

POLITICAL IDEOLOGY & COMMUNITY OUTREACH
IN YOUNG PEOPLE

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Introduction:

This study assesses whether there is a relationship between community outreach and political ideology for young people through the analysis of the Civic and Political Attitudes of Young People Study. Political ideology responses and community outreach involvement responses are compared to discern whether there is a correlation between the participation in community outreach and political ideology. The characteristics that are associated with one's political ideology may pre-dispose the holder of this view to increased involvement in community service. Due to the differences in ideals and beliefs among the different political ideologies, there might be one ideology that has more supporters willing to take an active role in the community through community outreach programs.

In addition, political ideology is influenced by a multitude of factors in one's life. Race¹, religion², education³, geography¹, and gender³ may all have some influence on one's political ideology. For this reason, it is not unreasonable to believe that involvement in community outreach may have an effect on one's political ideology. This is important to look at because it may give us another perspective in which to gauge how ideas and beliefs regarding politics are formed. We know that some natural and unavoidable surroundings of a person play an important role in shaping his or her political ideology, and it is important to know if one's voluntary

¹ Seltzer, Richard, and Robert Smith. "Race and Ideology: A Research Note Measuring Liberalism and Conservatism in Black America." *Phylon* 46(1985): 98-105.

² Perkins, James. "Political Ideology as Predicted by Parental Punishment, Formal Verses Concrete Reasoning, Moral Development." *National Undergraduate Research Clearinghouse*. 03 APR 1999. Northeastern State University. 11 Dec 2007 <<http://clearinghouse.missouriwestern.edu/manuscripts/75.asp>>.

³ Jennings, Kent, and Barbarah Farah. "Identiy, Gender, and Action: A Cross-National Survey." *British Journal of Political Science* 10(1980): 219-240.

experiences also play a role. The results may give us a better understanding as to whether political ideology is possibly shaped by these voluntary experiences.

Hypothesis:

It is expected that if one responds as being liberal that they will be more likely to have been involved in a community service organization, an outreach organization, or a volunteer services trip, than those who respond as being conservative. This is thought for two reasons. First, liberals are generally more in favor of change, while conservatives are more in favor of the status quo. People's political ideology may have a significant influence on their everyday lives, and not just when it comes to laws and policies that are passed. As a result, it is expected that the survey will show that liberals are more willing to work towards change and play an active role in their communities than conservatives. Second, community outreach may influence one's political ideology just like other external influences. When one participates in community outreach and experiences the hardships of fellow people, he or she may become more willing to support liberal policies that directly help impoverished people.

This study contains two variables: political ideology and community outreach. Political ideology is the independent variable and is defined by the respondents' political orientation (conservative, moderate leaning conservative, moderate, moderate leaning liberal, liberal, I don't know). Party affiliation will not be used to determine this variable because there is only a loose connection between political ideology and party affiliation. The level of community outreach of the respondent is the dependent variable and is gauged based on his or her given response to involvement in a community service organization, an outreach organization, or a volunteer services trip. The level of community outreach of the respondents is split into three variables

(community service organization, outreach organization, and volunteer service trips). They will all be considered as part of the variable “community outreach” and will also be examined individually to gain a more specific understanding of the responses.

Political ideology of the respondent is determined using the question, “When it comes to most political issues, do you think of yourself as a liberal, moderate, or conservative?” with possible answers listed as “conservative, moderate leaning conservative, moderate, moderate leaning liberal, liberal, and I don’t know.” This question allows the respondent to identify his or her political orientation. It is expected that conservatives will have done less community service than moderates leaning conservative, who will have done less community service than moderates, and so on. This comparison of individual political orientation group data is looked at for more detailed understanding beyond the simple comparison of liberals and conservatives.

The question should be sufficient in gaging a respondent’s political orientation, but there may be a bias away from “moderate leaning conservative” and “moderate leaning liberal,” because these options are not mentioned in the preface of the question. Research shows that respondents are a little less likely to choose middle alternatives for a question when they are not explicitly mentioned in the preface⁴. This may cause more people to choose moderate or more people to choose liberal and conservative. If more people choose liberal and conservative the results will appear more significant if there is a large difference between the two groups’ participation in community outreach. If more people choose moderate as a result of the question wording, it will pull people away from the opposite ideologies, making the results appear less significant.

