

## ABSTRACT

Cultivating the Common Good: Civic Life and Religious Contexts in American Society

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Social scientists have long recognized a positive link between religion and civic life in the United States. Americans who attend religious services more frequently, who pray more often, and who are more involved in the life of a congregation tend to be more civically engaged than their non-religious counterparts. However, the effects that religion has on civic engagement have been conceptualized primarily at the individual level in previous studies. Despite the contextual nature of religion, and the utility that social contexts have been shown to have for predicting individual behavior, relatively few studies have explored the impact that social and religious contexts have on civic involvement. Drawing on individual, congregational, and community level datasets, the four studies included in this project demonstrate different ways that religious contexts influence measures of civic engagement. Research findings suggest that the religious composition of a geographic area affects the size of the local nonprofit social service sector and that social and ethnic diversity have a positive impact on the community activity of local congregations. Furthermore, findings indicate that cultural and structural characteristics of a congregation affect the likelihood that individual attenders will be

civically engaged and that various aspects of conservative religiosity affect the likelihood of community volunteering in different ways. Each of these findings is discussed in detail, and implications and suggestions for future research are proposed.

Cultivating the Common Good: Civic Life and Religious Contexts in American Society

by

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A Dissertation

Approved by the Department of Sociology

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree  
of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank all the members of my dissertation committee for their guidance and their input during the research and writing of this project. I am especially grateful to Dr. Chris Bader for his support throughout my graduate school career and for encouraging me to select a research topic about which I care so deeply. I am also grateful to Cynthia Woolever, Deborah Bruce, and the staff at the Research Services Office of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) for all of their assistance in my work with the U.S. Congregational Life Survey. Finally, I owe more thanks than I can ever acknowledge to my wife, Lauren, who has been a source of encouragement and strength throughout this journey. She has put up with long nights, short weekends, and working vacations for far too long. I am truly grateful.

## DEDICATION

For Lauren

For always loving, believing, and caring

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

#### *Civic Life and Religion in the United States*

Throughout much of its history, the United States has enjoyed high levels of both civic and religious participation (Almond & Verba, 1963; Finke & Stark, 2005; Skocpol, 1999b). International survey data reveal that Americans tend to be more engaged in their communities and in civic life than citizens of many other industrialized nations (Almond & Verba, 1963; Curtis, Grabb, & Baer, 1992; Curtis, Baer, & Grabb, 2001; Schofer & Fourcade-Gourinchas, 2001; Wuthnow, 1991b). Each year more than a quarter of American adults volunteer for community organizations such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters, the Salvation Army, and Habitat for Humanity (Grimm, Cramer, Dietz, Shelton, Dote, Manuel, & Jennings, 2007; Wing, Pollak, & Blackwood, 2008). And in 2008, approximately 62 percent of the voting eligible population in the U.S. participated in local and national elections (Mooney, 2008). In addition, national survey data suggest that as many as 40 percent of adults in the U.S. attend religious services on a weekly basis (Gallup & Lindsay, 1999; Greeley, 1989; Princeton Religion Research Center, 2002).<sup>1</sup> This is very high compared to religious attendance in other industrialized nations such as France, Germany, and Great Britain (Iannaccone, 2003; Stark & Iannaccone, 1994).

Such high levels of both civic and religious activity have led social observers, as far back as Alexis de Tocqueville (1969 [1840]), to ask if these two features of American

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<sup>1</sup> Hadaway, Marler, and Chaves (1993) and Hadaway and Marler (2005) argue that the percentage of Americans who attend religious services weekly is closer to 22 percent.

life may be related (Baltzell, 1979; Hall, 2005; Putnam, 2000; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). And a growing body of sociological research suggests that religion does have an impact on civic activity in the U.S. (Becker & Dhingra, 2001; Beyerlein & Hipp, 2006; Park & Smith, 2000; Wuthnow, 1999). Americans who are active in the life of a local congregation are more likely to vote, volunteer, join a civic organization, and give to charitable causes than those who are not (Beyerlein & Hipp, 2006; Cassel, 1999; Greeley, 1997; Hodgkinson & Weitzman, 1996). In addition, participation in religious activities such as prayer and meditation is also positively related to civic engagement (Loveland, Sikkink, Myers, & Radcliff, 2005).

Yet, despite a robust link between religion and civic participation, many scholars have grown concerned about declining levels of civic activity in the U.S. in recent years (Putnam, 2000; Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999). In his best-selling book, *Bowling Alone*, political scientist Robert Putnam (2000) presents a wealth of data indicating that Americans are less engaged in community life today than they were a generation or two ago. And sociologist Robert Wuthnow (1999) has compiled survey data suggesting that the positive relationship between religion and civic participation may be weakening as those religious groups most likely to foster civic engagement (i.e., mainline and liberal Protestantism) experience membership decline and other forms of religion less conducive to civic engagement (i.e., evangelical and conservative Protestantism) experience growth (pp. 331-341). Under the scenario suggested by Wuthnow (1999), overall religious participation rates in the U.S. may remain stable or even climb in the future, while the impact that participation has on civic life may decrease.

These findings from Putnam (2000) and Wuthnow (1999) remind us that the relationship between religion and civic life in the U.S. is complex and that church participation is not the only aspect of religion likely to influence civic engagement. The type of religion that someone espouses, the type of congregation that they attend, the growth rates of religious groups in the U.S., and the religious composition of a geographic area may all have important effects on local civic life. Therefore, one aspect of American religion that I believe should be examined more closely is the influence that different religious contexts have on individual, group, and community measures of civic engagement.

### *Social Contexts and Human Behavior*

One of the many contributions that sociology has made to the study of human behavior is the recognition that social contexts matter. Social environments ranging from the family to the nation can have a significant effect on individuals' and groups' attitudes and behavior (Billy, Brewster, & Grady, 1994; Huckfeldt, 1979; Ku, Sonenstein, & Pleck, 1993; Oberwittler, 2004; Moore & Vanneman, 2003). Indeed, the importance of social context has long been a central tenet of the sociological perspective. Though the emphases of their work differ significantly, both Emile Durkheim (1951 [1897]) and Max Weber (2002 [1904]) recognized this and highlighted the effects that contexts have on the behavior of individuals, groups, and societies. Moreover, some of their most important works deal with the influence that religious contexts have on social outcomes. In his groundbreaking study of suicide, Durkheim (1951 [1897], pp. 152-170) discovered that the religious composition of European nations was related to their rates of suicide. He found that individuals in Catholic nations were less likely to commit suicide than those in

Protestant nations, and he theorized that this was the result of differences in the social cohesiveness of Protestant and Catholic societies. In addition, Max Weber (2002 [1904]), in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, argues compellingly that certain historical and religious contexts have been responsible for the success of capitalism in some parts of the West (Weber, 2002 [1904], p. 18-19).

More contemporary studies also highlight the power that social contexts have to shape individual and group behavior. Researchers have studied the effects that contexts such as schools, neighborhoods, and communities have on outcomes measuring delinquency, educational attainment, political involvement, and sexual activity (Brewster, Billy, & Grady, 1993; Oberwittler, 2004; Sun 1999). Furthermore, some researchers have begun to explore the effects that religious contexts have on such behavior. For instance, proponents of the “moral communities” perspective have argued that the religious makeup of a geographic area has a significant effect on the power of individual religiosity to deter delinquent behavior (Stark, Kent, & Doyle, 1982). And political scientists have shown that congregational contexts can influence individuals’ political attitudes and choices (Djupe & Grant, 2001; Wald, Owen, & Hill, 1988).

Clearly, the causal mechanisms underlying the relationships between the contexts and the social outcomes listed above may be debated. In contextual studies, as in all areas of social research, it is difficult to determine causality with a high degree of certainty. Nevertheless, these findings support the notion that religious contexts may have a significant impact on individual and group civic behavior.

