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Religious Service Attendance and Civic Engagement Among 15 to 25 Year Olds

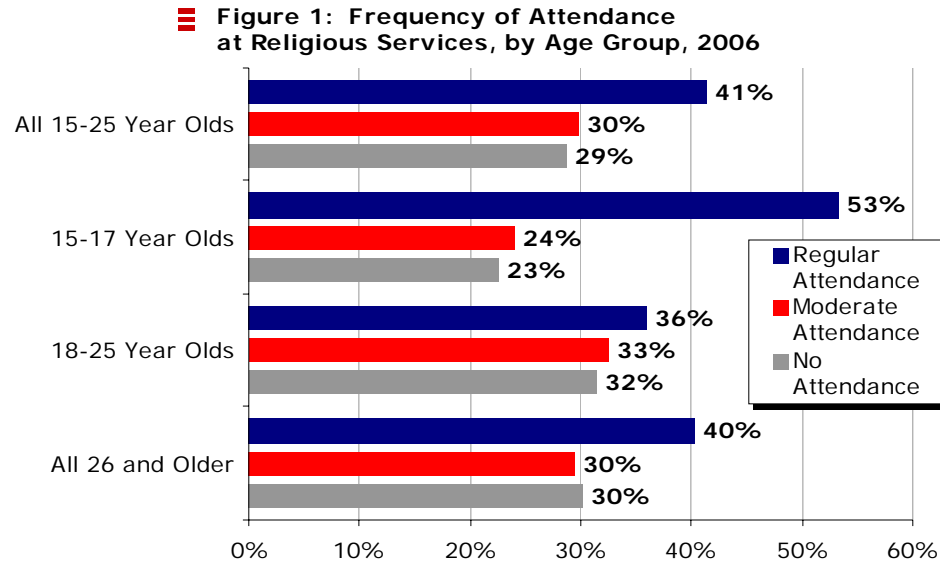
By Mark Hugo Lopez, Kumar V. Pratap, and Sean L. Conner¹
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Religions across the world encourage their followers to perform service in either their communities of faith or the larger local or global communities. In America, religiosity rivals education as a powerful correlate of most forms of civic engagement for all adults as people who regularly attend religious services often address social causes by volunteering, voting, signing petitions, boycotting companies, and in other ways.² Furthermore, religious institutions have served as central organizing venues for many of this nation's social movements, such as women's suffrage, abolitionism, the civil rights movement, and modern social conservatism. Services—ranging from job training to self-help groups to mentoring and after-school tutoring—take place in the basements and meeting rooms of local religious institutions, thus making them important providers of community services for members and non-members alike. Finally, religions impart values and identities that can have strong civic implications: "religious faith and commitment is one route by which young people find meaning, value and community."³

In this fact sheet, we present new evidence from the 2006 Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey (2006 CPHS) on the correlation between a wide range of civic engagement activities and frequency of religious service attendance for young people. The 2006 CPHS was conducted between April and June of 2006. It involved interviews of 1,674 young people (15-25 years old) and 547 adults (26 and older).⁴ For the purpose of this fact sheet, we define three mutually exclusive groups by the regularity of attendance at religious services:

1. **Regular Religious Service Attendees.** These are individuals who said they attend religious services once a week or more.
2. **Moderate Religious Service Attendees:** These are individuals who attend religious services less than once a week but more than once a year.
3. **Never Attend Religious Services:** This category includes individuals who seldom or never attend religious services, and those who said they "don't know" or refused to answer.

According to the 2006 CPHS, attendance at religious services among young people is, overall, similar to that of adults. As shown in Figure 1, approximately 40 percent of 15-25 year olds attended religious services regularly while the rest are split equally between the categories of moderate attendees and those who never attend religious services. However, there are large differences in attendance at religious services between high school age young people and college age young people. Specifically, 53 percent of young people ages 15 to 17 attend religious services regularly, while 36 percent of young people ages 18 to 25 attend services regularly. Similarly, among 15 to 17 year olds, only 23 percent do not attend any services, while among 18 to 25 year olds, one third do not attend services regularly.⁵ Many of these differences are likely driven by the attendance habits of parents.⁶



Source: Authors' Tabulations from the Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey (CPHS) May to June 2006.