⁴ Bishop, George. "Experiments With the Middle Response Alternative in Survey Questions." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 51(1987): 220-232.

The level of community outreach is determined using a question about the respondent's involvement in community outreach programs. The programs consist of community service organizations, outreach organizations, and volunteer service trips. Their affiliation with these organizations will be determined with the question, "Please indicate which organizations or programs, if any, you were involved with in the last twelve months and how much you were involved," from which we also will learn how many hours they were involved with the organization/program in the last twelve months. They were able to choose "community service organization, outreach organization, and volunteer services trip" among other things, as well as hours involved: "none, 10 hours or less, 11-25 hours, 26-60 hours, 61-120 hours, more than 120 hours." Hours involved are not considered in the analysis of the results for this hypothesis and responses are just considered on the basis of participation or non-participation. Analysis is performed looking at the community outreach activities individually and all together.

The fact that the community outreach options are sandwiched between many unrelated activities may pose a problem for the question. Not only can the community outreach options be overlooked because they are part of a long list, but the respondents may have experienced fatigue when identifying each activity that they are involved in and also when filling in the hours involved for every one, which may have lead to inaccurate results. In addition, respondents may have tended to overestimate their time spent involved in activities, which would give inaccurate results.

Survey Methodology:

The survey was conducted online by Polimetrix over a week-long span in November 2007. It sampled 1,000 young people between the ages of 18 and 24, 500 of which are full-time

college students and 500 of which are not full-time college students, excluding all full-time military. The target sample was created using a random sub-sample of 1,000 respondents, aged 18-24, from the American Community Study by the Bureau of the Census. From Polimetrix's panel, 1,629 people were interviewed and of this sample, 1,000 were selected that most closely matched the target sample. The results were weighted in two ways by applying four variables (age, race, education and gender) first, to college students and non-college students separately, and second, to the entire population of 18-24 year olds. Of the 1,629 interviews completed, 993 of the respondents were directly invited, of which 95.2% qualified for the study. The response rate was 31.2%. The other 636 respondents were directed to the study with screen outs from other studies and 66.7% participated.

The internet survey method was chosen as the best way to take this sample because of the nature of the sample population. The vast majority of young people use the internet regularly and have easy access to it, which makes an internet survey the closest method to achieving a probability sample. The alternatives are mail surveys, phone surveys, and in-person interviews, which all pose significant problems. It is almost impossible to reach college students and other young people by mail because they usually do not have a permanent address. In addition, mail surveys take a long time to get responses. As for phone surveys, young people most often do not have land lines and it is not typical and may be illegal in cases to contact a person on their cellphone, a private line. In-person interviews would be much more expensive for the surveyor because they would have to pay an interviewer for 1,000 interviews and it would require much more work to achieve our sample size from the target population. An internet survey on the other hand, is much easier in that thousands of people can be contacted instantly and they can

respond at their own leisure. The sample size of 1,000 respondents was achieved in about a week with the internet survey method, which was also much more cost-effective than the other options. In addition, the internet survey comes the closest to a “gold standard” because we were able to contact more people with it than we would have with the other sampling methods.

While the internet survey method does provide the most accurate results for this study, it is important to recognize that college students were over-sampled intentionally and full-time military personnel were excluded. Therefore, the results do not depict the opinions of the actual population of 18-24 year olds. College students were over-sampled because many of the survey questions only pertained to college students, and it was important to ensure that there would be enough college student respondents for analysis of them as a separate population. Full-time military were excluded because this population has very little opportunity to participate in voluntary community outreach in addition to other civic and political activities on the survey.

The target population served as an appropriate underlying population for the hypothesis because it targets young people. While people of all ages participate in community outreach, young people generally have more flexibility in their lives (summer vacations, school programs) allowing them to participate in community outreach. Older people, who have fully entered the workforce, have little flexibility in their lives, which may often prevent them from participating in community outreach. The hypothesis can be applied to the entire population, but it seems more appropriate to apply to young people who have more free time, and thus more choice in whether to participate in community outreach.