## *Research Agenda*

In the following chapters, I seek to contribute to our understanding of the ways that religion affects civic life in the U.S. Furthermore, I hope to draw attention to the utility that different characteristics of religious contexts (e.g., the religious composition of a community, the socio-demographic makeup of a congregation, the beliefs and practices of a religious group) can have for predicting civic engagement. I attempt to do so by presenting the findings of four independent research studies. Each of the chapters that follow comprises an individual study seeking to answer a particular research question or testing a series of hypotheses. Each chapter draws on different theoretical literatures, utilizes a separate dataset, and contains analyses that result in findings not directly related to the other three chapters. However, it is my intention that these chapters, taken together, will also help us begin to answer the broader research question:

*Q: In what ways do religious contexts influence civic life in the U.S.?*

While findings from the individual studies included here cannot answer this question in full, they do provide important empirical evidence that religious contexts affect individual, organizational, and community level measures of civic engagement. Furthermore, the findings that emerge from these studies suggest directions for future research in the area of religion and civic life. I will return to these issues in the concluding chapter. However, I turn now to a description of the chapters that follow.

In chapter two, I explore the effects that larger religious environments have on nonprofit social service sectors. Nonprofit organizations are significant for civic life in the U.S. because they represent an important way that Americans have sought to meet individual, family, and community needs at the local level throughout history. Rather

than relying solely on the state or the private sector to meet their needs, U.S. citizens have often joined together to established independent nonprofit service organizations. Furthermore, religious groups have played an important role in the establishment of many of these entities. Yet, few studies have examined the ways that the religious composition of an area may be related to the size of its nonprofit sector. Utilizing a series of spatial regression models, I discover that local religious environments tend to be related to county nonprofit social service rates, with the presence of mainline Protestantism and Roman Catholicism having a particularly strong effect.

In chapter three, I explore the effects that social diversity at organization and community levels is likely to have on the community service activities of local congregations. Recently, Robert Putnam (2007) has argued that living in more diverse contexts is likely to deter individuals from becoming more civically engaged. I suggest, however, that social diversity creates a unique opportunity, within a religious congregation, for the development of bridging social ties that may increase organizational capacity for community involvement. Drawing on a recent congregational dataset, I construct a series of multivariate regression models to examine the effects that community and congregational diversity have on the civic behavior of local congregations. Findings from my analyses indicate that diverse social contexts tend to increase the number of congregational service programs provided to the community.

In chapter four, I examine the relationship between congregational contexts and individual civic behavior. Most religious groups hold that serving the wider community is an important part of their mission. It is not evident, however, that a congregation's commitment to the community translates into a civically engaged membership. I utilize a



recent national congregational dataset to examine whether characteristics of local congregations affect their members' involvement in the community. My findings suggest that a congregation's commitment to the community, its size, and its level of strictness all have significant effects on individual civic behavior. Moreover, these effects vary by religious tradition.

Finally, in chapter five, I explore the effects that aspects of conservative religiosity have on community volunteering. Previous studies suggest that members of conservative religious groups tend to be less active in community life than members of other traditions (Wuthnow, 1999). However, due to a lack of data on the religious beliefs and practices of volunteers, researchers have not been able to examine which aspects of conservative religious affiliation are most likely to affect community volunteerism. Drawing on data from a recent national survey, I examine the influence that various measures of religiosity have on the likelihood that individuals will volunteer in their community. My findings suggest that some factors associated with conservative religion constrain volunteer behavior while others actually increase it. These findings paint a more comprehensive picture of the way that conservative religious contexts are likely to impact civic engagement than previous studies have been able to do.

In the concluding chapter, I review key findings from these four studies and suggest some of the implications that my findings have for our understanding of the relationship between religion and civic life in the U.S. I also suggest several directions for future research in this area.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Religious Environments and the Distribution of Nonprofit Social Services

#### *Introduction*

After visiting the United States for the first time in 1831, French political theorist Alexis de Tocqueville observed that, “Americans of all ages, all stations in life, and all types of disposition are forever forming associations” (1969 [1840], p. 513). He marveled at Americans’ propensity for coming together in voluntary groups to accomplish civic tasks such as the founding of schools, libraries, and hospitals, and supporting various social and political causes (Tocqueville, 1969 [1840]). Over the years, other observers have also noted Americans’ unique penchant for collective civic action, especially when faced with common needs not addressed by government or the private sector (Anheier, 2004; Hall, 2006; Hammack, 2002; Putnam, 2000; Sampson, McAdam, MacIndoe, & Weffer-Elizondo, 2005; Skocpol, 1999b; Skocpol, Ganz, & Munson, 2000). Indeed, this tendency towards voluntarism is one of the hallmarks of civil society in the U.S. (O’Connell, 1999; Putnam, 2000).

Much has changed in American communities since Tocqueville’s time. However, the spirit of voluntarism that he encountered continues to exist in today’s nonprofit and voluntary sector, where individual citizens and privately funded organizations still come together to achieve common goals (Monsma, 1996). This unique sector of American life, lying outside the realms of both government and the marketplace, is comprised of organizations ranging from traditional civic groups and social service agencies to nonprofit schools, hospitals, and even prisons (Wing et al., 2008). Moreover, this sector

has become the focus of much study in recent years (Bielefeld, 2000; Brooks, 2005; Corbin, 1999; DiMaggio & Anheier, 1990; Grønbjerg & Paarlberg, 2001; Monsma, 1996, 2004; Powell & Steinberg, 2006; Salamon, 2003; Sampson et al., 2005; Wuthnow & Hodgkinson, 1990; Wuthnow, 2004).

Researchers have examined the nonprofit sector's size and growth, its relationship to other parts of the economy, and its ability to compete with government and for-profit organizations (DiMaggio & Anheier, 1990; Powell & Steinberg, 2006; Salamon, 2003; Weisbrod, 1988). They have also examined the many contributions that this sector makes to local communities through the provision of services in areas such as education, health care, and social welfare (Salamon, 2003; Wing et al., 2008). And some scholars have begun to explore the less tangible contributions made by nonprofit organizations such as the enhancement of community social capital (Monsma, 1996; Sampson et al., 2005; Salamon, Haddock, Sokolowski, & Tice, 2007; Wuthnow & Hodgkinson, 1990; Wuthnow, 1998; Lockhart, 2005). All of these findings suggest that a robust nonprofit sector can be a valuable resource for a community and represents an important component of civil society in the U.S. (Anheier, 2004; Salamon & Anheier, 1997).

Nonprofit organizations are not evenly distributed among U.S. communities, however. Some metropolitan areas and counties have far more nonprofits per capita than others (Bielefeld & Murdoch, 2004; Joassart-Marcelli & Wolch, 2003; Wolch & Geiger, 1983; Wolpert, 1993). Yet, relatively few studies have attempted to explain this variation (Bielefeld & Murdoch, 2004; Grønbjerg & Paarlberg, 2001). And the theoretical perspectives that have been proposed in recent years provide fragmentary explanations at best (Corbin, 1999; Grønbjerg & Paarlberg, 2001; Saxton & Benson, 2005; Smith &

Shen, 2002). In this chapter, I seek to further our understanding of this phenomenon by considering the impact that an additional factor, the makeup of the local religious environment, is likely to have on one segment of this sector – nonprofit social services.

Sociological research indicates that religion often has a significant impact on individual, group, and community measures of civic life (Beyerlein & Hipp, 2006; Brooks, 2005; Chaves, Giesel, & Tsitsos, 2002; Park & Smith, 2000; Tolbert, Lyson, & Irwin, 1998; Verba et al., 1995; Wuthnow, 1999). And a growing body of work reveals that the makeup of local religious environments affects important community outcomes (Blanchard, Bartkowski, Matthews, & Kerley, 2008; Lee & Bartkowski, 2004; Mencken, Bader, & Polson, 2006). Extrapolating from these studies' findings, and drawing on what we know of the histories of major religious traditions in the U.S., I argue that varying religious environments are likely to influence the size of nonprofit social service sectors in different ways. In this study, I develop a series of spatial regression models to examine how the religious composition of U.S. counties is related to local nonprofit social service rates. I also explore how these relationships vary by region. I begin, however, by reviewing what we know about the distribution of nonprofit organizations and the influence that religious environments have on communities.

