

**Are Girls Checking Out?  
Gender and Political Socialization in Transitioning Democracies**

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## Abstract

Women in developed democracies have been found to be less interested and engaged in the political process than men. Studies have shown that this gender gap appears early in the life cycle, possibly as early as adolescence. Unfortunately, patterns of early political participation have not been given the same attention in research of developing democracies. In this study, we draw from data we collected in a pre- and posttest design in 6 Indonesian provinces in 2002-03 to explore gender differences among adolescents' political attitudes, skills and engagement. In contrast to the IEA and other studies, we find that girls are slightly more interested in politics, have participated more, and are more politically tolerant than boys. Civics instruction increased political participation among both boys and girls. Girls were found to have participated less at the pretest, but to increase their participation to higher levels at the posttest than those reported by boys.

### Why Are Low Levels of Participation a Problem?

Full political participation by all groups, including women, is important for several reasons. First, individuals benefit by developing skills that range from analyzing issue positions, to community organizing. Individuals learn how to identify and to pursue their own interests in the political arena. By coming into contact with other individuals, active citizens learn about diverse or oppositional interests. Because psychological benefits accrue to those who vote, volunteer or who are active in civic life, participation promotes a sense of connectedness to the polity and fosters a feeling of greater empowerment over elected officials. Schlozman, Verba and Brady (1995) point out that when more members of communities are active, it is easier to produce and to deliver good public policy of benefit to larger communities. Constituents who communicate their preferences enable public officials to respond. Groups, such as youth and women, that don't participate at the same levels as others, will miss out on the education gained through participation, as well as the public policy benefits. The benefits will flow to those whose voices are heard.

While participation patterns of youth and women have been studied extensively in advanced industrialized democracies, there is a dearth of research in emerging democracies. Indonesia has been classified as "industrial" democracy, where sex roles are arguably in the early stages of transition from an agrarian society to a postindustrial society, where researchers find the most egalitarian beliefs about gender roles (Norris and Inglehart 2003). The data presented will explore gender gaps among a large emerging political cohort, Indonesian adolescents. Indonesia is the most populous Muslim nation, but it has received scant attention from researchers.

### **Gender Gaps in Political Knowledge, Interest in Politics, Political Efficacy, and Participation**

Political knowledge varies across groups, with studies finding that women consistently score below men on knowledge tests (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, Garand, Guynan, Fournet 2005, Verba, Burns and Schlozman 1997). In their review of the literature, Mondak and Anderson

explore why the knowledge gap in political knowledge is about twice as large as gaps found in interest in politics and political efficacy among Americans (2004, 509). However, in this study the authors find that up to 50% of the gender gap in political knowledge stems from male respondents' reluctance to pick "don't know;" in reverse, females are ready to select "don't know" rather than guess. The authors don't deny the existence of a gender-based knowledge gap, but suggest that the measurement is flawed due to differing response patterns by gender.

While gender gaps in political knowledge among adults are found in most data, gender gaps in political knowledge are not as well established among younger cohorts. In some studies, however, gaps are visible. Studies of American youth, for instance, suggest that this gap is persisting, and that young women are both less politically knowledgeable and attentive to politics than are young men (Jenkins 2005). Among 15-25 year-olds, girls were significantly less knowledgeable, and there is a 7% point gap in the use of media to keep informed about political affairs (Jenkins 2005, 8). However, only about a quarter of all 15-25 year-olds attend regularly to politics and public affairs (8), so the author suggests that the bigger problem is less that of gender disparity than overall disengagement.

The IEA study contains cross-sectional data and includes respondents from 7 developing democracies. The data show that boys surpass girls in civic knowledge sometime between middle and high school. Only minor gender differences in civic knowledge were found among 14-year olds in the 28-nation IEA study (Torney Purta et al. 2001). Among adolescents, girls achieved about the same or slightly higher scores on knowledge tests. However, by upper-secondary school, males outperformed females on content knowledge by about two scale points. On the interpretive skills subscale, boys also scored on average of 2.3 scale points higher. Economic literacy was also more highly developed among boys and girls, and these effect sizes were larger than for either civic knowledge or skills (69-70).

