotheses, we designed a community collaborative study to understand the influence of Christian messages on peaceful political participation. While community collaborative methods are common in the fields of public health, education, global social policy, and peace studies, they remain virtually undiscussed in comparative political science. Defining features of this approach include: (1) an enduring commitment to work cooperatively with community partners as equals in the process of research design and implementation; and (2) the pursuit of mutual benefits for community partners and researchers alike.<sup>21</sup> Specifically, this study stemmed from Sperber’s conversations with Zambian religious and community leaders while conducting fieldwork on religion and politics in Zambia between 2011 and 2016.<sup>22</sup> As researchers, we are interested in abstract questions about the causal impact of messages, while our partners seek actionable feedback on civic education programming strategies to reach youth. Working closely with Caritas Zambia and the Protestant Council of Churches in Zambia (CCZ), we designed a study to pursue these aims using an applied evaluation study model. Additionally, we invited the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia (EFZ) and the Christian Churches Monitoring Group (CCMG) to work with us on this study. Subsequently, they provided useful consultation, support, and guidance. We refer collectively to these organizations as community partners. The study was also approved by the research ethics review committee at the University of Zambia and the IRBs of the two affiliated US

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<sup>21</sup>For useful overviews see Binet et al. (2019), Nyström et al. (2018), Pasick et al. (2010), and Sperber et al. (2008).

<sup>22</sup>for discussion of case selection, see Section 4.3.

universities.<sup>23</sup>

## 4.2 Sample and Recruitment

“Youth” is a social construction that varies across cultures and over time. In this paper, we define youth as individuals under the age of 35 to be consistent with the [African Youth Charter](#) (2006), [Zambia National Youth Policy](#) (2006) and Zambian census.<sup>24</sup> Our community partners and Zambian PI confirmed the appropriateness of this definition of youth in the Zambian context, where youth is commonly understood as those under 35 years of age or as those, regardless of exact age, who are unmarried and without children. During recruitment, we screened only for age and not for marital status or number of children. Nevertheless, as we report below, the sample skewed relatively young and childless, as expected.

We conducted the study in February to early March 2020 (before the spread of Covid) in Lusaka. Participants included 291 Zambian young adults. We adopted a two-pronged approach to recruitment, with roughly 39% of study participants randomly recruited from public streets and markets where young people were known to congregate. Enumerators stopped every fifth young-looking person (stratifying by gender) that passed them in the public marketplace, and invited that person to volunteer to join the study, screening on the basis of age. New volunteers were then given a ticket to present at workshops held later that day. The other 61% of our sample were recruited directly from Sunday worship services at Catholic, mainline Protestant, and Pentecostal congregations, also stratifying by gender. Our partner organizations helped connect us to the leaders of these churches, from whom we obtained advanced permission to recruit on Sundays. Depending on the church leader’s preferences, either the church leader announced the study during the service (using a script that we provided) or they invited a study enumerator to announce the study using the same script. After the service, enumerators waited outside the church and handed out tickets at random to youth exiting the church. All workshops were held in nearby classrooms, 88% of which were rented from local public schools. For the remaining 22% of workshops, public

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<sup>23</sup>More extensive details concerning study ethics and procedures appear in Appendix B.

<sup>24</sup>Work by the UN, USAID, and the International Youth Foundation also adopts this expansive definition of youth (Muzira, Njelesani, and Zulu [2013](#), 4); YouthMap [2014](#), 25).

classrooms were unavailable and we used church-provided Sunday School classrooms.<sup>25</sup> The goal of this recruitment strategy was to ensure a mix of regular and potentially less regular church attendees. In both recruitment methods, announcements of the study explained that researchers sought only “youth” volunteers between 18 and 35 years old. Descriptive statistics reveal that the final sample was evenly split between men and women, with an average age of approximately 24 years old. The majority of the sample (63%) had no children. As expected, the sample was almost exclusively Christian, and thus likely to be open to either message in the Christian civic education workshops.

The study took place in three urban and peri-urban compounds in Lusaka: Bauleni, Chawama, and Mtendere. We chose Lusaka as the site for this initial study for its high concentration of different churches (Catholic, Protestant, and Pentecostal) in close geographic proximity. This allowed us to recruit from different denominations and to assess the logistics of cooperating with these different types of churches in larger-scale future research. In each purposefully selected area, community partners connected us to the local Catholic, UCZ and Pentecostal churches where we conducted church-based recruitment. We purposively selected these compounds for their ethnically heterogeneous and relatively low-income populations (which make them closer to the average Zambian’s socioeconomic status), and because they are politically competitive. As a result, we were unlikely to limit the study sample to only one or two ethnic groups or to backers of only one of the parties. While we cannot know the degree to which findings from this study generalize to rural areas, this study provided an important opportunity to build knowledge that will inform larger-scale future research. Additionally, given the tendency for youth-involved political violence to break out in poor urban areas, we viewed these sites as substantively important areas to study. Indeed, Chawama and Mtendere experienced some political violence during the 2016 elections, which heightens the importance of understanding what motivates peaceful political participation for the future.

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<sup>25</sup>It is possible that both messages resonated more in workshops held in church rooms, but equal numbers of the two types of workshops were run in rooms provided by churches, so treatment effects (between the two messages) are not driven by differences in settings.

### 4.3 Intervention

Upon arrival at the workshop, study participants were randomly assigned to go into one of two classrooms. Each classroom implemented one of the two possible end-of-workshop motivational messages (described below). Study participants completed a brief baseline survey with an enumerator before participating in the informational workshop. They then listened to and discussed approximately 1.5 hours of information about the process of becoming an engaged citizen and voter, citizen rights and duties, and the electoral process. This information was identical across workshops and was drawn directly from curricular materials previously developed and implemented by our partner organizations. The information was explicitly *non-partisan*.

At the end of every workshop, facilitators played one of the two pre-recorded Christian motivational messages (“treatments”) through a speaker to workshop participants (more on these below). At the conclusion of the workshop, participants completed another brief survey one-on-one with enumerators about their inclinations to participate in politics and their aversion (or lack thereof) to political violence. In the following weeks, each participant received a phone call to complete a follow-up survey to gauge the longevity of any treatment effects.<sup>26</sup> Study participants were paid 77 Kwacha for their time in the workshops, and 25 Kwacha to reimburse transportation to/from the workshops. Snacks and water were provided during the workshop. Participants received phone credit as compensation for completing the phone survey.