The 19 Indicators of Civic Engagement

The 2006 CPHS asked about 19 core forms of engagement. A complete list of these activities is shown in Table 1. The results presented in this fact sheet cover these 19 measures of civic engagement. Scott Keeter, Cliff Zukin, and colleagues, in their recent book *A New Civic Engagement* and their 2002 report *The Civic and Political Health of the Nation*, developed the 19 measures of civic engagement shown in Table 1, and identified three broad categories of civic engagement: "civic (or community) activities," "electoral activities" and "political voice activities." Our results are organized by these three broad areas of engagement.

Table 1 - 19 Core Measures of Civic Engagement from the 2006 CPHS (Activities Performed within the Last 12 Months)

<i>Civic Activities</i>	<i>Electoral Activities</i>	<i>Political Voice Activities</i>
Engaged in Community Problem Solving Activity	Regular Voter (ages 20 and older)	Contacted public officials
Regular Volunteer for a non-electoral organization	Tried to Persuade others in an election	Contacted the print media
Active member in a group or association	Displayed buttons, signs, stickers	Contacted the broadcast media
Participated in fund-raising run/walk/ride	Made Campaign contributions	Protested
Engaged in Other fund-raising for charity	Volunteered for a candidate or political organization	Signed E-mail petitions
		Signed paper petitions
		Engaged in Boycotting
		Engaged in Buycotting
		Canvassed

Source: *Civic and Political Health of the Nation Report*, October 2006.

The Relationship Between Religious Participation and Civic Engagement

We find that young people who attend services on a regular basis show higher levels of civic involvement across most of the 19 measures, compared to their peers who do not attend religious services. For example, young people who regularly attend religious services are on average engaged in 4.1 activities (out of the 19 activities listed in Table 1), whereas the average number of activities for youth who never attend religious service is 3.1.

Although there is a strong correlation between civic engagement and regular religious attendance, there are some important exceptions. Youth who never attend religious services match, or surpass, their counterparts who regularly attend services in some areas such as boycotting (buying a certain product or service because they like the social and political values of the company that produces or provides it) 30 percent versus 29 percent, and signing e-mail petitions 16 percent versus 15 percent.

When interpreting these results, one should be cautious not to assume a causal relationship between religious attendance and civic engagement. Although it is possible that regular religious attendance fosters civic engagement, it is also likely that any correlation between religious attendance and civic engagement may be driven by factors that influence both why an individual attends religious services *and* why someone is civically engaged.⁷

In trying to throw more light on the influence of frequency of religious attendance on the measures of civic engagement in our survey, we examined the relationship of each measure of civic engagement to attendance at religious services in a series of multivariate models that controlled for many of the demographic and socio-economic factors available in the 2006 CPHS (See Appendix Table 2 for selected results). Our results suggest that regular religious attendance is a significant (at 1 percent level of statistical significance) explanatory variable for the following four measures of civic engagement: regular volunteering for non-political groups, active membership in at least one group, regular voting, and displaying a campaign button or sign. For all other measures, any differences between young people who attend religious services regularly and those who do not are eliminated once observable demographic and socio-economic factors are controlled.⁸

The remainder of this fact sheet examines these relationships in more detail.