Political interest is highly correlated with political knowledge: in the IEA study upper secondary elementary male students possessed a greater interest in politics than females (only in Chile did girls express more interest in politics). Youth in general have been found to be less interested in politics than older cohorts (Dalton 2006, Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006, Burns et al. 2001). Burns, Schlozman and Brady found that adolescent girls are more politically engaged when viable female candidates run for a major office (2001). Increases in political engagement by girls through female political role models appears to work when the public is attentive to media coverage that follows female candidates in competitive races, which is then reinforced through family discussions at home (Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006). The researchers find that girls will envision greater levels of future political activity when there are competitive female politicians who run for high profile political office in their district or country. Media coverage and the ensuing discussion may be essential, for in countries with gender quotas, there is no impact on political engagement by women at the mass level (Claibourn and Sapiro 2002). Gendered stereotypes about power, leadership, and legitimate authority (Sapiro 2003) among girls then, may be altered through parental discussions of women as leaders.

Adolescence is a malleable period for identity development, hence the desire by educators to foster efficacy and skills through civic education. However, even in industrialized democracies such as the U.S., Carole Hahn notes that:

“Women receive substantially less coverage than men, particularly in the civics textbooks. Furthermore, although the disparity between men and women in the political realm is noted, there is little discussion of the implications. Women are discussed more often in the history texts than in the civics texts, although comparatively few women are mentioned when compared to the number of men. Very few women of color are described in either the civics or history textbooks.” (1999)

Does this matter? As discussed, women and girls often know less about politics and are less interested. Further, girls have been found to possess lower levels of political efficacy (Bonneau and Bernstein 2005, Burns and Schlozman 1997, Craddock 2005, Soule 2003, Verba). However, in her review of the research in political psychology, Sapiro reminds us that the exclusion of women from governance has rarely been perceived as problematic (2003, 603). This is despite the finding that in all known societies, “gender has been the basis not just of differentiation but of inequality, especially in politics, largely because of women’s historical exclusion” (Sapiro 2003, 603).

There have been some studies that show that participation in civic education can narrow or even eliminate these gaps (Bonneau and Bernstein 2005), while other studies have shown that in some ways, boys benefit more from civic education (Finkel and Ernst 2001, Craddock 2005, Soule 2003). In the case of the Dominican Republic, Finkel found that males who belonged to two active groups benefited most from civics instruction (Finkel 2003). Finkel’s data accord with the resource model of political participation that suggests differences in education, income and employment patterns may account for many differences in political participation; those who belong to groups and who are enmeshed in connections through work are more likely to participate (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995).

In developed democracies, political efficacy and age have been shown to predict political participation (Dalton 2006). Young males are also more likely to protest and to engage in other radical acts (Dalton 2006, Hooghe and Stolle 2004), while girls are more likely to engage in social movement activities. Hooghe and Stolle found that the number of topics discussed in civics class had a strong positive effect on conventional and social movement participation, but a negative effect on radical participation (2004, 19). While young women seem to prefer conventional and social political participation, the gaps that are present among adults are not found, leading the authors to ask, “Why do adult women stop doing the things they intended to do when they were adolescent girls?” (Hooghe and Stolle 2004,19).

Although in many industrialized countries, women now vote at the same or higher rates as men, in the U.S. they have been found to be less likely to discuss politics, contribute to campaigns, to contact public officials, and to join a political organization (Burns, Schlozman and Brady 2001). Among young American adults, both men and women cite being not interested in politics as the first reason for not voting, but then the answers differ; young women say that they’re “not informed enough to make a decision,” followed by “I don’t have time;” young men say, “I dislike politics and government,” and “it’s hard to get reliable information about the candidates” (Jenkins 2005, 10). Because research on political participation by gender has not yet been widely

conducted across emerging democracies, we do not yet know if similar patterns hold, or whether demands of the family, or concerns about safety may exert greater effects on women's participation in emerging democracies. The data I will present in the next section provide a glimpse of youths' political participation pattern in the Republic of Indonesia.