### *Nonprofit Social Services*

The nonprofit sector is currently one of the fastest growing segments of the U.S. economy (Boris & Steuerle, 2006; Monsma, 1996; Wing et al., 2008). In 2005, there were approximately 1.4 million nonprofit entities registered with the Internal Revenue

Service (IRS),<sup>1</sup> and in 2006 nonprofits contributed an estimated \$666.1 billion, or roughly five percent, to the nation's gross domestic product (GDP). In addition, data indicate that employment growth in this sector outpaced that of all other areas of the U.S. economy from 1998 to 2005 with some 12.9 million Americans being employed by nonprofits by 2005 (Salamon, 2003; Salamon et al., 2007; Wing et al., 2008).

The nonprofit sector is very diverse, however, and not all nonprofit organizations are focused on local civic life. Some nonprofits exist primarily to benefit groups beyond the geographic community. For example, many foundations, religious organizations, and research institutes have more global or universal goals. And organizations such as hospitals, professional associations, and colleges tend to serve broad geographic or regional areas (Boris & Steuerle, 2006; Wing et al., 2008). Because today's nonprofit sector encompasses such a diverse set of organizations with varying missions, any meaningful analysis of it requires a more focused approach. Therefore, following the lead of other recent studies, I concentrate here on one segment of the nonprofit sector; nonprofit social services (Bielefeld & Murdoch, 2004; Corbin, 1999; Wolch & Geiger, 1983).<sup>2</sup>

For this study, I define social service organizations as those entities most likely to provide services to individuals, families, and neighborhoods. Therefore, nonprofit social services may include such organizations as transitional shelters, job training programs, counseling agencies, youth service organizations, and community development

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<sup>1</sup> This figure likely underestimates the total number of nonprofits as religious organizations and organizations with annual revenue of less than \$5,000 are not required to register with the IRS (Wing et al., 2008).

<sup>2</sup> While many previous studies have analyzed the distribution of nonprofit social services across U.S. communities, there are no standard criteria for determining what types of organizations classify as social services. Furthermore, most previous research has focused on analyzing nonprofit rates in a small geographic area (e.g., state or region) rather than across the U.S.

corporations, among others. I choose to focus specifically on these organizations for several reasons. First, social and human services make up one third (32.3 percent) of all nonprofits in the U.S. And between 1998 and 2005 this segment of the entire sector grew by approximately 58.1 percent (Wing et al., 2008). Second, these organizations represent a very tangible way that ordinary Americans become involved in the lives of their communities. Research shows that individuals and organizations contribute significant time and financial resources to the work of nonprofit social services and charities each year (Brooks, 2005; Havens, O’Herlihy, & Schervish, 2006; Wing et al., 2008). And Robert Wuthnow (1998) has suggested that as participation in more traditional civic associations such as the Kiwanis and the Rotary Club declines, individuals may be choosing to become engaged in their communities through more time-limited volunteering for nonprofit organizations. Finally, social services comprise a segment of the nonprofit sector that has been examined extensively in recent years (Bielefeld, Murdoch, & Waddell, 1997; Cnaan, Boddie, Handy, Yancey, & Schneider, 2002; Corbin, 1999; Grønbjerg, 2001; Grønbjerg & Paarlberg, 2001; Joassart-Marcelli & Wolch, 2003; Tucker, Singh, & Meinhard, 1990).

### *Nonprofit Distribution*

In the past, studies examining nonprofits have drawn primarily on three theoretical perspectives to make sense of the uneven spatial distribution of these organizations. These are the community structure, government and market failure, and resource dependence perspectives (Corbin, 1999; Gamm & Putnam, 1999; Lincoln, 1977; Skocpol et al., 2000; Steinberg, 2006). None of these approaches offers an overarching theory of nonprofit distribution. However, each contributes something significant to our

understanding of why nonprofit organizations tend to locate where they do. The first of these approaches, the community structure perspective, holds that characteristics of a community such as its urban/rural designation, population size, and stability will impact the size of the local nonprofit sector (Grønbjerg & Paarlberg, 2001). Indeed, community structure variables have been shown to influence the concentration of nonprofit and voluntary associations in the past. Smaller, more stable communities tend to have more voluntary associations per capita than larger, more urban communities (Gamm & Putnam, 1999; Grønbjerg & Paarlberg, 2001). Furthermore, population stability and a healthy local economy are also linked to the size of nonprofit sectors (Gamm & Putnam, 1999; Grønbjerg & Paarlberg, 2001).

The second perspective that has been used to explain nonprofit distribution takes into consideration the competing sectors of market and state. The government and market failure perspective suggests that nonprofit organizations are most likely to develop in areas where needs exist that neither the government nor the private sector is currently addressing (Ben-Ner & Van Hoomissen, 1992; James, 1987, 1993; Weisbrod, 1975, 1977, 1988). One of the key concepts in this approach is demand heterogeneity, or diversity of need. Theorists contend that in highly diverse places different groups of people will compete to have their needs met by both the government and the private sector. As a result of competition and limited resources, some groups will continue to have unmet needs. This creates a niche for nonprofit social services to fill (Corbin, 1999; Weisbrod, 1988).

One of the limitations of this perspective is that demand heterogeneity is a particularly difficult concept to measure. Previous nonprofit studies have utilized

measures of population diversity including ethnic diversity, income diversity, and even religious diversity to serve as proxies for demand heterogeneity (Ben-Ner & Van Hoomissen, 1992; Corbin, 1999; James, 1993; Salamon, 1987; Salamon & Anheier, 1998). However, these studies fail to take into consideration the contextual effects of religion itself. They fail to consider the possibility that some religious traditions may be more likely than others to support a vibrant nonprofit social service sector.

The third perspective, resource dependence, suggests that nonprofit organizations locate in areas where there are significant human and financial resources available (Ben-Ner & Van Hoomissen, 1992; Corbin, 1999; Grønbjerg & Paarlberg, 2001). In order to provide programs that serve the community, nonprofits must have access to an able and well-trained work force which requires an educated population. Furthermore, many nonprofit organizations rely heavily on contributions of volunteer time and money in order to provide services (Grønbjerg & Paarlberg, 2001). Just as the government and market failure perspective predicts that there must be a certain level of unmet need to sustain a vibrant nonprofit sector, this perspective suggests that there must be adequate resources. These two perspectives may be viewed as complementary rather than competing. Taken together, they intimate that nonprofit organizations are most likely to locate in areas where unmet needs and untapped resources coexist.

These three perspectives have been shown to have significant predictive ability in previous research (Grønbjerg & Paarlberg, 2001; Powell & Steinberg, 2006). And they reveal much about community characteristics that are likely to affect the size and shape of nonprofit sectors. However, beyond the use of religious diversity as a proxy for the concept of demand heterogeneity, nonprofit studies have generally not considered the



contextual effects of religion. This, despite the fact that many of today's largest and most visible social service organizations emerged from religious movements and organizations in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the next section, I suggest several ways that religious environments are likely to impact the density of nonprofit social services.

### *Local Religious Environments*

A large body of research in the social sciences suggests a robust link between religion and community involvement in the U.S. (Ammerman, 2005a; Greeley, 1997; Hodgkinson, Weitzman, Noga, & Gorski, 1993; Verba et al. 1995). At the individual level, religious participation is related to higher levels of civic and political activity such as socializing with neighbors, volunteering for community organizations, and participating in local politics (Becker & Dhingra, 2001; Beyerlein & Hipp, 2006; Park & Smith, 2000; Wuthnow, 1999), while at the organization level researchers have begun documenting the contributions that congregations and faith-based organizations make to society through the provision of community and social services (Chaves, 2004; Cnaan et al., 2002). Most recently, scholars have begun to examine the ecological effects that religion has on community level outcomes such as mortality rates, crime, economic development, and even industrial pollution (Blanchard et al., 2008; Grant, Jones, & Trautner, 2004; Lee, 2006; Tolbert et al., 1998).