Results:

Participants included 905 people who were eligible for comparison across the three community outreach activities. This included 244 liberals, 119 moderates leaning liberal, 158 moderates, 191 moderates leaning conservative, 191 conservatives, and 110 I don't know, 27.0%, 13.1%, 17.5%, 21.1%, 21.1%, and 12.2% respectively. Some of the analysis for specific community outreach activities contains different numbers of eligible participants based on the number of people that responded to the specific question. Bivariate crosstabulation analysis was performed to find a correlation between political ideology as the independent value, using the variables (liberal), (moderate leaning liberal), (moderate), (moderate leaning conservative), (conservative), and (I don't know) and community outreach as the dependent value, using the variables (community service organization), (outreach organization), and (volunteer services trip). The independent variables (conservatives) and (liberals) were compared more specifically on the basis of community outreach to address the hypothesis. In addition, participation in community outreach was compared for respondents who acknowledged having an ideology and for respondents who had no ideology because of an observed trend in the results regarding these two groups.

In Table 1. political ideology is compared to community outreach as defined by participation or non-participation in any one of the three activities. The table shows that conservatives and liberals participated in community outreach at a very similar rate as did moderates leaning conservative and moderates leaning liberal. Moderates participated in community outreach slightly less than either of these groups, though not significantly, and

respondents who responded “I don’t know” participated in less community outreach than any of the other groups. 905 respondents were eligible for this analysis.

Table 1.		Political Ideology			
		Don't Know	Liberal	MLL	Moderate
Participation in Any Activity	Non-Participation	98, 89.1%	149, 61.1%	73, 61.3%	106, 67.1%
	Participation	12, 10.9%	95, 38.9%	46, 38.7%	52, 32.9%
Total		110, 100.0%	244, 100.0%	119, 100.0%	158, 100.0%

(Table 1. continued)		
MLC	Conservative	Total
47, 56.6%	110, 57.6%	583, 64.4%
144, 43.4%	81, 42.4%	322, 35.6%
191, 100.0%	191, 100.0%	905, 100.0%

In Table 2. political ideology, defined as conservatives and liberals, is compared to community outreach, defined as participation or non participation in any of the three activities. Conservatives and liberals do not show a significant difference in their participation in community outreach. 637 respondents were eligible for this analysis.

Table 2.		Political Ideology		Total
		Liberals	Conservatives	
Participation in Any Activity	Non-Participation	222, 61.2%	157, 57.3%	379, 59.5%
	Participation	141, 38.8%	117, 42.7%	258, 40.5%
Total		363, 100.0%	274, 100.0%	637, 100.0%

In Table 3. political ideology, defined as conservatives and liberals, is compared to community outreach as defined by the number of activities that the respondent participated in. Once again, liberals and conservatives differ only slightly. None of these differences are significant. 435 respondents were eligible for this analysis.

Table 3.		Liberal	Conservative	Total
# of Community Outreach Activities	0	149, 61.1%	110, 57.6%	259, 59.5%
	1	53, 21.7%	44, 23.0%	97, 22.2%
	2	30, 12.3%	19, 9.9%	49, 11.3%
	3	12, 4.9%	18, 9.4%	30, 6.9%
	Total	244, 100.0%	191, 100.0%	435, 100.0%

In Table 4. political ideology, defined as conservatives and liberals, is compared to participation in a community service organization. No significant difference is observed between conservatives and liberals. 472 respondents were eligible for this analysis.

Table 4.		Political Ideology		
		Liberal	Conservative	Total
Community Service Organization	Non-Participation	180, 67.4%	144, 70.2%	324, 69.0%
	Participation	87, 32.6%	61, 29.8%	148, 31.4%
	Total	267, 100.0%	205, 100.0%	472, 100.0%

In Table 5. political ideology, defined by conservatives and liberals, is compared to participation in an outreach organization. Conservatives are shown to participate significantly more in outreach organizations than liberals. The two-tailed P value is equal to 0.0138, which is statistically significant. 472 respondents were eligible for this analysis.

Table 5.		Political Ideology		
		Liberal	Conservative	Total
Outreach Organization	Non-Participation	216, 81.5%	143, 71.5%	359, 63.5%
	Participation	49, 18.5%	57, 28.5%	106, 18.8%
	Total	265, 100.0%	200, 100.0%	565, 100.0%

In Table 6. political ideology, defined by conservatives and liberals, is compared to participation in a volunteer services trip. No significant difference is observed between liberals and conservatives. 450 respondents were eligible for this analysis.