As noted, study participants were exposed to one of two “treatments,” i.e., pre-recorded Christian motivational messages, which we randomized at the workshop level. We developed these messages in close consultation with community partners by drawing on their churches’ preaching and existing materials. One message emphasized *the power of faith to make change*, while the other emphasized Christians’ *moral obligation – and commitment – to the common good*. They were of comparable length and were recorded by the same man. This allowed us to hold the identity and style of the speaker constant and to vary only the *content* of the

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<sup>26</sup>Follow-up surveys were administered anywhere between 12 days and several weeks later due to miscommunication among enumerators. We exploit this variation in our analysis to see if time to follow-up survey impacted the impact of workshop participation.

audio messages.

The “obligation to the common good” message presents Jesus’ sacrifice for humanity as a model that should motivate listeners to think beyond their own immediate needs and wants, and to take action in service of the greater good. This message approximated messages from (non-Charismatic) Catholic organizations.<sup>27</sup> The “power of faith message” discussed how God works through the actions of the faithful to make change in the world. This message approximated messages from Pentecostal and Charismatic organizations. Appendix A contains the text of both treatment messages and the full informational workshop curriculum. The key passages that differed across treatments were as follows. The “obligation to the common good” message stated:

[T]he dignity of every human person, the respect of human rights, commitment to the common good . . . these are central to the teachings of Jesus Christ and important values of all Christians. . . . 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. 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 try to get through the struggles of daily life. 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.

By contrast, the “power of faith” treatment stated:

You must know that with strength of faith anything is possible. . . . Christians must declare their faith and embody it every day, just as Jesus would have us do. 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 try to get through the struggles of daily life. But these are the ways of thinking of people of little faith. 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.

Importantly, both messages acknowledge that participating in politics can be daunting. Both exhort listeners to engage in peaceful political action despite associated personal ‘costs’

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<sup>27</sup> A growing minority of Catholics in sub-Saharan Africa identify as members of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, which embraces many aspects of the “power of faith” theology. On Charismatic Catholicism in sub-Saharan Africa, see Dowd and Sarkissian (2017).

in time and energy. Both use Jesus as a model and underscore the importance of acting to protect the “morals that uphold our democratic system.” The messages differ, however, in the reasons offered to encourage participation. The power of faith message focuses on how strong faith can bolster an individual’s ability to make positive change through peaceful political participation. Here, Jesus figures as a model of individuals’ strong commitment to and embodiment of their faith. By contrast, the commitment to the common good message uses Jesus as a model of our shared obligation to sacrifice for the greater good. Specifically, it emphasizes that investing time and energy to participate in peaceful political action ultimately advances the greater good, and that as Christians, we are morally committed to doing so. As noted in Section 2, this treatment may strike strict “rational individualists” as unappealing because it offers “only” a moral model and notion of obligation to motivate action. Nevertheless, its logic accords with research across the social sciences, which finds that: (a) moral conviction motivates participation in costly political action (Einwohner [2003](#); Bélanger et al. [2014](#)); (b) religious individuals invest time and energy in “sacrifices” to signal (valuable!) virtue to themselves (Bénabou and Tirole [2011](#)) or to “bind” themselves to a moral community (Bulbulia [2004](#); Graham and Haidt [2010](#)); and/or that religious messages often remind individuals of the promise of “God’s Grace,” which incentivizes prosocial behavior (Warner et al. [2015](#), 193; also see Oviedo [2016](#)).

#### 4.4 Measurement

At the start and the end of the workshop, and in the later phone survey, participants were asked several questions designed to elicit their willingness to engage in peaceful political participation, our main outcome of interest. The end of workshop survey asked the following questions: “There are various actions that people sometimes take as citizens. We are interested in whether you would do these things if offered the opportunity in the near future. For instance, would you attend a peaceful protest or demonstration march?... Would you contact a government official?” “If elections were held tomorrow, would you vote?” and “How interested would you say you are in politics? [very, somewhat, not very, not at all]”<sup>28</sup> These

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<sup>28</sup>These questions also appear regularly in waves of the Afrobarometer survey, including in Zambia, and thus have been tested and used in this same context for other research.

questions measure participants' willingness to take peaceful political action and their interest in politics. Asking these questions at baseline allowed us to control for baseline levels in our main analyses. In the endline and phone surveys, participants were also asked, "Would you attend a protest where violence by political cadres was likely to break out?" Responses to this question measure willingness to join in (potentially) violent political action. Logistically, we had to ensure that baseline surveys could be conducted quickly, so we asked this question only in the endline survey (following the workshop) and in follow-up phone surveys.

Because respondents may not always be willing to report the full extent to which they would themselves engage in certain forms of political participation but may nevertheless be willing to judge *others* for their decisions, study participants were also asked to evaluate a sympathetic person who chose not to vote, despite the high stakes of the election in ensuring high quality government. The vignette read,

Now I want to read you a brief description about someone's actions and then ask for your opinion. Specifically, I want to tell you about a Zambian parent who is very busy taking care of their children and household while also struggling to make ends meet. This parent strongly believes that, if elected, one of the politicians running for office will lead a corrupt and exploitative government. They are optimistic that the other candidate will lead a more effective, accountable, and purpose-driven government. However, this parent also believes that a strong majority will turn out to vote for the candidate that they prefer, so they decide to stay home on election day rather than going out to vote.

We then asked (1) "In your view, is this person's decision [fully justified, mostly justified, mostly unjustified, or totally unjustified]?" (2) "In your view, is this person a good citizen?" and (3) "In your view, is this person a good Christian?" We used responses to these questions to estimate the effect of treatments on participants' views about the appropriateness of taking or not taking peaceful political action.