Much of this work, utilizing aggregate level measures of religion, extends and builds upon the "moral communities" hypothesis first introduced by Stark, Kent and Doyle (1982). Stark and his colleagues argued that the religious environment in which someone lives has a significant effect on their behavior. Specifically, they hypothesized

that because religion is an integrative force in society with the power to enforce social norms, the overall level of religious commitment in a community will impact the relationship between individual religiosity and delinquent behavior. And they found that individual religiosity does, in fact, have a negative effect on delinquency in highly religious areas of the country such as the American South, while it has little or no effect on delinquency in secular areas such as the West Coast (Stark et al., 1982; Stark, 1996).

These individual level findings have inspired other researchers to ask how various religious environments affect community level outcomes as well. For instance, in a recent study of violent crime, Matthew Lee (2006) discovered that communities with a higher number of congregations per capita tend to have lower rates of violent crime. And Lee and Bartkowski (2004) find that the increased presence of some types of religious organizations (i.e., civically engaged denominations) is negatively related to juvenile homicide rates. No studies have yet examined the impact that varying religious environments have on the distribution of nonprofit social services across the U.S. History suggests, however, that such an examination may prove fruitful.

Many contemporary nonprofit service organizations (e.g., Catholic Charities, Lutheran Social Services, the Salvation Army, YMCA) trace their origins back to reform movements that emerged from religious organizations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries such as the Social Gospel movement. The efforts of religious citizens to combat poverty and homelessness, to improve treatment of orphans and the mentally ill, and to deal with numerous other social problems led to the establishment of many of these organizations (Day, 2000). Yet, some religious traditions have been more active in the development and support of social service organizations than others, in particular

mainline Protestantism and Roman Catholicism (Bane, 2005; Hall, 1990, 2005, 2006; Thuesen, 2002). One reason may be the tendency of denominations in these traditions to pursue social change through institutional means. Scholars suggest that the hierarchical organization of these groups may influence their way of viewing community involvement (Bane, 2005; Thuesen, 2002). Indeed, mainline denominations have a long history of establishing and supporting various institutions aimed at societal reform. This is what Peter Thuesen (2002, p. 27) has called the, “logic of mainline churchliness.” Likewise, throughout its history the Catholic Church has sought to deal with many social problems by establishing formal institutions such as orphanages, hospitals, schools, and homes for the sick and elderly (Bane, 2005).

In contrast, since the evangelical movement’s emergence in the early twentieth century, evangelical Protestant denominations have tended to be less hierarchical and less active in the establishment of formal service organizations. While some evangelical Protestant denominations have established such entities (Ammerman, 1990; Early, 2004, Marsden, 1980; Smith, 1998), denominations in this tradition, as a whole, have tended to eschew the Social Gospel’s emphasis on transforming the social order by building institutions (Marsden, 1980; Smith, 1998).<sup>3</sup> One of the hallmarks of evangelicalism is an emphasis on individual conversion rather than societal change. And many evangelical Protestant groups continue to hold that the only real way to bring about meaningful change in the world is to transform lives, one person at a time (Emerson & Smith, 2000; Woodbridge, Noll, & Hatch, 1979). For many of these denominations, the establishment

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<sup>3</sup> As Blanchard et al. (2008) suggest there are important differences in the way that various evangelical Protestant subgroups view their civic responsibility. For instance, evangelical Protestants, narrowly defined, may be more supportive of nonprofit social service organizations than fundamentalist and Pentecostal Protestants. In the future it will be helpful to examine the effects that different types of evangelical Protestantism have on nonprofit social service sectors.

of formal social service programs may be seen as a good thing, but not the most important thing (Marsden, 1980). Furthermore, recent research suggests that some evangelical Protestants prefer to support the community through their congregation rather than through secular organizations (Ammerman, 2005a)

Taking into consideration previous findings on the influence of religious environments as well as recent work on the civic tendencies of America's major religious traditions leads me to propose several research hypotheses and an additional research question which I will address in the remainder of this chapter. First, I anticipate that U.S. counties with a larger mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic presence will have a more developed nonprofit social service sector than other counties. Because these religious traditions have historically encouraged civic responsibility and because they have a history of supporting the development of institutions that serve the wider community, I expect that their presence in a county will be positively related to the density of nonprofit social service organizations. I propose that:

*H1: The percent of county residents affiliated with a mainline Protestant denomination will be positively related to nonprofit social service rates.*

*H2: The percent of county residents affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church will be positively related to nonprofit social service rates.*

In contrast, because evangelical Protestantism has historically emphasized individual conversion rather than societal transformation, and because recent studies suggest that evangelical Protestants may be less likely to support secular social services than other groups (Ammerman, 2005a; Marsden, 1980; Uslaner, 2002), I anticipate that the presence of this tradition will not be significantly related to county nonprofit rates. I hypothesize that:

*H3: Nonprofit social service rates will be unaffected by the percent of county residents affiliated with evangelical Protestant denominations.*

Finally, I set out to explore whether the relationship between religious tradition and nonprofit social service rates varies significantly by region. A central tenet of the “moral communities” perspective is that the effect of religion varies in different regions of the country (Lee, 2006; Stark, 1996; Stark et al., 1982). Because different religious traditions predominate in different areas and because some regions have historically had higher levels of religious commitment than others, I suspect that the relationship between religious environments and county nonprofit rates will be more pronounced in some areas of the U.S. than others. Therefore I develop additional spatial models to address the following research question:

*Q: How does the relationship between religious environments and nonprofit social service rates vary by geographic region?*

#### *Data and Methods*

To address the proposed hypotheses and research question, I develop a series of spatial regression models utilizing aggregate county level data drawn from national datasets including the 2000 U.S. Census, the National Center for Charitable Statistics’ (NCCS) 2000 core files, and the 2000 Religious Congregations and Membership Study (RCMS). The NCCS core files, compiled by researchers at the Urban Institute, contain descriptive information on all 501(c)(3) nonprofit entities required to file a Form 990 with the IRS, including information on the geographic location of each filing organization (Urban Institute 2006). This information makes it possible to compute the

number of filing nonprofit organizations that are located in each U.S. county.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, NCCS data include information that makes it possible to classify these organizations into meaningful sub-groups (e.g., healthcare nonprofits, social services, educational organizations).

RCMS data, collected by the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies (ASARB) and distributed by the Association of Religion Data Archives ([www.theARDA.com](http://www.theARDA.com)), contain information on the number of congregations and adherents for each of 149 major religious groups in the U.S. (Jones, Doty, Grammich, Horsch, Houseal, Lynn, Marcum, Sanchagin, & Taylor, 2002). This data is available at county, state, and national levels, making it possible to determine how many congregations or religious adherents from each religious group are present in U.S. states and counties.<sup>5</sup> In addition, ASARB researchers have classified religious groups in this data set by major religious tradition (i.e., evangelical Protestant, mainline Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, other). This makes it possible to estimate the size of these religious traditions relative to county and state populations. Table 1, below, provides descriptive information for all variables included in my analyses.

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<sup>4</sup> Nonprofits that are not required to file a Form 990 (e.g., those that receive less than \$25,000 in gross receipts annually and those that are primarily religious in nature) are excluded from these data. Faith-based and religious organizations are required to file only if they receive a majority of their funding from serving the public and if they qualify as a public charity (e.g., Catholic Charities, Lutheran Social Services).

<sup>5</sup> Despite being one of the most comprehensive sources of data on religious congregations and adherents in the U.S., RCMS data does not include information on many historically African-American denominations and religious groups in the U.S. (Jones et al., 2002).