### The Republic of Indonesia

Indonesia is a developing democracy with a large population (245,452,739 estimated as of July 2006.). It is composed of over 300 distinct ethnic groups that speak over 350 languages (Wurm and Hattori 1981). There are five officially sanctioned religions: Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Although Islam is the predominant religion (88% of the population), massive areas of the country have majorities consisting of those practicing minority faiths (i.e., Papuan Christians).

In 2004, Indonesians held their second democratic presidential election, which resulted in the electoral defeat of Indonesia's first female president, Megawati Sukarnoputri. This was only the second election since the 30-year Suharto dictatorship ended eight years ago. However, corruption continues to be endemic; in 2002 Indonesia was ranked 96<sup>th</sup> of 102 countries on a scale measuring corruption (Asian Development Bank 2002). And although the rate of adult illiteracy is below 15%, Indonesia has one of the lowest rates of spending (per capita as a percentage of GNP) on education in the region (Unesco 2002).

For the past 55 years, the Indonesian government has utilized civic education as an explicit tool to promote national unity (along with the Indonesian military, which has been actively engaged in suppression of rebel groups and independence movements). The following five principles (termed Pancasila) are taught to youth from first grade through the university:

1. A belief in the one and only god
2. A just and civilized humanity
3. The unity of Indonesia
4. Democracy led by the wisdom arising out of deliberations among representatives
5. Social justice for all

Studying these ideals has not necessarily prepared Indonesians with knowledge to choose candidates that represent their interests or the skills to hold elected officials accountable (Asia Foundation, 2003). As power devolves to provinces and to local political institutions, citizens have greater need to sharpen their political skills to advance their interests. Education is rapidly decentralizing as well, to the point now where the central government offers guidelines for civics instruction that consist of modified standards printed in booklets by the federal ministry and is then distributed to teachers through regional ministries. Current standards reflect new civic curricula such as the program analyzed here, *Kami Bangsa Indonesia* ("I am a Citizen of Indonesia," adapted from *We the People: Project Citizen*). The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funded this civic education initiative, as well as the study presented here.

*"Kami Bangsa Indonesia,"* hereafter referred to as *Project Citizen*, teaches students how to monitor and influence public policy. Students work collaboratively to identify, research, and propose a solution to a problem that can be addressed by local political institutions. Research has

shown that a focus on local issues of concern to students is likely to increase student learning (Niemi and Junn, 1998, 153). Students proposed public policy solutions on issues ranging from preventing illegal drug use to curbing mass fights by students.

*Project Citizen* has been implemented in 18 provinces, and the study was conducted in seven diverse provinces: Sumatra Utara, Sumatra Barat, Lampung, Jakarta DKI, Jawa Barat, Kalimantan Selatan, and Sulawesi Utara. Over 330,000 students at more than 3,500 schools have used the curricula. The Director of the Indonesian Center for Civic Education is currently working with Nahdatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, the world's first and second largest Islamic organizations to get *Project Citizen* into program into pesantren and madrasah schools.

Prior to conducting the survey, I visited Indonesia and interviewed teachers and school principals to develop a better understanding of their conceptions of civic education as well as to pilot test the questionnaires. The least-liked group approach (Gibson 1992) is used to measure political tolerance, which requires utilizing a range of threatening to nonthreatening groups. I found seemingly universal dislike for atheists, so I created a special battery to capture attitudes toward atheists' participation. Recall that Pancasila authorizes five religions —atheism is not an option—and that, historically, atheists were associated with communists, another reviled group.

## **Results**

### **A. Research Design**

In 2002-03, I surveyed 1,435 middle school students. The survey design incorporated pre- and post-test surveys, with equivalent control groups at each school. Of adolescents surveyed, 915 participated in *Project Citizen* and 520 were in an equivalent control group. The questionnaires were administered at the start of the school year and at the end of the course. Students were matched time one to time two, permitting me to analyze gains made by individuals.