Participants were also asked about their views on the use of political violence. In the endline and phone surveys, we asked, "Which of the following statements is closest to your view: The use of violence is never justified in Zambian politics today. OR In this country, it is sometimes necessary to use violence in support of a just cause."<sup>29</sup> Participants could agree with the either statement strongly or weakly, or they could agree with neither. The resulting

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<sup>29</sup>This question appears regularly in the Afrobarometer survey, including in Zambia.

data allowed us to translate our concept of peaceful political participation into measures of respondents' assessment of the social appropriateness of undertaking peaceful political action and of participants' views about whether political violence is justified.

In order to supplement the above self-reported measures of inclinations and attitudes, we also added a donation measure to the endline survey. At the end of the workshop, after having answered the attitudinal questions, study participants were given the opportunity to donate any portion of their study compensation to the Christian Churches Monitoring Group (CCMG) "to facilitate election observation in the future." Participants already knew from workshop content that CCMG works for peaceful and fair elections. This donation measure therefore allowed study participants to demonstrate their level of support for peaceful political participation in a more "costly" way. Additionally, donating to political causes can also be considered an act of peaceful political action in and of itself, especially if directed to organizations that eschew violence. Study participants were assured that they were under no obligation to donate and all donations were given to CCMG, as promised. We use this measure as a behavioral proxy for our overarching outcome of interest, which is peaceful political participation.

## 5 Results

Recall that we recruited youth both directly after church services and from public marketplaces. Our sample characteristics reflect these design choices. Table [1](#) provides summary statistics. The sample is largely young (average age 24 years). Three-quarters of the sample are unmarried, and more than half do not have children. The vast majority of workshop participants report attending church at least one to two times a week. Even among participants recruited from public markets, the majority (58%) attend church either weekly or daily. Having recruited from Catholic, UCZ, and Pentecostal churches, the largest denominational group (35%) in the sample is Catholics, with another 31% of participants from UCZ, 22% affiliated with Pentecostal churches, and the rest from other churches. (One non-Christian, a Muslim, volunteered to participate in the study.)

Table 1: Summary Statistics, Full Sample

	Mean	St. Dev	Min-Max	Obs
Female	0.46	0.50	0-1	291
English-speaking	0.18	0.38	0-1	288
Nyanja-speaking	0.63	0.48	0-1	288
Bemba-speaking	0.17	0.38	0-1	288
Age	23.9	4.39	18-35	291
Married	0.23	0.42	0-1	291
No Children	0.63	1.01	0-5	291
No Schooling	0.003	0.06	0-1	288
Primary School	0.10	0.30	0-1	288
Secondary School	0.65	0.48	0-1	288
University	0.21	0.40	0-1	288
Grad School	0.05	0.22	0-1	288
UCZ	0.31	0.46	0-1	291
Catholic	0.35	0.48	0-1	291
Pentecostal	0.22	0.41	0-1	291
Other Church	0.11	0.31	0-1	291
Born Again	0.86	0.35	0-1	291
Pentecostal (self-id)	0.37	0.38	0-1	291
Attends Church Daily	0.05	0.22	0-1	291
Attends Church Twice a Week	0.42	0.49	0-1	291
Attends Church Once a Week	0.46	0.22	0-1	291
Church Leader	0.34	0.47	0-1	291
Political Interest	2.98	1.00	1-4	291
Bauleni	0.35	0.48	0-1	291
Chawama	0.40	0.49	0-1	291
Mtendere	0.25	0.43	0-1	291
Recruited on Street	0.39	0.49	0-1	288

The randomization of participants to workshops was implemented as intended. Table 2 shows no detectable differences in observable characteristics of participants across the two types of workshops.

We find that exposure to the power of faith message boosted reported willingness to participate in peaceful protests, relative to exposure to the obligation to serve the common good message. Many of the other measures of inclinations to participate (willingness to contact a government official, interest in politics, donations to CCMG) moved in the same direction as willingness to protest, but these treatment effects did not reach statistical significance. One exception is that willingness to donate *among women* did move in response to the power of faith message but to a statistically significant degree. We discuss this further below. Table 3 shows the results on inclinations to vote among the full sample of participants. We control for baseline levels of willingness to engage in each of these behaviors (all of which strongly

Table 2: Balance Tests

	Obligation to Common Good Mean (SE)	Power of Faith Mean (SE)	Difference (p-value)
Female	0.46 (0.04)	0.46 (0.04)	0.00 (0.93)
English-speaking	0.18 (0.03)	0.18 (0.03)	0.00 (0.97)
Nyanja-speaking	0.63 (0.04)	0.63 (0.04)	0.00 (0.96)
Bemba-speaking	0.16 (0.03)	0.16 (0.03)	0.00 (0.98)
Age	24 (0.37)	23.75 (0.36)	0.25 (0.62)
Married	0.24 (0.04)	0.21 (0.03)	0.03 (0.46)
No Children	0.66 (0.08)	0.57 (0.09)	0.07 (0.55)
Education	2.17 (0.06)	2.24 (0.06)	0.07 (0.44)
UCZ	0.31 (0.04)	0.31 (0.04)	0.00 (0.95)
Catholic	0.37 (0.04)	0.34 (0.04)	0.04 (0.53)
Pentecostal	0.21 (0.03)	0.23 (0.04)	0.02 (0.70)
Attends Church Once a Week	0.45 (0.04)	0.48 (0.04)	0.03 (0.66)
Church Leader	0.34 (0.04)	0.34 (0.04)	0.00 (0.97)
Political Interest (Baseline)	2.97 (0.08)	2.97 (0.08)	0.00 (0.96)
Willing to Protest (Baseline)	0.87 (0.03)	0.87 (0.03)	0.00 (0.99)
Recruited on Street	0.39 (0.04)	0.39 (0.04)	0.00 (0.89)

predict endline levels) and cluster standard errors by workshop session because this was the level at which treatment was assigned. Figure 2 reveals that the work is being done by the power of faith message: reported willingness to protest was high at baseline (87% of respondents said they would be willing), and the power of faith message corresponds with an increase to 94%. By contrast, willingness to participate in protest remained at roughly the same levels as baseline among those exposed to the obligation to the common good message.