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics for County Level Analyses*

Variables	Minimum	Maximum	Mean/ Proportion	SD
<i>Dependent variable</i>				
Nonprofit rate (per 100,000 persons)	0.00	258.40	26.17	21.58
<i>Community structure</i>				
Population (ln)	4.20	16.07	10.23	1.40
Percent population change	-37.40	191.00	11.12	16.04
Metropolitan area	0	1	0.35	0.48
Percent locally employed	6.90	75.83	37.85	11.32
<i>Demand heterogeneity</i>				
Racial/ethnic diversity	0.02	0.84	0.28	0.17
Income inequality	0.27	0.59	0.42	0.04
<i>Resource dependence</i>				
Median household income	12,692.00	82,929.00	35,269.28	8,836.46
Percent college graduates	4.90	63.70	16.51	7.80
Percent middle-aged	3.55	27.60	13.62	1.49
<i>Census region</i> <sup>a</sup>				
Northeast	0	1	0.07	0.26
South	0	1	0.46	0.50
Midwest	0	1	0.34	0.47
West	0	1	0.13	0.34
<i>Religious environment</i>				
Percent evangelical Protestant	0.00	111.38	22.83	16.89
Percent mainline Protestant	0.00	88.40	14.31	11.40
Percent Roman Catholic	0.00	94.68	13.70	14.87

Note. N = 3,108.

<sup>a</sup> The omitted category for all analyses is South.

*Dependent Variable*

The dependent variable in all analyses is the rate of nonprofit social service organizations per 100,000 residents in each U.S. county. Data used to construct this variable are drawn from NCCS core files and U.S. Census data. NCCS core files include a National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities – Core Code (NTEE-CC) for each organization. The NTEE-CC indicates the type of nonprofit (e.g., education, health care, human

services) and the major type of service provided by the organization.<sup>6</sup> Relying on these codes, I include in the construction of the dependent variable only those entities likely to provide social services at the local level. Other types of nonprofits clearly contribute to the strength of civic life in the U.S. However, the focus of this paper is on the relationship between religion and the prevalence of organizations providing services to individuals, families, and neighborhoods. Appendix A provides more information on the types of nonprofit entities included in construction of the dependent variable.

### *Independent Variables*

Because I am primarily concerned with examining the effect that religion has on local nonprofit service sectors, I include three independent variables in my analyses which, taken together, approximate the religious environment of U.S. counties. Using RCMS data, I construct variables estimating the percent of county residents claimed by denominations in evangelical Protestant, mainline Protestant, and Roman Catholic traditions. These independent variables represent the size of each religious tradition relative to overall county population.<sup>7</sup> An alternative method of operationalizing the religious environment would be to calculate the number of congregations in each tradition per county resident (see Blanchard et al., 2008). However, because congregations differ greatly in size (Chaves, 2004; Dudley & Roozen, 2001), I believe

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<sup>6</sup> A full listing of NTEE-CC is available from the National Center for Charitable Statistics (Urban Institute, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that in some counties the religious membership is greater than 100 percent. This may be the result of Census undercounts or congregational overcounts. Or it may indicate that residents from neighboring counties are commuting into the county to attend a congregation (see Jones et al., 2002).



that measures of religious composition may provide a more accurate approximation of the overall religious environment.<sup>8</sup>

To account for other factors that influence the distribution of nonprofit organizations, I include a number of important control variables in my analyses (Corbin, 1999; Grønbjerg & Paarlberg, 2001; Steinberg, 2006). Some researchers have found that smaller, more stable communities have a higher concentration of nonprofit organizations and voluntary associations than others (Gamm & Putnam, 1999; Grønbjerg & Paarlberg, 2001; Skocpol et al., 2000). Therefore, to control for elements of community size and structure, I include the natural log of each county's 2000 population, percent change in county population between 1990 and 2000, percent of county residents employed locally, and a dichotomous variable indicating metropolitan status according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's urban influence codes (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2003). Furthermore, in analyses that include data for all U.S. counties, I add dichotomous controls for the region of the country in which each county is located (i.e., Northeast, South, Midwest, West).

To control for the potential effects of government and market failure, I include two additional variables in my analyses that serve as proxies for the concept of demand heterogeneity. To control for racial and ethnic diversity, I construct a standardized entropy index for each county using U.S. Census data (White, 1986). An entropy index measures the evenness of county residents' distribution among distinct racial/ethnic groups and can range from 0 to 1, with 0 representing complete homogeneity and 1

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<sup>8</sup> For instance, a county with 100 small evangelical congregations and a county with 100 evangelical megachurches would likely comprise two very different religious environments though they contain the same number of evangelical congregations.

representing perfect heterogeneity.<sup>9</sup> In addition, I include the GINI coefficient of income inequality for each U.S. county.<sup>10</sup> Like the entropy index, GINI coefficients range from 0 to 1. A GINI coefficient of 0 represents a county with complete income equality (i.e., where every resident receives the same income) and a GINI coefficient of 1 represents a county with complete inequality (i.e., where one person receives all of the income).

Finally, I include several variables to control for the effects of resource dependence. Each of these measures indicates the availability of some resource that previous research suggests may be important to the work of nonprofit service organizations (Corbin, 1999; Grønbjerg & Paarlberg, 2001). These variables include a measure of median household income, percent of county residents who are college graduates, and percent of county residents who are middle-aged (i.e., 45-54 years).

### *Spatial Modeling*

To test the proposed hypotheses and research question, I employ a series of spatial regression models that take into consideration the potential for spatial autocorrelation among U.S. counties (Anselin, 2005). Counties represent major administrative and political divisions within the U.S. and have distinct geographic boundaries. Yet, because their boundaries are highly permeable, proximate counties often share similar social, political, and cultural milieus. Furthermore, conditions in one county may have a direct

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<sup>9</sup> The formula that I used to construct the standardized entropy index is:

$$H = \frac{\sum_{k=1}^K P_k \log P_k}{\log K}$$

where  $P_k$  = the proportion of the  $k_{th}$  group in each county and  $K$  = the number of racial/ethnic categories used in construction of the index (Dougherty, 2003; White, 1986).

<sup>10</sup> County GINI coefficients for the year 1999 were provided by Kirby G. Posey of the U.S. Census Bureau (personal communication, March 10, 2006).

influence on conditions in surrounding counties. Therefore, the potential for spatial autocorrelation among counties is high and suggests that results obtained from standard OLS regression may be biased. In contrast, spatial modeling techniques make it possible to control for autocorrelation among observations of the dependent variable or among the error terms by including an additional control variable in the regression equation (Messner & Anselin, 2004; Ward & Gleditsch, 2008). Preliminary diagnostics of the data used in my analyses reveal spatial autocorrelation among observations of the dependent variable in some models.<sup>11</sup> When one county has a high ratio of social service nonprofits to residents, surrounding counties tend to as well. To account for this clustering, I develop spatial lag models which take the following form:

$$y_i = x_i\beta + \rho w_i y_i + \epsilon_i$$

where the original error term is decomposed into two separate components, a spatially uncorrelated error term ( $\epsilon_i$ ) and a spatially lagged term for the dependent variable ( $\rho w_i y_i$ ). To test my hypotheses, I specify two spatial lag models predicting the relationship between religious composition and the density of nonprofit service organizations across all U.S. counties. I then specify four additional models to test the relationship in each major region of the U.S. All models are specified and run using spatial modeling software (GEODA 0.9.5-i).