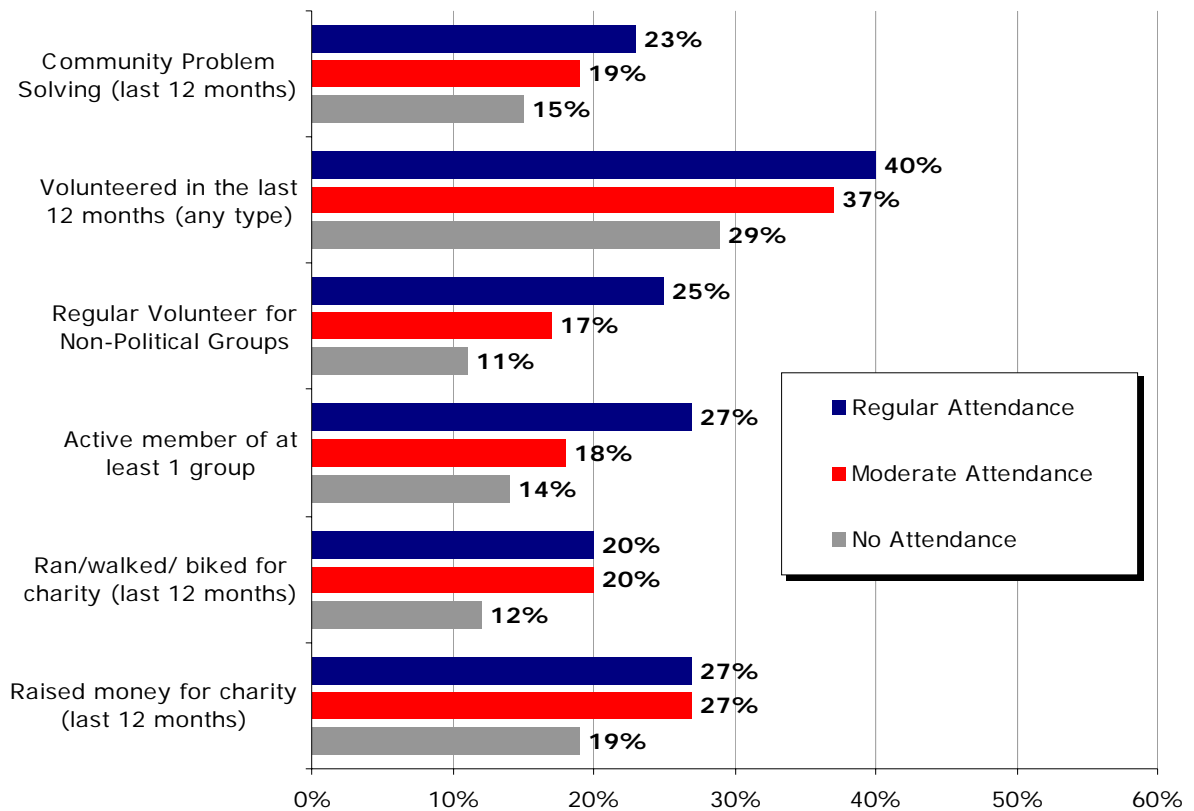
Community Involvement

With regard to “civic” (or “community”) involvement, young people who attend religious services regularly show a higher level of participation compared to their peers who attend services less regularly or not at all. This pattern applies to all measures of community involvement in the 2006 CPHS. Additionally, the relationship between intensity of religious participation and community involvement is monotonic, with those who attend services most regularly being the most involved in their communities, those who moderately often attend services being the second most involved, and those who never or seldom attend services being the least involved. See Figure 2.

Volunteering

Among all “civic” or “community” activities, volunteering is the behavior that draws the largest number of young participants; and the frequency of religious service attendance is positively correlated with volunteering. In 2006, 40 percent of regular religious service attendees said they had volunteered in the last 12 months, while 37 percent of infrequent attendees and 29 percent of young people who did not attend religious services said they had volunteered in the past 12 months. Furthermore, young people who attended religious services regularly were more likely to be regular volunteers (25 percent) compared to young people who were infrequent attendees (17 percent) and those who never attended services (11 percent).⁹