### **B. Student Attributes**

Slightly more girls, 53% (N=767) than boys (N=667) were surveyed. Students were on average, 14.5 years of age. They classified themselves into eighty-four different ethnic groups (including some from “mixed” marriages). Sixty-seven percent of the sample were Muslim, 10% were Catholic, and 21% were Christian Protestant (less than 4% were Hindu or Buddhist). Socioeconomic status (SES), measured by mother's and father's occupation plus parents' level of education, was slightly higher among students in the control group. Overall, 26% of respondents were ranked as Low SES, 40% as Middle SES and 34% as High SES.

### **C. Statistical Procedures: Factor Analysis and Repeated Measures MANCOVA.**

The survey questionnaire, which consisted of 38 questions, was reduced to seven factors (through principal axis factoring using varimax rotation). The seven factors are entitled: political participation, political interest, political skills, political attentiveness, political tolerance of atheists, political tolerance toward other groups, and government responsiveness. See Appendix 1 for a full list to the questions and the reliability coefficients. Political knowledge questions were administered in the posttest only.

Multiple Analysis of Covariance, MANCOVA, was used to test for the hypotheses. MANCOVA allows us in measure differences on the 7 civic skills, attitudes and behaviors after controlling for

socioeconomic status, age, religion and parents' education. MANCOVA is a test of mean differences when there is more than one independent variable with multiple dependent variables, and the result shave the potential of showing two significant main effects and one interaction effect.

**D. Outcomes**

In my study, only 8 political knowledge items were tested. A simple T-Test showed gender differences in political knowledge on only two items, with boys scoring higher on one, and girls on another. These questions were only included on the posttest, so we cannot measure differences over time. While no significant gender differences were found, it will be interesting to see if Indonesia is included in the next IEA study. A more comprehensive test will aid in the analysis of gender-based knowledge differences

Next, Table 1 shows that there is a significant main effect of gender (F for Wilks lambda = 6.532 with 7 and 1383 df;  $p < .000$ ). Mean scores on the combined seven dependent variables differ for girls and boys, or another way of putting it, factor scores may be combined to reliably separate girls from boys.

**Table 1: Multivariate Tests**

Effect			Value	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Between Subjects	Gender	Wilks' Lambda	.968	6.531 (1, 1383)	.000	.032
Within Subjects	Gender Pre/Post	Wilks' Lambda	.988	2.382 (2, 1383)	.020	.012

The gender effect accounts for only about 3% of the variability in the combined dependent variable. There is also a significant pre-post gender effect (F for Wilks lambda = 2.38 with 7 and 1383 df;  $p < .02$ ). The effect size is smaller only 1.2% of the variance is accounted for by gender, but indicates that the means for pre versus post on several of the dependent measures (political participation and government responsiveness) are different for girls than for boys. These results suggest that it is appropriate to proceed with univariate statistics, provided we increase the strictness of the probability level to  $p < .01$  (to avoid Type I errors). Table 1 displays the three attitudes that differ by gender.

**Table 2: Test of Between Subjects Affects: Univariate ANOVA**

Source	Measure	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Gender	Political Interest	7.178	1	7.178	10.742	.001	.008
	Tolerance of Atheists	85.668	1	85.668	9.057	.003	.006
	Tolerance: General	392.109	1	392.109	29.269	.000	.021