### *Results*

Table 2 presents results from two spatial lag models predicting nonprofit social service rates for all U.S. counties. Model 1, including only control variables, serves as a

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<sup>11</sup> Analysis of the Moran's I statistic reveal the presence of spatial autocorrelation in standard OLS regression models. Further analysis of Lagrange Multiplier test statistics suggests that this autocorrelation is the result of spatial clustering of the dependent variable rather than correlation of error terms (see Anselin, 2005).

base model and supports previous researchers' findings that measures of community structure and resource dependence are significant predictors of nonprofit density (Corbin, 1999; Gamm & Putnam, 1999; Grønbjerg & Paarlberg, 2001; Steinberg, 2006; Weisbrod, 1988). Non-metro counties (-2.55, SE = 0.94,  $p < 0.01$ ) with a higher percentage of locally employed residents (0.38, SE = 0.04,  $p < 0.001$ ) tend to have more social services per capita than others, as do counties comprised of a higher percent of college-educated (0.97, SE = 0.06,  $p < 0.001$ ) and middle-aged residents (1.76, SE = 0.26,  $p < 0.001$ ). Controlling for metropolitan status, however, population size is positively related to the size of the nonprofit service sector (0.80, SE = 0.35,  $p < 0.05$ ). And median income is negatively related to the dependent variable (-0.76, SE = 0.19,  $p < 0.001$ ). Measures of demand heterogeneity do not appear to be significantly related to the dependent variable. And controls for geographic region reveal that the density of nonprofit social services tends to be higher in non-South regions of the U.S. Finally, the spatial lag term is significantly related to the dependent variable, indicating that nonprofit rates in adjacent counties tend to be related to one another (0.11, SE = 0.03,  $p < 0.001$ ).

In Model 2, three independent variables approximating the religious environment of each county have been added to the prediction equation. Results derived from this model provide empirical support for my hypotheses. It appears that religious composition is significantly related to the distribution of nonprofit social services across all U.S. counties. Specifically, counties with higher levels of mainline Protestantism and Roman Catholicism tend to have more social service nonprofits per capita than other counties.

Table 2

*Spatial Lag Models Predicting Nonprofit Rates for U.S. Counties*

	Model 1	Model 2
<i>Community structure</i>		
Population (ln)	0.80* (0.35)	1.22*** (0.36)
Percent population change	-0.03 (0.03)	0.01 (0.03)
Metropolitan area	-2.55** (0.94)	-2.76** (0.94)
Percent locally employed	0.38*** (0.04)	0.33*** (0.04)
<i>Demand heterogeneity</i>		
Racial/ethnic diversity	-0.41 (2.76)	-0.43 (2.78)
Income inequality	-9.34 (10.48)	-5.92 (10.58)
<i>Resource dependence</i>		
Median household income (thousands of dollars)	-0.76*** (0.19)	-0.78*** (0.19)
Percent college graduates	0.97*** (0.06)	0.93*** (0.06)
Percent middle-aged	1.76*** (0.26)	1.86*** (0.26)
<i>Census region</i> <sup>a</sup>		
Northeast	7.69*** (1.60)	6.23*** (1.77)
Midwest	8.91*** (1.06)	7.34*** (1.16)
West	3.51** (1.22)	4.44*** (1.41)
<i>Religious environment</i>		
Percent evangelical Protestant		0.02 (0.03)
Percent mainline Protestant		0.17*** (0.04)
Percent Roman Catholic		0.10*** (0.03)
<i>Spatial autocorrelation</i>		
Spatial lag ( $\rho$ )	0.11*** (0.03)	0.10*** (0.03)
Intercept	-11.43 (6.60)	-19.02** (6.91)
-2 Log likelihood	26904.20	26872.40
R <sup>2</sup>	0.28	0.30
N	3108	3108

Note. \*p < 0.05. \*\*p < 0.01. \*\*\*p < 0.001.

<sup>a</sup> The omitted category for all analyses is South.

Spatial regression coefficients estimate that a ten percent increase in the mainline Protestant population is associated with an increase in the nonprofit social service rate of approximately 1.7 nonprofits per 100,000 residents (0.17, SE = 0.04,  $p < 0.001$ ). And a ten percent increase in the Roman Catholic population is associated with an increase in the nonprofit social service rate of approximately 1 nonprofit per 100,000 residents (0.10, SE = 0.03,  $p < 0.001$ ). The presence of evangelical Protestantism, however, has no significant effect on nonprofit social service rates. Taking previous explanations for the uneven distribution of nonprofit organizations into account, these two spatial models provide initial support for my contention that some religious environments are more likely to foster vibrant nonprofit service sectors than others.

To examine whether the relationship between religious environments and the nonprofit service sector varies across major regions of the U.S., I specify four additional models in Table 3 (i.e., Northeast, South, Midwest, and West). To account for spatial clustering among observations of the dependent variable in the South and the West, I develop spatial lag models. However, because there was no evidence of spatial clustering among the counties of the Northeast and Midwest, I specify standard OLS regression models for those regions.

The models in Table 3 reveal regional differences in the way that religious environments are related to the distribution of nonprofit social services. Model 1 indicates that local religious environments have no significant effect on the density of nonprofit social services in the Northeast. Despite the historical dominance of mainline Protestantism in this region and the emphasis that mainline Protestant denominations have traditionally placed on civic responsibility, there appears to be no relationship

between the presence of mainline Protestantism here and the size of the nonprofit social service sector. No other religious tradition is significantly related to the dependent variable in the Northeast either.

The control variables in Model 1 behave as expected with two exceptions. Population size is negatively correlated with the dependent variable (-4.53, SE = 1.13,  $p < 0.001$ ). And only in the Northeast is racial and ethnic diversity significantly related to the dependent variable; counties that are more diverse tend to have more social services per capita than homogeneous counties (33.48, SE = 7.84,  $p < 0.001$ ). This finding suggests that, rather than comprising a general theory of nonprofits, the government and market failure perspective may help to explain nonprofit distribution in certain regions of the country.

Among counties in the South (Model 2), mainline Protestantism and Roman Catholicism are both positively related to the dependent variable. A ten percent increase in the mainline Protestant population is associated with an increase in the nonprofit social service rate of 4.1 organizations per 100,000 residents (0.41, SE = 0.07,  $p < 0.001$ ). And a ten percent increase in the Roman Catholic population is associated with an increase in the nonprofit social service rate of 0.9 organizations per 100,000 residents (0.09, SE = 0.04,  $p < 0.01$ ). There is no significant relationship, however, between the size of the population affiliated with evangelical Protestantism and the size of the nonprofit social service sector. Despite the dominance of evangelical Protestantism across much of the South, this tradition does not increase nonprofit social services.

Table 3

*OLS and Spatial Lag Models Predicting Nonprofit Rates across Regions*

	Model 1 Northeast	Model 2 South	Model 3 Midwest	Model 4 West
<i>Community structure</i>				
Population (ln)	-4.53*** (1.13)	1.06* (0.48)	1.32 (0.84)	2.29* (1.13)
Percent population change	0.11 (0.09)	-0.00 (0.03)	0.02 (0.08)	-0.04 (0.06)
Metropolitan area	-5.55** (2.10)	-0.60 (1.05)	-3.45 (2.05)	-7.84* (3.53)
Percent locally employed	0.88*** (0.10)	0.21*** (0.05)	0.49*** (0.09)	0.31* (0.14)
<i>Demand heterogeneity</i>				
Racial/ethnic diversity	33.48*** (7.84)	-5.08 (2.99)	5.20 (7.40)	-8.93 (10.60)
Income inequality	9.95 (37.23)	-1.56 (11.31)	52.96 (31.92)	37.50 (42.00)
<i>Resource dependence</i>				
Median household income (thousands of dollars)	-0.75*** (0.16)	-0.76*** (0.14)	-0.42* (0.18)	-0.37 (0.22)
Percent college graduates	1.10*** (0.18)	1.05*** (0.07)	0.28 (0.16)	0.60** (0.21)
Percent middle-aged	3.32*** (0.91)	1.32*** (0.37)	0.64 (0.63)	2.55*** (0.59)
<i>Religious environment</i>				
Percent evangelical Protestant	-0.26 (0.31)	0.03 (0.03)	0.00 (0.07)	0.17 (0.19)
Percent mainline Protestant	-0.14 (0.15)	0.41*** (0.07)	0.17** (0.07)	0.23 (0.22)
Percent Roman Catholic	-0.02 (0.06)	0.09** (0.04)	0.09 (0.06)	0.17* (0.09)
<i>Spatial autocorrelation</i>				
Spatial lag ( $\rho$ )	--	0.06* (0.04)	--	0.15* (0.07)
Intercept	5.06 (21.10)	-11.71 (9.10)	-26.77 (18.45)	-60.51** (22.43)
-2 Log likelihood	1617.04	11666.14	9408.46	3741.52
R <sup>2</sup>	0.67	0.33	0.14	0.23
N	217	1423	1055	413

Note. \*p < 0.05. \*\*p < 0.01. \*\*\*p < 0.001.