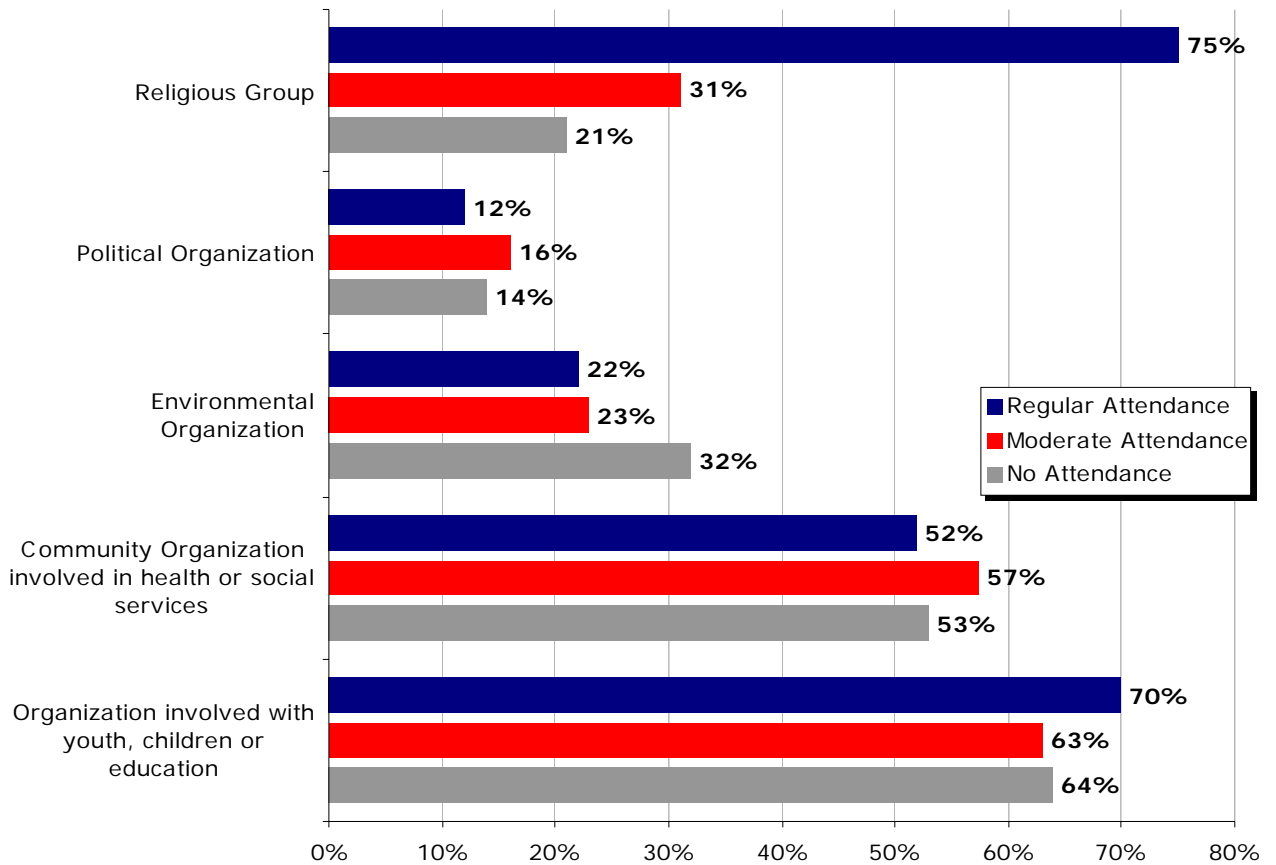
Figure 2: Core Indicators of Civic Involvement, By Religious Attendance Among 15-25 Year olds. Percent Responding "Yes".



Source: Authors' Tabulations from the Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey (CPHS) April to June 2006.

Volunteering for particular groups among volunteers varied some by religious attendance, as seen in Figure 3 below. Regular religious-service attendees volunteered more for religious groups, as would be expected; but young volunteers who never attended religious services were more active in volunteering for environmental organizations.

Figure 3: Volunteering for Different Groups Among 15-25 Year Old Volunteers by Religious Attendance