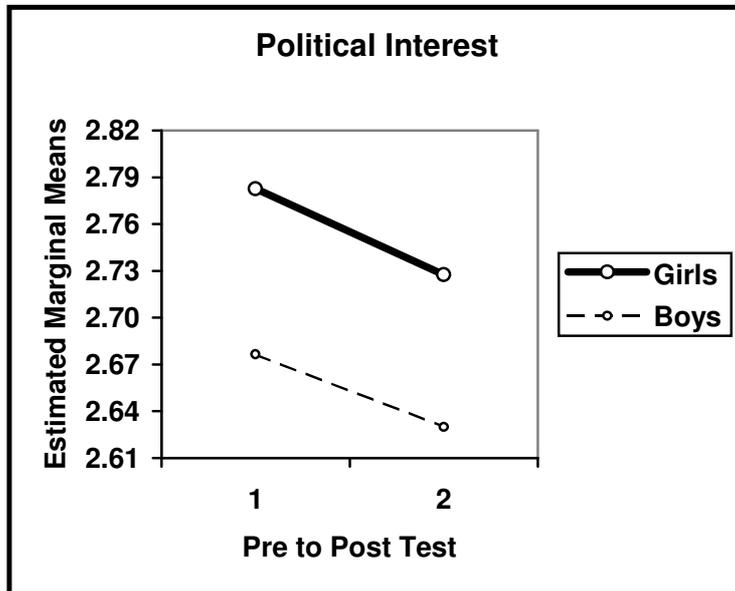
**Table 3: Mean Differences**

Measure	Gender	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Political Interest	boys	2.653	.023	2.609	2.698
	girls	2.755	.021	2.714	2.797
Tolerance of Atheists	boys	7.544	.086	7.376	7.712
	girls	7.896	.080	7.740	8.052
Tolerance: General	boys	19.199	.102	18.999	19.399
	girls	19.952	.095	19.766	20.138

Girls possess higher levels of Political Interest, higher Tolerance of Atheists, and higher Tolerance of Groups. Further, for measures of Political Participation and Government Responsiveness, girls began at lower levels or about the same as boys, then scored higher when tested again later. Gender differences were not found for Political Skills or Political Attentiveness.

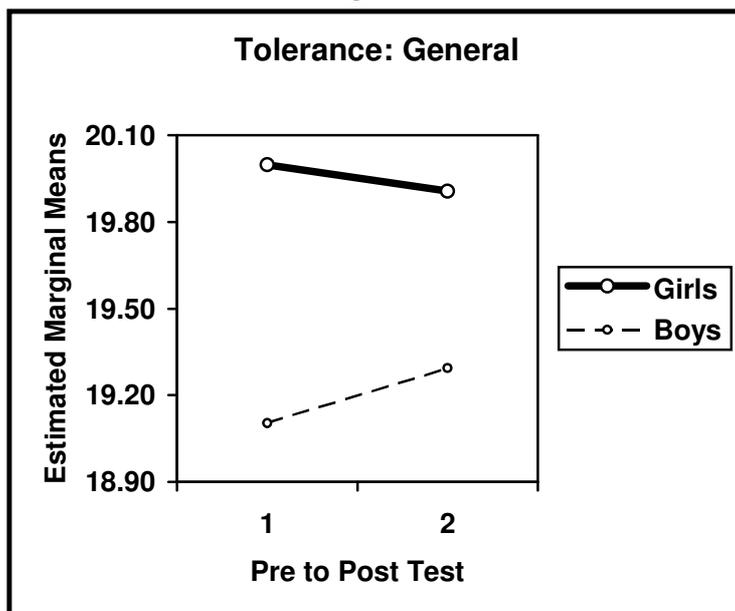
Political Interest consists of a question that directly asks about interest in politics and public affairs. Two questions measuring political efficacy, whether the respondents felt ready to take part in political and public life and whether they felt they possessed a good understanding about political issues facing Indonesia, also load on this factor. The importance of following the media and, how likely would you be to vote in the next election if given the opportunity are the final measures. Political interest is higher for females on both the pre and post-test than for males. The pattern whereby interest in politics declines slightly for both groups is puzzling; it may be indicative of the slide from adolescence into teenage-hood, when other issues may assume greater importance.