Model 3 reveals that mainline Protestantism is the only religious tradition that is significantly related to the distribution of nonprofit social services in the counties of the Midwest (0.17, SE = 0.07,  $p < 0.01$ ). A ten percent increase in the mainline Protestant population is associated with an increase in the nonprofit social service rate of 1.7 organizations per 100,000 residents. Furthermore, few of the controls in Model 3 are significantly related to the dependent variable. Local employment appears to have a positive effect on nonprofit social services (0.49, SE = 0.09,  $p < 0.001$ ), while median household income has a negative effect (-0.42, SE = 0.18,  $p < 0.05$ ).

Finally, Roman Catholicism appears to be the only religious tradition that has a significant effect on the dependent variable in Model 4 (0.17, SE = 0.09,  $p < 0.05$ ), the model for western counties. A ten percent increase in the Roman Catholic population is associated with an increase in the nonprofit social service rate of 1.7 organizations per 100,000 residents. Other control variables behave as expected.

### *Discussion*

Previous studies have sought to explain the uneven distribution of nonprofit organizations in the U.S. by examining the effects that community level characteristics have on local nonprofit rates. Despite the fact that many nonprofit organizations have roots in American religious institutions, however, the majority of these studies have failed to consider the possibility that differing religious environments may have divergent effects on nonprofit sectors. My findings indicate that the religious composition of U.S. counties is, in fact, related to the relative size of local nonprofit sectors. Counties comprised of a larger percentage of mainline Protestant or Roman Catholic adherents

tend to have more nonprofit social services per capita than counties with fewer adherents of these two traditions.

I contend that these relationships result, at least in part, from the historical commitment that denominations in these traditions have made to establishing and supporting institutions that serve wider society (Bane, 2005; Thuesen, 2002). I suspect that in counties where these two traditions are prevalent there is likely to be a more robust culture of institutionalized caring, whereby individuals and organizations seek to ameliorate social conditions by supporting the work of charitable organizations and nonprofit social services. I am suggesting that there is a higher level of confidence in the power of institutions to meet the needs of the community in counties with large mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic populations. Furthermore, because denominations in these religious traditions tend to place a significant emphasis on civic responsibility and encourage their members to take an active role in the community (Ammerman, 2002; Chaves et al., 2002; Roozen, McKinney, & Carroll, 1984), their increased presence in a county or geographic area may serve as a cultural, institutional, and human resource that nonprofit social services can tap for support.

In contrast, the presence of evangelical Protestant adherents appears to have no significant effect on the size of the local nonprofit sector. Because the denominations in this tradition tend to be less invested in the establishment of institutions, and because these groups tend to emphasize individual rather than systemic change (Marsden, 1980; Smith, 1998), I contend that their presence provides fewer of the resources needed by nonprofit service organizations. I do not mean to suggest that evangelical Protestantism has a negative impact on the development of nonprofit services or that they somehow

create an environment less conducive to charitable activity. To the contrary, there is much evidence that evangelical Protestants are just as charitable, and in some instances more so, than members of other religious traditions (Regnerus & Smith, 1998; Regnerus, Smith, & Sikkink, 1998; Smith, 1998). However, because many evangelical Protestants prefer to funnel charitable giving and activities through congregations rather than secular organizations, the presence of evangelical Protestantism in an area may not benefit social service organizations in the same way that mainline Protestantism or Roman Catholicism does.

My analyses also reveal that the relationship between religious environments and the local nonprofit social service sector varies significantly by geographic region. The positive influence of mainline Protestantism and Catholicism is not uniform across all sections of the U.S. Rather, the increased presence of mainline Protestantism appears to have a significant effect on nonprofit density primarily in the South and the Midwest, two regions often recognized for their high levels of religious commitment. And the increased presence of Catholicism appears to have a significant positive effect on nonprofit density primarily in the South and West.

It is not particularly surprising that mainline Protestantism would be related to larger nonprofit social service sectors in the Midwest, as this region has long been dominated by mainline Protestant groups (Barlow & Silk, 2004; Jones et al., 2002). If there is any place in the U.S. that higher levels of mainline Protestantism ought to foster the development of organizations committed to serving the community it would be in this region. Similarly, the effect that Catholicism has on the rate of nonprofit social services in the western U.S. may be a result of this group's strong presence in the region (Jones et

al., 2002). The dominance of a tradition in a geographic region may increase its sense of responsibility to the community and, therefore, increase support for nonprofit organizations and charitable institutions.

Mainline Protestantism and Roman Catholicism also have a positive effect on nonprofit density in the South, where evangelical Protestantism has long been the dominant form of religious expression (Wilson & Silk, 2005). What is more, the percent of residents affiliated with evangelical Protestant groups appears to have no effect on the size of local nonprofit sectors in the South. I contend that the generally higher levels of religious commitment that exist in this region may simultaneously stimulate the institutional civic orientation of mainline Protestants and Roman Catholics while strengthening evangelical Protestants' resolve to transform society one person at a time.

Model 1 in Table 3 reveals that local religious environments have no effect on the size of nonprofit sectors in the Northeast while control variables do appear to have significant explanatory power. Any public influence religious traditions have in this region is overwhelmed by the influence of other social and community factors. Nonprofit rates in the highly urbanized Northeast are more a function of population size, diversity, and resource availability than religious culture or climate. It is surprising that in a region where mainline Protestantism and Roman Catholicism have such a long history there would be no relationship between these traditions and the size of the nonprofit sector. However, we might also expect that the effects of religious environments will be less significant in more secular areas of the country such as the Northeast and the West. Indeed, this is what the "moral communities" perspective predicts for individual level outcomes (Stark et al., 1982).

Overall, the results presented here indicate that religious environments do have an effect on the size of local nonprofit sectors. This finding supports the arguments advanced most recently by sociologists studying crime, economic development, and civil society that religion is an important community level property that can have significant effects on other processes. Future research on civic life in American communities should examine the influence that religious environments have on patterns of volunteerism, charitable giving, and political participation across the U.S.

Finally, my analyses have several limitations that must be noted. First, the findings presented here reveal little about the causal links between nonprofit density and local religious environments. I have offered explanations for these links. However, future research should examine these relationships more closely to determine whether the explanations proposed here are supported by empirical evidence or whether there may be other factors that explain the relationship between local religious environments and the density of nonprofit sectors. Community-based studies and ethnographic work on nonprofits may be particularly helpful in determining how religious environments affect county nonprofit sectors.

Second, in my analyses I utilize several of the widely accepted RELTRAD categories for classifying religious denominations into major religious traditions (Steensland, Park, Regnerus, Robinson, Wilcox, & Woodberry, 2000). Specifically, I focus on the effects that the three largest religious traditions in the U.S. (i.e., mainline Protestantism, evangelical Protestantism, Roman Catholicism) have on nonprofit distribution. I choose to use these specific categories primarily because of their currency in contemporary sociological literature. However, recent work by Blanchard et al. (2008)

makes a compelling case that evangelical Protestantism may be too diverse a category to use in such analyses. Blanchard and his colleagues suggest that there is meaningful diversity within the evangelical Protestant tradition. They advocate splitting this category into three separate subgroups that have distinct histories (i.e., fundamentalist, evangelical, and Pentecostal Protestants). They contend that evangelical Protestants, more narrowly defined, are more likely to be engaged in society than members of the other two conservative Protestant subgroups. Similarly, other scholars have argued that evangelical Protestants take an approach to social interaction that encourages both engagement and distinction (Smith, 1998). Future nonprofit research should examine whether the presence of these evangelical Protestant subgroups within a county affect local nonprofit rates differently.