Consistent with these findings, the power of faith message also moved respondents to be more critical of the person in the vignette who chose not to take political action. When asked about their evaluation of a person who chose not to participate in politics, respondents

Table 3: Effects of Power of Faith Christian Message (Relative to Obligation to Common Good Christian Message) on Political Intentions

	Would Protest	Would Vote	Would Contact Gov't	Very Interested in Politics	Donated
Power of Faith Message	0.072** (0.029)	0.009 (0.043)	0.031 (0.034)	0.068 (0.057)	0.045 (0.080)
Baseline Level	0.312*** (0.091)	0.567*** (0.088)	0.508*** (0.070)	0.557*** (0.042)	– –
Observations	288	288	288	288	279
$R^2$	0.17	0.28	0.27	0.31	0.002
Mean at Baseline	0.873	0.880	0.825	0.416	0.423 (power tr)

Note: \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.10$ ; standard errors clustered by workshop session.

Figure 2: Direction of Treatment Effect on Willingness to Protest

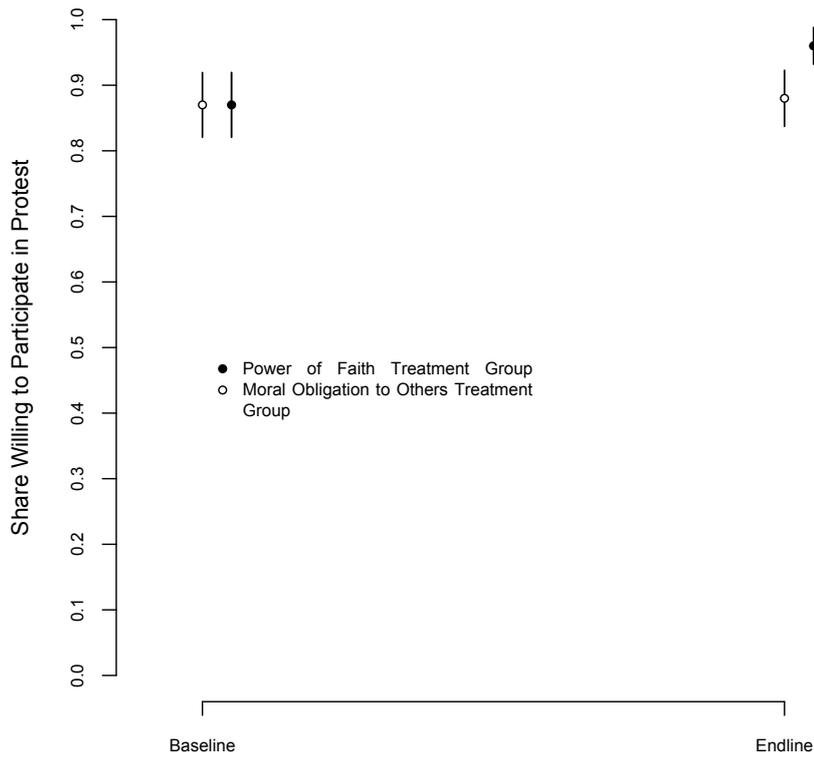


Table 4: Effects of Power of Faith Christian Message (Relative to Obligation to Common Good Christian Message) on Evaluations of Non-Participating Person in the Vignette

	Bad Christian	Bad Citizen	Action Totally Unjustified
Power of Faith Message	0.064 <sup>(*)</sup> (0.039)	0.084 <sup>**</sup> (0.034)	0.096 (0.076)
Observations	288	288	288
$R^2$	0.01	0.02	0.01
Mean in Obligation to Common Good Condition	0.74	0.85	0.56

Note: \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.10$ ; standard errors clustered by workshop session.

in the power of faith treatment workshops were much more likely to judge the hypothetical person as a “bad Christian”, a “bad citizen” and to say that the person’s actions were totally unjustified, relative to respondents in the obligation to the common good treatment workshops. See Table 4.

This increased inclination to participate politically (and to criticize others for not doing so) is accompanied by a heightened disapproval of violence. Exposure to the power of faith message increased the rate at which respondents said that violence is never justified and decreased the rate at which they said that violence was sometimes justified, relative to exposure to the obligation to the common good message. Exposure to the Power of Faith message also decreased the rate at which respondents said they would be willing to take part in a violent demonstration, relative to exposure to the obligation to the common good message. See Table 5. About 13% of participants exposed to the obligation to the common good message said they would be willing to participate in a violent protest, while a smaller share – only 8% – of those exposed to the power of faith message were willing. In short, findings are consistent with the hypothesis that the power of faith message increased participants’ proclivity toward peaceful political protest.

These patterns were consistent across men and women. Tables 6 and 7 break down the results by gender. There are no detectable heterogeneous treatment effects by gender on the measures of willingness to participate, except when it comes to donating to an election monitoring organization. Forty-eight percent of women exposed to the power of faith message were willing to donate compared to 32% of women exposed to the obligation to the common

Table 5: Effects of Power of Faith Christian Message (Relative to Obligation to Common Good Christian Message) on Attitudes Toward Violence

	Violence Never Justified	Violence Sometimes Necessary	Would Join Violent Protest
Power of Faith Message	0.101* (0.054)	-0.052* (0.030)	-0.050* (0.029)
Observations	288	288	288
$R^2$	0.01	0.01	.01
Mean in Power of Faith Condition	0.64	0.21	0.13

Note: \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.10$ ; standard errors clustered by workshop session.

Table 6: Effects of the Power of Faith Christian Message (Relative to Obligation to Common Good Christian Message) on Political Intentions, by Gender

	Would Protest	Would Vote	Would Contact Gov't	Very Interested in Politics	Donated Donated
Power of Faith Message	0.058* (0.033)	0.001 (0.054)	0.015 (0.054)	0.030 (0.073)	-0.047 (0.088)
Baseline Level	0.312*** (0.091)	0.567*** (0.086)	0.505*** (0.070)	0.556*** (0.046)	-
Female	0.019 (0.022)	0.003 (0.047)	-0.001 (0.069)	0.011 (0.074)	-0.183** (0.081)
Female*Power of Faith	0.031 (0.047)	0.017 (0.056)	0.034 (0.094)	0.084 (0.061)	0.200* (0.117)
Observations	288	288	288	288	279
$R^2$	0.17	0.28	0.27	0.31	0.459
Mean at Baseline	0.873	0.880	0.825	0.416	0.423 (power tr)

Note: \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.10$ ; standard errors clustered by workshop session.

good message (a difference that is statistically significant); whereas among men donation decisions were roughly the same across the two workshop types. In other words, the treatment effect on donations is in the same direction as on willingness to protest but is evident only among women. Meanwhile, there was little difference in how treatment effects men's and women's evaluations of the person in the vignette. On one measure (evaluations of the hypothetical person's actions as totally unjustified), the treatment effect is strongest among men, but otherwise men and women were affected in similar ways. Likewise, there were not detectable heterogeneous treatment effects by gender on attitudes toward violence. In other words, although there were some instances in which the treatment effects were driven by either the subgroup of men or the subgroup of women, the overall pattern was that both men and women were moved by the power of faith message to be more willing to participate in protest, more critical of others who do not participate, and more disapproving of violence.