Figure 1



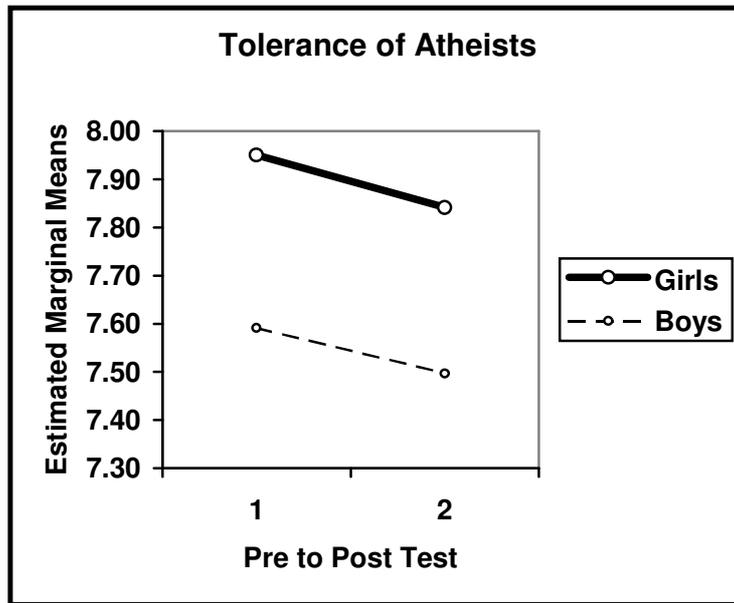
The least-like group approach was taken to measure political tolerance toward groups. Atheists stood out as a least-like group and the distribution of responses on the index is informative, see Figure 2. Respondents are divided in their willingness to allow atheists to convey their opinions to the community, to vote, or to take part in peaceful demonstrations. Girls are more permissive toward a wide range of other groups participating in the political process as well. These groups include student groups, fundamentalist Christian groups, ethnic Chinese, human rights groups, Free Aceh Separatist movement (GAM), environmentalists, and fundamentalist Muslim groups. In data not presented here, I found similar results for teachers and principals.

Figure 2



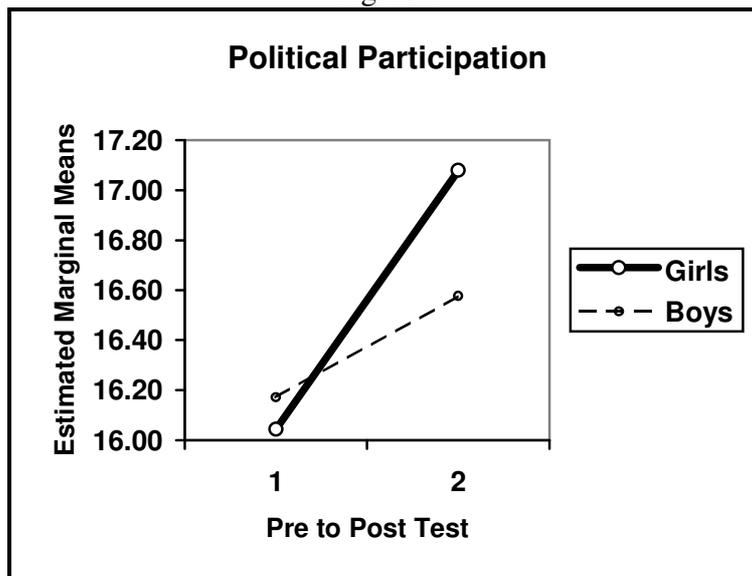
Girls however, are slightly more tolerant of atheists than boys. Figure 3 graphs the means scores.

Figure 3



Measures contained in the factor Political Participation range from meeting with government officials to protesting. Overall, students who participated in *Project Citizen* increased their political participation. There were no differences by gender from participating in *Project Citizen*. However there was a two-way interaction by gender, whereby girls, who participated less than boys at the outset of the school year, had higher mean scores of political participation than boys at the posttest.

Figure 4



Given the religious differences among the students, we wondered whether there were gender by religious differences for political participation. Using only pretest scores, which we thought would be the least contaminated, we ran multivariate tests, and reaffirmed gender differences on political interest, tolerance toward atheists, and tolerance toward other groups. There are also existing religious differences on political actions, political interest, social engagement, tolerance toward atheists, and attitudes toward government. With respect to political actions, Protestants are high and Catholics are low (with Muslims right in the middle). With respect to political interest, Muslims and Catholics are about the same, and express less interest than Protestants. Religious by gender differences are displayed in Figure 5. There were only two indices with religious by gender differences: Political Participation and Government Responsiveness. Among the majority group, Muslim boys participate more than girls. Among Catholics, girls report greater levels of political participation, at about the same levels as Muslim girls. Protestant girls report the highest levels of political participation. Recall that all students who participate in Project Citizen increase the number of participatory acts, and that the differences displayed here are found at the outset of the program. Figure 5 displays the data by religious group (pretest scores only).