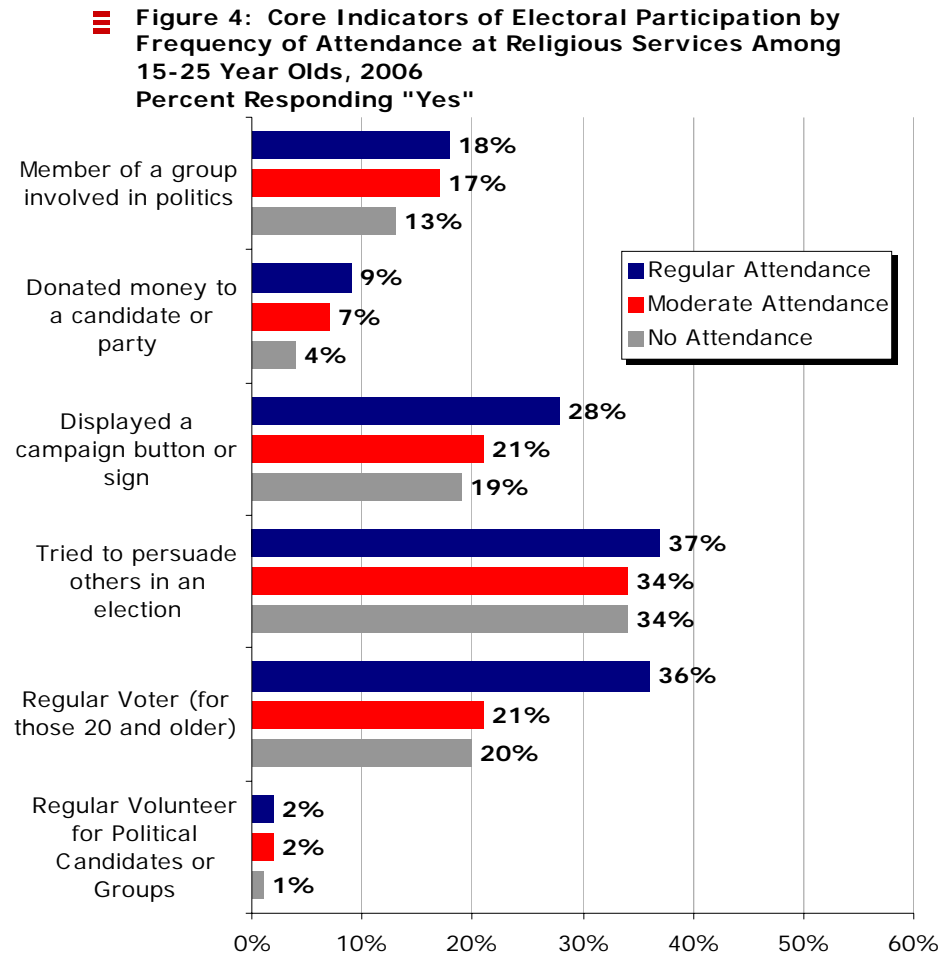


Source: Authors' Tabulations from the Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey (CPHS) May to June 2006.

Electoral Participation

Those who attend religious services regularly were generally most involved in electoral activities. This was particularly true for regular voting. Young people who were regular religious service attendees were more likely to report that they voted regularly than young people who attended services less regularly or not at all (36 percent versus 21 percent and 20 percent, respectively).

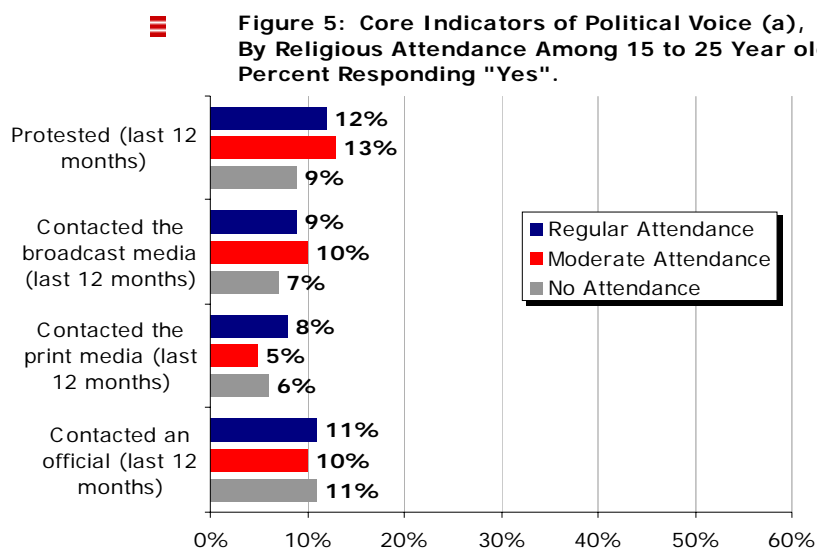
On other measures of electoral participation, 15-25-year-olds who attended religious services regularly were, on average, more engaged than their counterparts who never attended religious services. For example, 28 percent of the regular attendees displayed a campaign button or sign while 21 percent of infrequent attendees and 19 percent of youth who never attend religious services did so. See Figure 4.



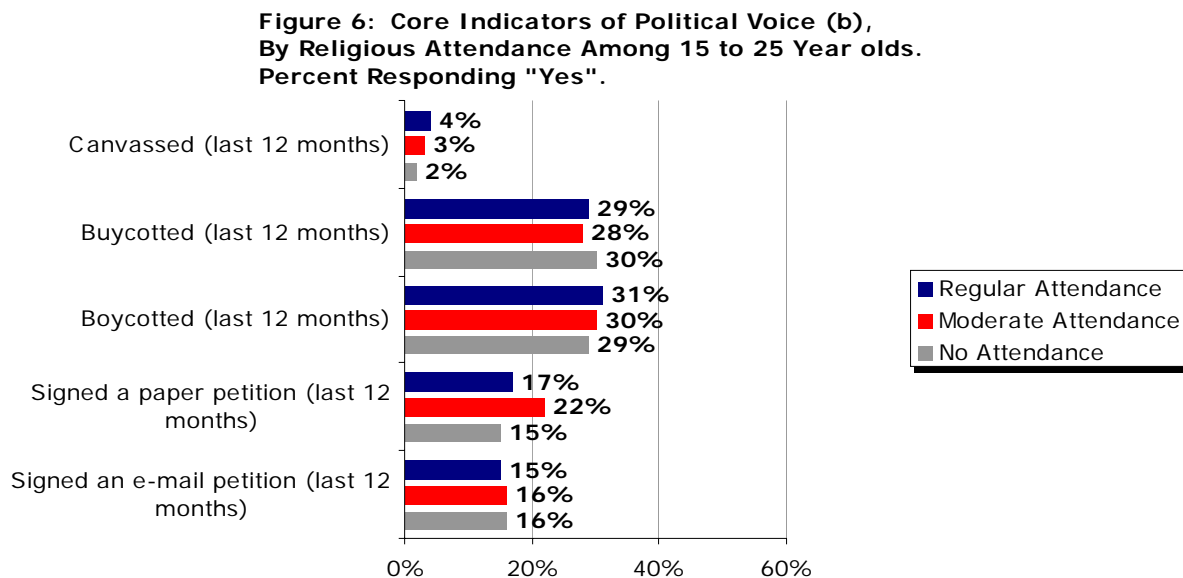
Source: Authors' Tabulations from the Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey (CPHS) May to June 2006.