Table 6.		Political Ideology		
		Liberal	Conservative	Total
Volunteer Services Trip	Non-Participation	235, 91.8%	171, 88.1%	406, 90.2%
	Participation	21, 8.2%	23, 11.9%	44, 9.8%
	Total	256, 100.0%	194, 100.0%	450, 100.0%

In Table 7. political ideology, defined as having an ideology and not having an ideology, is compared to community outreach, defined by the participation or non-participation in any of the three activities. Respondents were considered to not have an ideology if they responded “I don’t know” and respondents were considered to have an ideology if they responded

“conservative, moderate leaning conservative, moderate, moderate leaning liberal, or liberal.”

Respondents with no ideology are observed to participate in significantly less community outreach than those with a political ideology. The two-tailed P value is less than 0.0001, making the results extremely statistically significant. 911 respondents were eligible for this analysis.

Table 7.		Political Ideology		
		No Ideology	Has Ideology	Total
Participation in Any Activity	Non-Participation	98, 89.1%	489, 61.0%	587, 64.4%
	Participation	12, 10.9%	312, 39.0%	324, 35.6%
	Total	110, 100.0%	801, 100.0%	911, 100.0%

Discussion:

No significant difference is found between any of the political ideologies in their participation in community outreach on the whole. Throughout the results, conservatives and liberals are seen to have very similar responses. The only significant difference in results between the two groups was that conservatives were significantly more likely to participate in outreach organizations than liberals. Moderates leaning conservative and moderates leaning liberal also gave very similar responses to not only each other but to conservatives and liberals as well. Moderates were seen to participate in less community outreach than any of the other ideologies, but none of these results were statistically significant.

While a difference was not found between the ideologies, a significant difference was observed between those with an ideology and those without an ideology. Respondents who responded “I don’t know” participated in significantly less community outreach than any of the other groups. These results show that young people who do not associate themselves with a political ideology are less likely to participate in community outreach and that by just associating

with a political ideology, one is more likely to have participated in community outreach. These results were extremely statistically significant, with a two-tailed P value of less than 0.0001.

Reasons for this may be that having a political ideology causes one to participate in community outreach, that participating in community outreach causes one to develop a political ideology, or that another factor causes having a political ideology and participating in community outreach to correspond with each other. To determine the nature and causation of this relationship more studies will be necessary.

Conclusion:

The survey served as an adequate means for assessing whether there is a relationship between political ideology and participation in community outreach for young people. Although no difference was observed between ideologies, a significant trend was observed for respondents who did not associate with a political ideology. While this significant correlation was observed, the study was not adequate for determining the specific nature of the relationship. All that can be assumed is that those who associate with a political ideology are more likely to have participated in community outreach. There is no information from the study that will suggest why this is the case. To determine the reasons behind the relationship, additional questions would have been necessary. Questions that would provide insight into the reasons for the relationship would determine when the respondents first participated in community outreach and when the respondents first associated themselves with a political ideology. By determining these events, it would provide information on whether respondents participated in community outreach and then developed a political ideology or if respondents developed a political ideology and then participated in community outreach. In addition, other background information should be

assessed to see if there is another factor causing those with political ideologies to also participate in community outreach. The source of causation may then be able to be identified after additional studies with these types of questions.

As described earlier, a survey of young people was appropriate for this hypothesis because young people tend to have more opportunity to participate in community outreach than older people who have less flexibility in their lives. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to pose the same questions to a sample representing the entire adult population. This is especially true, because it is likely that older people will be less likely to respond “I don’t know” to a political ideology question because they have had longer to develop their own opinions and beliefs. With less respondents who are unsure of their political ideology, more differences between political ideologies and participation in community outreach may appear.

Overall, the survey worked well for identifying a relationship between political ideology (or lack of one) and community outreach. The results were consistent and clearly displayed that political ideology has little or no effect on one’s participation in community outreach. In addition, having no political ideology was shown to be strongly associated with not participating in community outreach compared to those with political ideologies. The survey gave the means to identify this interesting correlation and provided a foundation for future studies assessing this relationship.