Figure 5

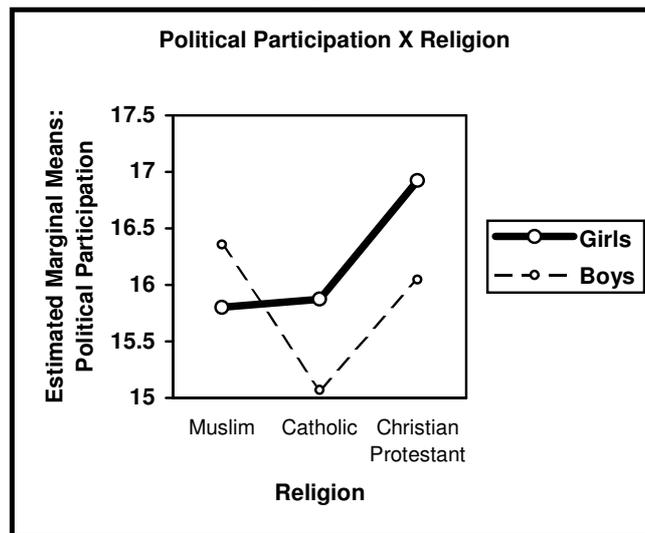
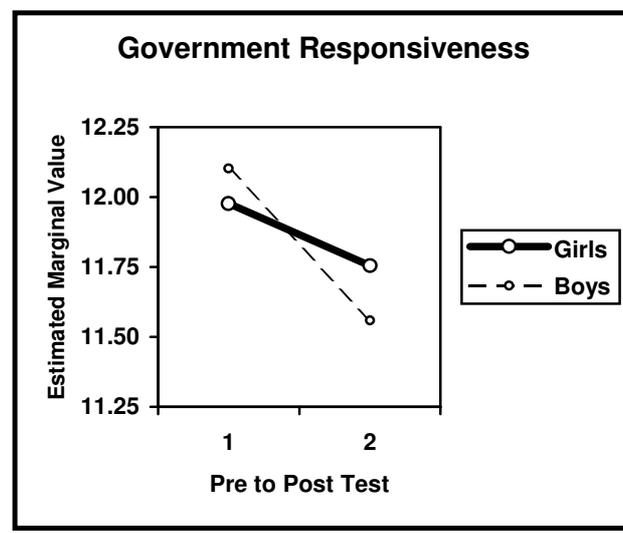


Figure 6 illustrates the pre- and posttest means for girls and boys on the measure termed Government Responsiveness. In a similar pattern to other attitudes, scores for both groups decline. However, boys become less likely to agree that: government is doing its best to find out what people want, that officials care about public opinion, or that leaders listen when citizens organize to demand change. For religious by gender differences, similar to political participation, Muslim boys believe that government is more responsive than Muslim girls. Minority Catholic boys and Catholic girls both have low factor scores. Among minority Protestants, girls have more favorable attitudes than boys, with girls scoring at about the same level as Muslim boys.

Figure 6



### Discussion

Evaluating gender differences in political participation has not yet been done systematically, especially in developing countries (UN Report 2004). What is widely reported is that an Islamic religious heritage is a “powerful barrier to gender equality” (Inglehart and Norris 2003). The dearth of research in developing democracies prevents us from identifying causal variables for gender differences that affect participation cross-nationally. For instance, in this study, while there were some religious differences, there were only religious by gender differences on two measures: political participation and government responsiveness. While Muslim boys scored slightly higher on these two measures than Muslim girls, the bigger story *is that they did not differ on five other measures*. Muslim boys were not more interested in politics, they did not possess more political skills, they were not more attentive to politics, nor were they more politically tolerant. And, where gender differences were found, girls were more politically engaged; they expressed greater interest in politics across a variety of measures and had participated in more political acts.