Table 7: Effects of Power of Faith Christian Message (Relative to Obligation to Common Good Christian Message) on Vignette Evaluations and Attitudes Toward Violence, by Gender

	Bad Christian	Bad Citizen	Action Totally Unjustified	Would Join Violent Protest	Violence Never Justified	Violence Sometimes Justified
Power of Faith Message	0.113** (0.050)	0.096* (0.051)	0.195** (0.084)	-0.058 (0.039)	0.098 (0.08)	-0.078 (0.07)
Female	0.079 (0.054)	0.031 (0.051)	0.078 (0.092)	-0.020 (0.052)	-0.06 (0.10)	-0.03 (0.09)
Female*Power of Faith	-0.108 (0.073)	-0.025 (0.076)	-0.213* (0.122)	0.017 (0.067)	0.01 (0.13)	0.06 (0.11)
Observations	288	288	288	288	288	288
R <sup>2</sup>	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.01
Mean in Power of Faith Condition	0.80	0.94	0.66	0.08	0.21	0.64

Note: \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.10; standard errors clustered by workshop session.

Table 8: Treatment Effects Among Only Catholics

	Would Protest	Would Vote	Very Interested in Politics	Willing to Participate in Violent Protest	Violence is Sometimes Necessary
Power of Faith Message	0.035 (0.036)	0.027 (0.05)	0.0.090*** (0.025)	-0.091*** (0.020)	-0.029* (0.046)
Baseline Level	0.319** (0.144)	0.507** (0.103)	0.571**** (0.090)	-	-
Observations	102	102	102	102	102
R <sup>2</sup>	0.17	0.22	0.33	0.04	0.01
Mean at Baseline	0.91	0.87	0.44	-	-

Note: \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.10; standard errors clustered by workshop session.

These patterns were also consistent among Catholics, UCZ affiliates and Pentecostals, although we are admittedly dealing with very small samples when examining treatment effects within any of these subsamples. One might have thought that Catholics, who are likely to be more familiar with the obligation to the common good message, might have resisted the power of faith message as more distant from messages in their own houses of worship. Yet, as illustrated in Table 8, Catholics' willingness to participate in protest, as well as to be critical of violence, increased in response to the power of faith message similarly to members of other denominations. (Notably, the baseline willingness of Catholics to participate in peaceful protest is very high—91%—at baseline, and so it is perhaps not surprising that the positive treatment effect, though positive, is not as large as in the entire sample.) The effects of the power of faith message on Catholics' interest in politics (positive) and their willingness to participate in violent protest (negative) were particularly robust.

There are a few outcome measures for which we had null results. As can be seen in the tables above, the treatment effect on willingness to vote was not just statistically insignificant but also practically nil in the full sample. We also detected no treatment effects on measures of internal and external political efficacy (whether participants thought politics was something they could easily understand and whether they thought political actors would listen to people like them), nor did treatment detectably move perceptions of the likelihood of electoral violence in the next election cycle or beliefs about improvements in the quality of democracy. We discuss the null results concerning political efficacy in the next section.

Overall, our results indicate that the power of faith message moved people to be more willing to participate in protest, more critical of others who do not participate, and more disapproving of violence. However, it likely did not have these effects through the mechanisms of changing people's beliefs about likely electoral violence or the quality of democracy or by increasing their sense of political efficacy. In the next section, we discuss some ways forward to further test the duration of and mechanisms behind these findings.

## 6 Discussion

Findings presented above are consistent with our hypotheses that the power of faith message moved people to be more willing to participate in political protest relative to baseline, as well as to donate to an organization dedicated to promoting peaceful electoral participation (among women), to criticize others who do not participate, and to disavow the use of political violence, compared to exposure to a commitment to the common good message. These results appear to be consistent across subgroups and are robust to including individual controls. Still, several questions remain that will guide any further research we conduct about these effects.

First, one might ask *why* this particular message, in contrast to the commitment to the common good message, corresponds to certain attitudes or behaviors. That is, what are the mechanisms driving these findings? One possibility is that positive messages tend to be more effective than negative ones, and the power of faith message is a particularly

encouraging/positive message. Yet, empirical analyses in adjacent fields does not necessarily support this generalization. For instance, a vast literature in the study of campaigns has found either that negative messages are more likely to motivate beliefs and behaviors than positive ones, or that there is no significant difference between the two (Lau and Rovner 2009; Mann, Arceneaux, and Nickerson 2020). Additionally, in communication studies, one meta-analysis concluded that “fear arousal is associated with greater engagement with persuasive messages, and negative information and events are more potent than their positive counterparts” (O’Keefe and Jensen 2008). In our context, the other message emphasizing the importance of taking on costs and risks to benefit the greater good could easily have been expected to be the more motivating message, because it could have induced a sense of impending danger demanding action. Future research could benefit from deeper engagement with framing theory and might pair the power of faith message with another equally positive religious (or secular) message for contrast. Yet, against the background of existing research in adjacent fields (c.f., Bassi 2019), we think it unlikely that this affective mechanism fully explains our results.