Political Voice

Unlike community involvement and electoral participation measures, participation in “political voice” activities had a muddled relationship with frequency of attendance at religious services. In many cases, those who attended religious services regularly were not the most engaged. For example, 9 percent of those who attended services regularly had contacted the broadcast media in the past year, while 10 percent of those who attended services infrequently had contacted the broadcast media. A similar pattern is evident in the case of boycotting and signing an email petition. See Figures 5 and 6 below.



Source: Authors' Tabulations from the Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey (CPHS) April to June 2006.



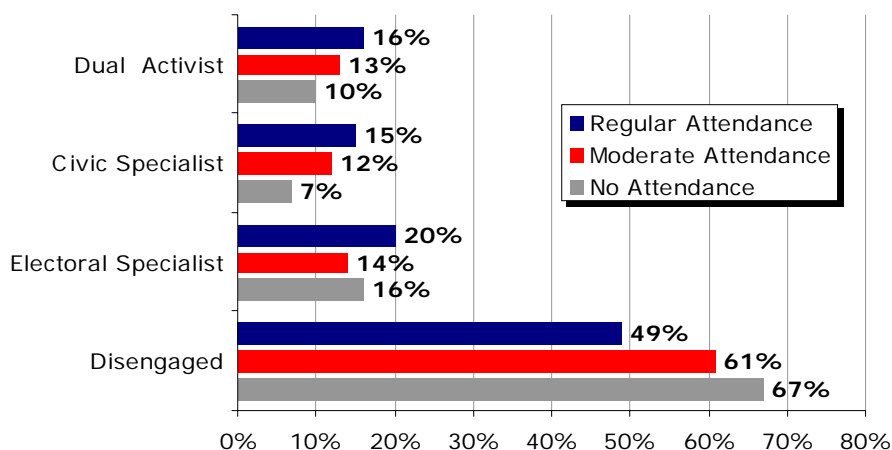
Source: Authors' Tabulations from the Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey (CPHS) April to June 2006.

Typology of Engagement

The 2006 *Civic and Political Health of the Nation* report identifies a “typology of engagement.” This typology classifies individuals into four groups based on their participation in a range of civic and electoral activities (for a full list of which, see Table 1). Individuals who engage in two or more civic activities are labeled *civic activists*. Similarly, individuals who engage in two or more electoral activities are labeled as *electoral activists*. Individuals who are both civic and electoral activists are identified as *dual activists*. Individuals who are neither civic nor electoral activists are identified as “disengaged.” Figure 7 shows the distribution of the engagement typology by religious attendance for 15-25 year olds.

Young people who attended religious services regularly were more likely to be classified as dual activists, civic specialists and electoral specialists, as compared to youth who were infrequent attendees at religious services or who never attended services at all. However, while a large proportion of young people from all groups were involved in at least two activities, substantial numbers of young people were disengaged, regardless of their religious attendance. Specifically, while 67 percent and 61 percent of the young people who did not attend religious services or who attended infrequently (respectively) were disengaged, the corresponding percentage among regular attendees was still 49 percent.

Figure 7: Civic Typology, By Religious Attendance for 15 to 25 Year olds.



Source: Authors' Tabulations from the Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey (CPHS) April to June 2006.

