Perspectives on environment, climate, and renewable energy in the Mormon culture region

Shawn K. Olson
Utah State University
Department of Sociology, Social Work, & Anthropology

April 9, 2015
Graduate Student Symposium
Environmental issues are increasingly polarized along political party lines. (McCright, Xiao, and Dunlap 2014)

Past research has suggested that environmental beliefs are also related to religious affiliation.

Faith-based arguments in favor of environmental actions are becoming more prominent.
Religion & Environment

• Three ‘waves’ of research (Woodrum & Wolkomir 1997)
  1. 1st Wave: Casting blame on religion
     • Lynn White (1967): Judeo-Christianity at fault for ecological crisis
  2. 2nd Wave: Gathering empirical evidence
     • Simplistic measures, found evidence for White thesis
  3. 3rd Wave: Varied and contradictory results, alternate measures
     • Evidence in support for religious stewardship

The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis

Lynn White, Jr.

10 March 1967, Volume 155, Number 3767
Research on Mormon environmental views

- **Very understudied**
- Brehm & Eisenhauer (2006)
  - Surveyed 4 communities inside Mormon Culture Region
  - **Mormonism negatively related to environmental concern**
- Peterson & Liu (2008)
  - Teton Valley of western Wyoming
  - **Mormons least environmentally oriented**
- Hunter & Toney (2005)
  - Compared Mormons in Logan, UT, with national non-Mormon public
  - **Mormons show higher environmental orientation**
  - ....but less likely to exhibit pro-environmental behavior
Research Questions:

1. How is Mormonism, compared to other denominations, related to general environmental attitudes (using the New Environmental Paradigm scale), views about global warming, and support for renewable energy in the Intermountain West?

1. How much does religion account for these environmental views, compared with, socio-demographic variables, political ideology and local community context?
Methods

2014 community survey

- (n=906)
- 5 communities across Utah, Idaho, and Wyoming
- Drop-off, pick-up method
- Random sample, 250 households per community
- Response rates: 67% - 80%

- Analytic methods
  - 1. Test of difference: ANOVA
  - 2. Multivariate regression
Measurement

Dependent variables

1. **Environmental orientation (NEP)**
   - Latent construct: 10 items of New Environmental Paradigm (NEP) scale (Cronbach’s=0.843)

2. **Views on the seriousness of global warming**
   - Single-item ordinal variable (0-3)

3. **Support for Renewable Energy**
   - Latent construct: 3 survey questions indicating support (Cronbach’s=0.847)
   - Transformed into ordinal variable
Measurement

Predictors

- Religious affiliation
  - Mormon, Protestant, Catholic, None (reference)
- Political orientation
- Sociodemographics
  - Age
  - Education
  - Gender
- Communities
  - Milford, UT (reference)
  - Monticello, UT
  - Eastern Idaho Falls, ID
  - Rawlins, WY
  - Saratoga, WY
Five study Communities

- Milford, UT
- Monticello, UT
- Rawlins, WY
- Saratoga, WY
- Eastern Idaho Falls, ID
1st test: Analysis of variance; *two lowest groups circled

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Mormon Mean</th>
<th>Mormon SD</th>
<th>Catholic Mean</th>
<th>Catholic SD</th>
<th>Protestant Mean</th>
<th>Protestant SD</th>
<th>No affiliation Mean</th>
<th>No affiliation SD</th>
<th>ANOVA</th>
<th>Scheffe Post Hoc Test**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NEP</td>
<td>10 - 50</td>
<td>25.33</td>
<td>7.22</td>
<td>31.48</td>
<td>6.58</td>
<td>31.02</td>
<td>8.03</td>
<td>33.91</td>
<td>7.97</td>
<td>53.50</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seriousness of global warming</td>
<td>0 - 3</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>18.07</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support renewable energy</td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political orientation*</td>
<td>1 - 5</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>34.51</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Two lowest groups circled
Comparison: 3 regression models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mormon</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td>(-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td>(-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td>(-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political orientation</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>(+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td>(+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saratoga, WY</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>(N/A)</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td>(-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho Falls, ID</td>
<td>(N/A)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Variance explained

- NEP: 28.70%
- Views on seriousness of global warming: 11.50%
- Support for Renewable Energy: 9.10%
- Support for Renewable Energy with NEP & climate: 11.90%
Discussion

1. How is Mormonism, compared to other denominations, related to environmental attitudes?
   - Mormons have lowest overall environmental orientation, BUT
   - Mormons have higher support for renewable energy than other religions!!
   - Mormons are not that different from Protestants: general environmental orientation & climate change beliefs
   - Catholics and those of no religious affiliation are similar

2. How much does religion account for these environmental views?
   - It depends
     - NEP: strong association for all three religious groups, even when political orientation is controlled
   - Most consistent predictors are
     - Political orientation (liberal = +)
     - Gender (male = -)
   - Local community context matters in some cases
In conclusion, this research:

- Demonstrates that the religion-environment relationship is complex and additional ‘third wave’ research is needed to understand the varied and evolving environmental beliefs of religious individuals.

- Provides some support for Lynn White thesis.

- Shows that support for renewable energy is not related to environmental attitudes.

- Indicates potential areas where political environmental divisions may be bypassed if issues are framed carefully.
Thank you!

Shawn K. Olson
Utah State University
shawn.k.olson@usu.edu