Another possible explanation for the greater effect of the power of faith message is that it heightened individuals’ political efficacy, underscoring as it does the idea that strong faith allows individuals to make things happen (McClendon and Riedl 2019). And, yet, self-reports of political efficacy (both internal and external) did not meaningfully diverge between participants in the two different workshops. It is possible that the questions we asked were not the right ones. We asked people to report political efficacy in closed-ended survey questions after the workshops: whether they thought politics was something that someone like them could understand and whether they thought the government listened to people like them. It could be that the message moved people’s sense of self-efficacy (the notion that they can overcome problems, can make a difference) and thereby their sense that they can be effective in politics, without the use of violence, even if it did not move answers to the particular questions we asked. In future studies, researchers might employ qualitative methods to deepen the examination of senses of self-efficacy and political efficacy post-treatment. Asking study participants to describe their own sense of agency in an open-ended way would lead to richer insights into whether the power of faith message

changed listeners' sense of self-efficacy. Following up with a subset of study participants in in-depth conversations over time, perhaps employing ethnographic methods, would also give researchers greater insight into whether the treatments changed self-conceptualizations outside of the workshop (Levy Paluck [2010](#)).

Future research could examine additional mechanisms as well. For instance, another possibility is that the commitment to the common good message primed people to think about loss—a factor that has been shown to depress political action (Levine [2015](#))—whereas the power of faith message underscored the possibility of gain (through faith). Another possibility is that listening to the power of faith message may have led people to expect that others would also be moved by the treatment, thus performing a coordinating function, whereas the commitment to the common good message did not. Another possibility is that the power of faith message mobilized a sense of national identity, which moved listeners to want to engage in politics after hearing the importance of doing so for the nation. As we explained in an earlier section, there is no obvious, stable alignment between a particular denomination and a particular contemporary political party.<sup>30</sup> However, past presidents (specifically, President Michael Chiluba (1991-2000) of the Movement for Multiparty Democracy and President Edward Lungu (2015-present) of the Patriotic Front (Cheyeka [2016](#))) both used born again ideas to define Zambian national identity as a “Christian nation.” Most prominently, in 1996, President Chiluba officially declared Zambia to be a “Christian Nation” with a toothless provision in the constitution. The power of faith message, which is also associated with a born again theology, thus may have primed a sense of national identity. These are all mechanisms that we would like to unpack further in future research. Future research might consider conducting focus group discussions in which participants listen to messages together and discuss their sense of identity, their expectations of others' behavior and their sense of gains and losses in an open-ended way (Cyr [2016](#)). These methods could be used to develop additional measures that could be used in a larger follow-up experiment.

Another possibility is that the power of faith message was more familiar to study participants than the commitment to the common good message and thus more easily integrated

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<sup>30</sup>Nevertheless, we plan to further investigate the possibility of associations between specific Christian messages and partisan or national identity in future research.

into their thinking about subsequent political questions. Although the power of faith message has often been associated with Pentecostal churches, these types of messages can also be prevalent within certain subgroups of the Catholic and mainline Protestant churches, namely among Charismatics. Charismatic Catholics and Protestants are faithful members of these older churches but also identify as born again and believe in the power of the Holy Spirit to enter the body of the individual and empower them with ecstatic gifts (e.g., speaking in tongues, divine healing, prophesy, etc.). In part for this reason, we have referred throughout to one of our treatment messages as the power of faith message and the other as the “commitment to the common good” message rather than to them as “Pentecostal” or “Catholic/Mainline.” Interestingly, although our study sample came from various different denominations (Catholic, UCZ, Pentecostal and others), 85% of our sample, when asked whether they identified as “Born Again”, said yes. In other words, many of our study participants could be considered Charismatic Catholics or Charismatic Protestants and are likely to have heard the power of faith message in their home houses of worship. It is possible that the power of faith message simply resonated more with study participants because of this background. These findings are still very instructive for those interested in the influence of religious messages in sub-Saharan Africa, given the growing prevalence of Born-Again Christians on the continent. In the Pew survey on Islam and Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa conducted a decade ago (2008-2009), ten out of sixteen countries exhibited over half of their Christian populations identifying as Born-Again,<sup>31</sup> and the relative prevalence of Born-Again identifiers is likely only to have grown in the years since. Yet, in order to tease out this possibility in future research we may make a concerted effort to recruit non-Charismatic study participants and ask more explicitly about familiarity with the message.

Second, beyond mechanisms, one might ask about the duration of these effects. To assess duration, we conducted a follow-up phone survey with workshop participants. The original protocol was to contact all workshop participants by phone a week to ten days (maximum two weeks) after the workshops they participated in and again ask several of

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<sup>31</sup>The percentages of Christians identifying as Born-Again were: Botswana (75%), Chad (80%), DRC (71%), Ghana (77%), Guinea Bissau (80%), Kenya (57%), Liberia (87%), Nigeria (78%), Rwanda (56%), Zambia (76%), followed by Cameroon (49%), South Africa (46%), Ethiopia (38%), Mozambique (29%), Tanzania (29%), and Uganda (26%).

the same questions they were asked at the end of the workshops in order to assess whether differences in willingness to engage in peaceful political participation and in attitudes toward violence persisted. However, a miscommunication with the implementing team about the protocol resulted in only a random subset of workshop participants being contacted within the originally design time frame (12 days) after the workshops. The rest of the workshop participants were contacted weeks later, after the miscommunication was discovered and corrected. As a result, the completed phone surveys we have were conducted 12 to 66 days after the workshops ended, with a mean of 28 days elapsed between workshop and phone survey.<sup>32</sup> Based on previous work (McClendon and Riedl 2019) that finds that the influence of religious communication lasts only for short periods without repeated exposure, we did not expect that we would find much evidence of persistent treatment effects so far out. And indeed, we find no evidence of distinguishable differences in political attitudes by workshop type in the pooled phone survey sample, even if we include a control for the number of days elapsed between workshop and phone survey. The subsample of respondents contacted within the originally specified time frame is too small to detect the treatment effect sizes we found at the end of the workshop only within that subsample. Only if we use respondents in non-audio sessions (see discussion below) as the reference group for both treatment workshops *and* include a control for the number of days between the workshop and the phone survey, and then also an interaction term between the power of faith message and the number of days elapsed between the workshop and the phone survey, do we find suggestive evidence that there may be a shorter-term persistent effect of the power of faith message on willingness to participate in peaceful political action that then dissipated as time went on, but these results are too dependent on specification for us to draw firm inferences. In future research, we would like to conduct follow-up measurement of outcomes closer to the original administration of treatment (e.g., a few days after the workshops), which would allow us to draw better inferences about the duration of treatment effects.