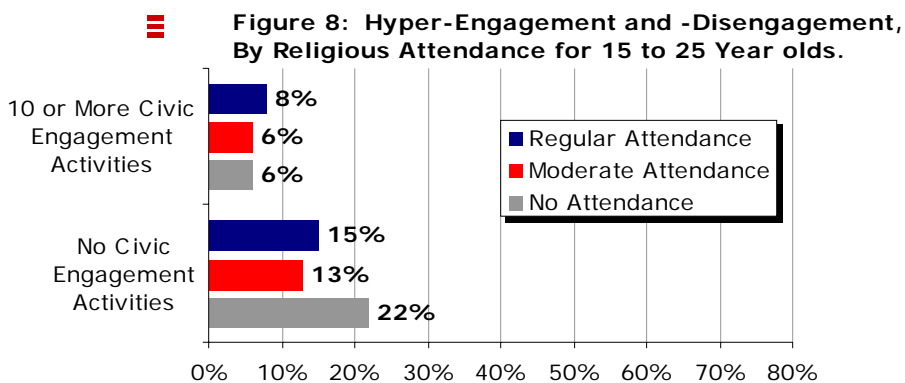
Hyper-Engagement and Hyper-Disengagement

Although the above civic typology is a useful tool for summarizing the level of civic engagement among groups, it takes into account only some of the civic engagement activities measured in the 2006 CPHS. Specifically, political voice activities have been excluded.

As an alternative, Lopez et. al. (2006) have developed two additional summary measures of civic engagement that encompass all of the 19 indicators. First, we identify those who reported participating in *10 or more* activities. Second, we identify those who had said they did not participate in *any* of the 19 activities. We call these two groups the hyper-engaged and the hyper-disengaged, respectively.

As we have shown throughout this fact sheet, those who are regular religious service attendees generally reported a higher level of engagement. This pattern is less evident when we examine the hyper-engaged, because they are rare across the whole population. Specifically, only 8 percent of regular religious services attendees were hyper-engaged, as compared to 6 percent each of moderate attendees and youth who never attended religious services.

The level of hyper-disengagement was higher than the level of hyper-engagement. Among youth who never attended religious services, 22 percent said they had not engaged in any of the civic, electoral or political voice activities we asked about. Among youth who were infrequent attendees, this figure was 13 percent; and for those who were regular participants at religious services, 15 percent reported not participating in any activity. See Figure 8.



Source: Authors' Tabulations from the Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey (CPHS) April to June 2006.

Appendix Table 1: Religious Attendance and Civic Engagement Among 15-25 Year Olds (%)

	Frequency of Attendance at Religious Services		
	<i>Regular</i>	<i>Moderate</i>	<i>Never</i>
Civic			
Community Problem Solving (last 12 months)	23%	19%*	15%***
Volunteered in the last 12 months (any type)	40%	37%	29%***
Regular Volunteer for Non-Political Groups	25%	17%***	11%***
Active member of at least 1 group	27%	18%***	14%***
Ran/walked/ biked for charity (last 12 months)	20%	20%	12%***
Raised money for charity (last 12 months)	27%	27%	19%***
Electoral			
Regular Volunteer for Political Candidates or Groups	2%	2%	1%**
Regular Voter (for those 20 and older)	36%	21%***	20%***
Tried to persuade others in an election	37%	34%	34%
Displayed a campaign button or sign	28%	21%***	19%***
Donated money to a candidate or party (last 12 months)	9%	7%	4%***
Member of a group involved in politics	18%	17%	13%**
Political Voice			
Contacted an official (last 12 months)	11%	10%	11%
Contacted the print media (last 12 months)	8%	5%	6%
Contacted the broadcast media (last 12 months)	9%	10%	7%
Protested (last 12 months)	12%	13%	9%*
Signed an e-mail petition (last 12 months)	15%	16%	16%
Signed a paper petition (last 12 months)	17%	22%**	15%
Boycotted (last 12 months)	31%	30%	29%
Buycotted (last 12 months)	29%	28%	30%
Canvassed (last 12 months)	4%	3%	2%*

Source: Authors' tabulations from the Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey (CPHS), April to June 2006. All results are weighted. "****" indicates a significant difference at the 1 percent level of statistical significance; a "***" indicates a significant difference at the 5 percent level of statistical significance; and "**" indicates significant difference at the 10 percent level of statistical significance. All comparisons are relative to those who attend church regularly.