Further, in a similar pattern to IEA data, which included developing nations as well, girls were found to be more politically tolerant of a wide variety of groups (Torney-Purta, J. R. Lehmann,

H. Oswald and W. Schulz 2001). Girls in the IEA study expressed greater support for immigrant and women's rights than boys. In an earlier study, I also found higher levels of political tolerance among Bosnian adolescent females (Soule 2003). In his study of Ukrainian adolescents, Craddock found that girls were more sensitive to the governments' responsibility to secure political equality and to immigrant rights to keep their own language (2005). Norris and Inglehart argue that as nations modernize, women become more left-leaning (2003). While the measures are too few to state that this pattern is emerging with any degree of confidence, the data suggest that young women are more supportive of political rights of minority groups. Is this because they sympathize with the non-dominant groups? Are cohorts in some emerging democracies replicating the pattern of liberal tendencies? This would be particularly interesting in the majority-Islamic nation of Indonesia.

In a recent study of Latvian, Lithuanian, and Ukrainian adolescents, no significant political knowledge by gender differences were found (Craddock 2005, Vontz et al. 2000). We also found no significant gender differences in levels of political knowledge among 14-year old Indonesian youth in the data we will present here. Several hypotheses come to mind; adolescents of both genders possess the same levels of political knowledge, but we can expect gaps to open later in the life-cycle. The IEA study shows that teenage boys know more about politics than teenage girls, for instance. Or it may be that this cohort will be different; women will continue on knowledge parity with men.

Most studies of adults, at least in the U.S., find that males express greater interest in politics than females. At this early stage in their life-cycle where time and resources may be relatively equal, girls express even greater interest in politics than boys. During the course of this study, the president of Indonesia was a woman, which may have stimulated girls to be more interested in politics (see Campbell and Wollbrecht 2006). We were unable to obtain statistics from this past election that could be analyzed by gender, which might have lent support to the argument that women in office stimulates greater interest or activity by women in the electorate. This is reflective of a wider problem, namely of the limited degree to which national statistics in emerging democracies capture gender differences or gender-related issues (World Bank 2006).

In addition to formal instruction, what forces of socialization are at work in Indonesia? Do peers, parents, and media socialize young women into thinking that politics is a "man's game?" Jenkins hypothesized that U.S. media may portray politics as a never-ending conflict, and in their desire to avoid conflict, young women may focus on "more immediate, personal, and consensual concerns. Regardless of whether politics is accurately reflected in cultural and media discourse, its representation may alienate young women" (2005, 3). We do not know what kind of peer pressure is exerted upon young women, or who they perceive as role models. For example, one U.S. case study found that popularity for adolescent girls rides upon being smart, but not displaying that publicly (Nancy Niemi 2005). If this is true, being a "popular" girl may ultimately be incompatible with taking and defending political positions. However, according to some researchers, Indonesia has a tradition of strong women and women leaders (Sunindyo 1998). "During the revolutionary armed struggle, the nation was portrayed as a suffering feminine mother who was owned, controlled and cruelly exploited by foreign power"(Sunindyo 1998).

In conclusion, gaps in political knowledge, interest, and participation would be better understood through cross-national research. This study offers a snapshot of religiously and ethnically diverse Indonesian adolescents. Few gender differences were found, with the exceptions that girls scored slightly higher on measures of political interest, participation, and tolerance. Tests of gender by religious differences revealed that Muslim boys were slightly more participatory and expressed a greater sense that government would respond to their needs than Muslim girls, but there were no differences between Muslim girls and boys on the other five factors mentioned here. These data from Indonesia, the most populous Muslim nation, are mirroring data gathered from the U.S. and other advanced industrialized democracies, which suggest that gender is playing less of a significant role in predicting patterns of political participation among emerging political cohorts (Dalton 2006, Jenkins 2005). Given the emphasis on democracy building in Muslim nations, more priority should be given to the study of whether women participate fully and effectively in the public sphere. To accurately ascertain whether Muslim women's rights are being circumvented, more empirical research on patterns of political participation is necessary.

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