One might also ask about the substantive importance of the treatment effects we found.

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<sup>32</sup>Eighty workshop participants did not complete the phone survey, for a response rate to the phone survey of 72.5%. This level of attrition is not surprising given the amount of time that inadvertently lapsed between the workshops and when respondents were contacted; in fact, the response rate strikes us as relatively high given these conditions. We found no evidence of differential attrition across workshop types.

Our outcome measures are largely self-reported attitudes and inclinations, with the exception of the donation measure at the end of the workshop. Do the treatment effects extend to other forms of costly behavior? The plan is to continue to follow whether participants in this study continue to get involved with CCMG and with its efforts to ensure a peaceful election in the 2021 elections in Zambia (scheduled for August 2021). CCMG offers opportunities to undertake more trainings and to get involved with election monitoring and other civic organizing around peaceful participation. These opportunities can be advertised to study participants via SMS and uptake of these opportunities would provide a measure of longer-term, more sustained involvement in promoting peaceful participation. But it remains to be seen whether and how these opportunities will take place because of concerns about the coronavirus, and we want to be sure that we do not do anything to encourage activities that could put study subjects, researchers or the larger community at risk.

Lastly, due to resource constraints, we were unable to include a secular civics education condition in this experiment. By this we mean that we do not have data that speak to the effect of participating solely in the informational workshop *without any* motivational message at the workshop's conclusion. It is therefore theoretically possible that the informational part of the workshop boosted peaceful participation, and that exposure to the commitment to the common good message then depressed peaceful participation but that there was no additional boost from the power of faith message; it is also theoretically possible that the informational part of the workshop depressed peaceful participation and then exposure to both religious messages boosted it again but to different degrees. To clarify these patterns, we plan to include a secular civics education control condition in the larger-scale version of the pilot study.

Yet, it is important to emphasize that available evidence does not support the idea that informational interventions alone substantively influence African youths' willingness to engage in politics. Berinsky and coauthors (2016), for instance, used a lab in the field experiment to evaluate how (non-religious) motivational messages impacted youths' intention to vote following exposure to information about an upcoming election and found that motivational messages were more effective than information alone in boosting intentions to

participate (specifically, to register and to vote). The one exception among the motivational messages they tested was one that emphasized one's "obligation to vote as a citizen" (Berinsky et al. 2016, 8), which produced no boost in intention to participate above and beyond the informational message (though it was not demobilizing). Further, higher levels of education (which likely correlate with more information on these issues) often do not correspond to high relative levels of political participation. Research involving 200 students at the University of Cape Town revealed that among this unusually educated youth sample, nearly one half of all students still reported that they "did not vote because they believed their votes would not count, that the machinery was already in place for rigging the election, and that it *did not matter* whether or not they voted" (Adebayo 2018, 154, emphasis added). Also consistent with our interpretation are recent findings concerning the relationship between education and political participation in Zimbabwe (Croke et al. 2016).

Furthermore, there were two workshop sessions in our study in which, unexpectedly, the audio system did not work properly and thus in which study participants did not hear the religious messages. These two workshops do not provide a large enough set of respondents to adequately test for differences in outcomes between a secular civics workshop and the two religious workshops. However, willingness to participate peacefully in politics is statistically higher among those exposed to the power of faith message than among those in the no-audio workshops, whereas the difference in outcomes between the no-audio workshops and the commitment to the common good workshops is not statistically significant. These patterns are consistent with the argument that the power of faith message did indeed boost willingness to participate in politics, whereas the commitment to the common good message did not. But more work needs to be done to verify these patterns. Including a secular civic education workshop would help us further interrogate these patterns and would also help us clarify how much work the religious part of religious appeals actually does in motivating political participation.

## Next Steps

Unfortunately, it is currently impossible to run an expanded version of this study due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our original plan was to expand the study, in cooperation with our local collaborating organizations, to cover three provinces in Zambia (Lusaka, Central Province and Eastern Province), to include a control condition that would involve a secular workshop (civics information alone with no religious message), and to incorporate more measures of potential mechanisms as well as longer-term behavioral follow-up measures. In the pilot, we used the baseline measures as a proxy for what one might observe in a pure control condition, but it would be useful to compare effects of a secular workshop (relative to baseline) with effects of the religious workshops (relative to baseline), as discussed above. However, COVID-19 currently prevents us from planning in-person activities which, even with social distancing, could introduce risks to participants, researchers and the local community. We are therefore currently pursuing a larger study wherein youth could take part in educational training (the intervention) via WhatsApp or another platform, and then participate in remote surveys and other organizing opportunities on social media platforms.

## 7 Conclusion

This project heeded African scholars' calls for more research on religion and, especially, the potentially empowering effects of religion in African contexts. As Enwerem (1995) and others have argued, problematic aspects of the relationship between religion and politics should not obscure the positive role that religion may play in African society:

Our grasp of politics and social change, be it in Nigeria or in Africa as a whole, depends on our understanding of how religion and politics mutually impact upon one another. While it is true that religion has often been misdirected into a negative role, this is not enough justification to ignore its inherent potential for meaningful emancipatory projects (Enwerem [1995](#), 3).

Previously, scholars responded to this call by studying religion in relation to the HIV epidemic (Burchardt, Patterson, and Rasmussen [2013](#)), LGBTQ rights movements (Van Klinken

2019), and peacebuilding and socioeconomic development (c.f., Philpott 2015; Dowd 2015; Smith and Hackett 2012; Ter Haar and Ellis 2006). This study contributes by enlisting experimental and community-collaborative research methodology to study how two prominent types of Christian messages may influence the effects of church-based civic education programs that aim to promote peaceful political participation among youth. In doing so, we contribute to growing literature on youth participation, on the one hand, and the political implications of different Christian ideas, on the other.