Appendix Table 2: Assessing the significance of religious attendance frequency on measures of civic engagement for 15-25 year olds

	<i>Coefficient on regular religious attendance</i>
Civic	
Community Problem Solving (last 12 months)	0.043**
Volunteered in the last 12 months (any type)	0.035
Regular Volunteer for Non-Political Groups	0.080***
Active member of at least 1 group	0.09***
Ran/walked/ biked for charity (last 12 months)	0.025
Raised money for charity (last 12 months)	0.015
Electoral	
Regular Volunteer for Political Candidates or Groups	0.004
Regular Voter (for those 20 and older)	0.143***
Tried to persuade others in an election	0.014
Displayed a campaign button or sign	0.054***
Donated money to a candidate or party (last 12 months)	0.030**
Member of a group involved in politics	0.021
Political Voice	
Contacted an official (last 12 months)	-0.002
Contacted the print media (last 12 months)	0.014
Contacted the broadcast media (last 12 months)	0.003
Protested (last 12 months)	0.006
Signed an e-mail petition (last 12 months)	-0.025
Signed a paper petition (last 12 months)	0.02
Boycotted (last 12 months)	0.005
Buycotted (last 12 months)	-0.01
Canvassed (last 12 months)	0.012

Source: Authors' tabulations from the Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey (CPHS), April to June 2006. All results are weighted. All reported coefficients represent the coefficient on the "regular religious attendance" variable from multivariate linear probability models estimated for each measure of civic engagement. All reported coefficients represent percentage point differences between those who attend services regularly, and those who do not. Each model also controls for the following independent variables: education (high school or above), female, race/ethnicity, economic class, nativity, mother's education level, whether politics was discussed in home when growing up, and whether volunteers are present in the household. Results are available on request. "****" indicates a significant difference at the 1 percent level of statistical significance; a "***" indicates a significant difference at the 5 percent level of statistical significance; and "**" indicates significant difference at the 10 percent level of statistical significance.

Notes

¹ Research Director, Doctoral candidate at the University of Maryland's School of Public Policy, and Research Assistant respectively. We thank Peter Levine, Karlo Marcelo, and Emily Kirby for comments on previous drafts of this document. We also thank Rafael Nieto for Research Assistance.

² See Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of the American Community* (2000), page 67. Also see *Voice and Equality* by Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry Brady (1995) for an extensive discussion of the links between attendance at religious services and the development of civic skills and participation in civic life.

³ www.rebooters.net, *OMG! How Generation Y Is Redefining Faith In The iPod Era*. (2005)

⁴ For more information on the 2006 CPHS and its survey methodology, please see the CIRCLE report *The 2006 Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Detailed Look at How Youth Participate in Politics and Communities* by Mark Hugo Lopez, Peter Levine, Deborah Both, Abby Kiesa, Emily Kirby, and Karlo Marcelo, October 2006.

⁵ Our results differ slightly from those found in the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press' report "How Young People View Their Lives, Futures, and Politics," published in January 2007. According to their survey of 18 to 25 year olds, 32 percent attend services once a week or more. For the 2006 CPHS, we found that 36 percent of 18 to 25 year olds reported attending services once a week or more. For 15-25 year olds, 40 percent reported regularly attending services.

⁶ For example, see "Effects of Parental Church Attendance, Current Family Status, and Salience on Church Attendance," by Donald Ploch and Donald Hasting, *Review of Religious Research*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (June 1998).

⁷ Past research shows that religious attendance can foster civic engagement. For example, Cliff Zukin, Scott Keeter, Molly Andolina, Krista Jenkins, and Michael Delli Carpini, in *A New Engagement*, report that one of the stronger predictors of engagement among young people is frequency of attendance at religious services. Corwin Smidt examines the relationship between religious involvement and civic engagement in his study entitled "Religion and Civic Engagement: A Comparative Analysis". The study concludes that religious involvement plays "an important role in fostering involvement in civil society... even after controlling for the effects of other factors generally associated with fostering civic activity among members of society." However, while this is suggestive of a positive correlation between civic engagement and frequency of attendance at religious services, it is not definitive in proving a causal relationship. For more information, see Smidt, Crown. *Religion and Civic Engagement: A Comparative Analysis*. Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Vol.565. Civil Society and Democratization (Sep 1999).

⁸ Each model estimated was a linear multivariate regression. Other controls included indicators for: education aspirations (high school or above), gender, race/ethnicity, economic class, nativity, mother's education level, whether politics was discussed in home when growing up, and whether volunteers are present in the household. Results are available on request.

⁹ For details on statistical significance, see Appendix Table 1. All comparisons are relative to regular attendees.