Additionally, this paper presented findings from what we believe is the first study to examine how Christian messages influence the impact of church-based programs to promote youth political participation. The dearth of research on Christian civic engagement programming has meant that scholars and civil society leaders have lacked insight into the impacts of these programs. We therefore developed this study in close partnership with many of Zambia’s major civil society and religious actors in order to provide actionable insights to our community partners as well as scholarly insights into the effects of two prominent types of Christian motivational messages on youth political participation. Derived from our community partners’ preaching and preexisting materials, these messages emphasized either the Christian moral obligation to serve the greater good or the power of faith for making change in the world. Using three rounds of surveys and a behavioral measure, we found that the message focused on the power of faith moved workshop participants to be more willing to participate in peaceful protest, to disavow political violence, and to critically evaluate other people who chose not to participate in electoral politics. By contrast, the message focused on the moral obligation to contribute to the common good did not significantly influence participants’ political attitudes relative to baseline. This finding extends insights from priming experiments (McClendon and Riedl 2019) and challenges some theories of religious commitment (sacrifice) as a mechanism for pro-social behavior. It also may challenge observers of “politicized Pentecostalism” in sub-Saharan Africa who characterize the individualism inherent in Pentecostal and other born-again theology as anti-democratic. Instead, our findings affirm prior research that emphasizes the empowering potential of some African Pentecostal ideas, especially the power of faith message that we study in this paper (c.f., Sperber and Hern 2018), McClendon and Riedl 2019), and Marshall 2009).

It is important to note that this study's sample is limited to young adults who reside in relatively low-income areas of urban and peri-urban Lusaka, Zambia. This setting was important to study for substantive reasons and provided a logical initial site in which to begin advancing knowledge about the influence of Christian messages on the political participation of youth. Nevertheless, there is ample room to build on this study by researching these messages alongside of secular (not explicitly religious) versions of the civic education curriculum; studying them in rural and other urban contexts in Zambia; and, eventually, studying this type of programming in other country contexts, such as states with significant Islamic populations, where comparable inquiry might be lodged into local types of Islamic messages concerning political efficacy. Insights from this study's community collaborative approach, two-pronged recruitment strategy, and findings lay an important initial foundation upon which we hope to build towards more expansive research in the future.

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## Appendix

### 8 Appendix A

#### Two Christian Treatment Scripts

*Note to reader:* In each workshop, one of the following pre-recorded messages was played on an audio speaker. The facilitator read the following note in bold:

**We would now like to play an audio recording for you from a religious leader who will speak about the importance of political engagement:**

*[Workshop 1: play Treatment 1 Message]* The Christian faith values the democratic system because it ensures the participation of citizens in making political choices, guarantees to the governed the possibility both of electing and holding accountable those who govern them and of replacing them through peaceful means when appropriate.

Authentic democracy is not merely the result of formal observation of a set of rules but is the fruit of a convinced acceptance of values that inspire democratic procedures. Those values are the dignity of every human person, the respect of human rights, commitment to the common good, and these are central to the teachings of Jesus Christ and important values of all Christians. Without these values, the deepest meaning of democracy is lost and its stability compromised. If there is no ultimate truth to guide and direct political action, then ideas and convictions can easily be manipulated for reasons of power.

Democracy without values easily turns into open or thinly disguised authoritarianism. Democracy is fundamentally a system and as such a means and not an end. Its moral value is not automatic, but depends on conformity to the moral law which it, like every other form of human behavior, must be subject. In other words, its morality depends on the morality of the ends which it pursues and of the means which it employs.

To uphold this morality, 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. 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 try to get through the struggles of daily life. 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.

*[Workshop 2: play Treatment 2 Message]*

The Christian faith values the democratic system because it ensures the participation of citizens in making political choices, guarantees to the governed the possibility both of electing and holding accountable those who govern them and of replacing them through peaceful means when appropriate.

Authentic democracy is not merely the result of formal observation of a set of rules. It is the work of us as people of faith, who can make real change in the world. If you declare a thing, you will achieve it. Whatever you have declared, the Bible says that it has already been established. You are blessed to prosper and never fail. With strength of faith, your actions make a new world.

We must feel the blessing of God on this country, on this city. 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. Without faith, the deepest meaning of democracy is lost and its stability compromised. If there is no ultimate truth to guide and direct political action, then ideas and convictions can easily be manipulated for reasons of power.

Democracy without values easily turns into open or thinly disguised authoritarianism. Democracy is fundamentally a system and as such a means and not an end. Its moral value is not automatic, but depends on conformity to the moral law which it, like every other form of human behavior, must be subject. In other words, its morality depends on the morality of the ends which it pursues and of the means which it employs.

To uphold this morality, Christians must declare their faith and embody it every day, just as Jesus would have us do. 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 try to get through the struggles of daily life. But these are the ways of thinking of people of little faith. 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.

## 9 Appendix B

### Extended Detail on Study Ethics and Procedures

The study was approved by the research ethics review committee at the University of Zambia, as well as by the IRBs of the two affiliated US institutions and by our community partner organizations. It introduced no more than minimal risks or discomfort to participants. Zambia is an overwhelmingly and “officially” Christian state where wide-ranging Christian messages are ubiquitous in public and daily life. Hence, religious communication in did not expose participants to foreign or potentially jarring ideas. The workshop curricula were also based on civic education programs already being conducted in Zambia. All information provided in the workshops was accurate and provided in a non-partisan fashion. Participation in all parts of the study was also voluntary and informed, and we did not ask any highly sensitive questions during any of the survey portions of the study. We also took the steps to protect the privacy of study participants by collecting names and mobile numbers only with the consent of attendees and only for the purposes of communicating logistical details of the study as well as for contacting participants to complete the phone survey. Names and mobile phone numbers were then destroyed after the phone survey was completed. Beginning-of-workshop and end-of-workshop surveys were conducted one-on-one (enumerator-study participant), so that study participants did not have to answer questions in front of other workshop participants. Answers given at the end of the workshop or on phone survey (enumerator-completed) questionnaires to questions about willingness to participate in politics and about aversion (or lack thereof) to violence were filled out in separate surveys linked only by a numerical participant ID in order to prevent answers to the questions from being identifiable. Participant names were recorded only on consent sheets, used to confirm the identities of respondents in the phone survey and then were destroyed.