Furthermore, one of the most significant deficiencies of the RCMS county level religion data, which I use to construct the three primary independent variables for these analyses, is that congregations in traditionally African American denominations such as the Church of God in Christ and the African Methodist Episcopal Church are under-represented (Finke & Scheitle, 2005). In some regions of the country, particularly the South, these groups are likely to have a significant impact on the local religious environment.

Another of the major limitations of the current study is the incompleteness of the data on nonprofit organizations and community social service programs. While the NCCS core files provide the most reliable data available on the number of nonprofit organizations in each county, there are many small nonprofit organizations that do not appear in this dataset. Because NCCS data is limited to those nonprofits required to file

an IRS Form 990, they do not contain information on organizations with annual budgets of less than \$25,000 and those that are explicitly religious in nature. Furthermore, there are no widely accepted criteria for classifying nonprofit organizations as social services. Many of the current core codes (see Appendix A) are broad enough that organizations which are not actually social services may have inadvertently been included in construction of the dependent variable and others that are local nonprofit social services left out.

Lastly, the dataset used in these analyses does not document the social service programs of local congregations. Recent research shows that some congregations develop programs that provide services directly to the residents of their community such as clothes closets, temporary shelters, benevolence ministries, and after-school programs (Chaves, 2004; Cnaan et al., 2002; Wineburg, 2001). However, because these programs are typically not registered as nonprofit entities with the IRS, they do not appear in current NCCS data. Future research is needed to document the impact that very small nonprofits and congregation-based service programs have on their communities.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Social Diversity and the Bridging Activity of American Congregations

#### *Introduction*

Congregational community service programs have come under the scrutiny of social scientists and academics in recent years (Ammerman, 2001; Chaves, 2004; Cnaan & Boddie, 2001; Twombly, 2002; Wineburg, 2001, 2007; Wuthnow, 2004). As a result of welfare reform in the mid-1990s and former President Bush's establishment of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives during his first term, many have begun to pay closer attention to the non-religious activities of local congregations. Researchers have been particularly interested in their capacity for meeting human needs. And some have even argued that faith-based and congregational service programs could one day serve as an alternative to publicly-funded social services (Olasky & Murray, 1995; Olasky, 1997).

Not all congregations are eager to take on the role of social service provider, however (Chaves, 1999). And research shows that some types of religious groups are more likely to provide service programs than others, namely large well-funded congregations and those affiliated with mainline Protestant or liberal religious traditions (Ammerman, 2002; Chaves, 1999; Chaves et al., 2002; Wuthnow, 1999). Yet, there is still much that we do not know about variation in congregational community services. For instance, despite recent work by Robert Putnam (2007) which suggests that increasing community diversity can have an adverse effect on the strength of civic life,



few studies have explored the impact that social and ethnic diversity are likely to have on congregations' community service activity.<sup>1</sup>

Do congregations characterized by internal similarity and social solidarity contribute more or less to civic life than socially and ethnically diverse congregations? And does a congregation's location within a more heterogeneous or homogeneous community have any impact on its level of civic activity? These questions have important implications for our understanding of the broader relationship between religion and civic life; especially in light of the increasing diversity of American communities (Putnam, 2007). In this chapter, I explore the effects that ethnic and social heterogeneity have on congregations' civic engagement. I begin by reviewing current research on religion and civic life. Then, drawing on existing theories of social capital and social network composition, I propose and test several hypotheses concerning the community service activity of America's estimated 350,000 congregations.

### *Religion and Civic Life*

Social scientists have long recognized the contribution that congregations make to the health of civic life in the United States (Baltzell, 1979; Douglass & deS. Brunner, 1935; Hall, 2005; Skocpol, 2003; Warner & Lunt, 1941). Americans participate in religious organizations more frequently than any other type of voluntary association (Putnam, 2000), and this participation tends to be related to other forms of civic activity as well (Beyerlein & Hipp, 2006; Greeley, 1997; Lam, 2002; Legee, Wald, & Kellstedt,

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<sup>1</sup> In previous analyses of congregational social services, Chaves and Tsitsos (2001) and Cnaan et al. (2002) include variables measuring the ethnic and social composition of congregations. However, these studies rely primarily on estimates gathered from key informants, and it is difficult to assess their accuracy. Furthermore, because of the way that questions and response categories were structured it is not possible to construct standard measures of diversity or heterogeneity from these estimates.

1993; Park & Smith, 2000). During an era in which many believe that civic engagement in the U.S. is declining, the promise that religion holds for motivating and mobilizing individuals for wider community involvement has captured the public's attention (Greeley, 1997; Putnam, 2000; Putnam, Feldstein, & Cohen, 2004). Research suggests that congregations have the capacity to draw citizens into community life, mobilize them for public service, and inspire movements for social change (Becker & Dhingra, 2001; Brown & Brown, 2003; Lichterman, 2005; Verba et al., 1995; Wood, 1999; Young, 2002; Zald & McCarthy, 1998).

Not only do congregations mobilize individuals, however. In many instances these organizations are becoming engaged themselves. Researchers have begun to recognize the proclivity that some congregations have for establishing formal service programs that directly benefit neighborhoods and communities (Ammerman, 2005a; Chaves & Tsitsos, 2001; Chaves, 2004; Cnaan et al., 2002; Hodgkinson, Weitzman, & Kirsch, 1990; Tsitsos, 2003). It is not uncommon to find churches, synagogues, and mosques providing feeding programs for the poor, job skills training for the unemployed, English classes for immigrants, and child care for working parents (Ammerman, 2001, 2005a; Cnaan et al., 2002; Greenberg, 2000; McCarthy & Castelli, 1998). Indeed, in a recent national study of American congregations, Mark Chaves (2004) found that 57 percent of congregations provided at least one community service program on a regular basis.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Other recent studies have found that almost 90 percent of congregations are involved in some type of community service (Cnaan et al., 2002; Dudley & Roozen, 2001; Hodgkinson & Weitzman, 1996). The discrepancy in these estimates is believed to be due to methodological issues (e.g., sampling and interview methods). For a more detailed discussion, see Chaves (2004), Cnaan et al. (2002), and Wuthnow (2004).

Programs such as these represent an effort on the part of religious organizations to meet local needs and to serve their communities. In addition, they are bridging activities in that they have the capacity to link community members across social divides and thereby contribute to the strengthening of civil society (Bartkowski & Regis, 2003; Chaves et al., 2002; Putnam, 2000; Wuthnow, 1998). Not all congregations are equally engaged in these types of activities, however. There is significant variation in the community service provision of U.S. congregations (Chaves, 1999, 2004; Chaves et al., 2002; Cnaan et al., 2002; Hodgkinson et al., 1990; Tsitsos, 2003). Some provide a host of community services while others provide few or none (Chaves, 2004). Consequently, a growing literature on congregation-based services has sought to identify factors related to this variation (Chaves & Tsitsos, 2001; Chaves, 2004; Cnaan et al., 2002).

In one of the largest studies of congregation-based services to date, sociologists Mark Chaves and William Tsitsos (2001) find that congregations with more members and more financial resources tend to provide a larger number of services to their communities than smaller and more financially strained congregations. This is not surprising, as they have a larger set of human and financial resources from which to draw. They also find that religious tradition makes a significant difference, with mainline Protestant congregations outpacing all other groups in the provision of community services. This finding comports with previous research indicating that liberal and mainline Protestants tend to be more civically engaged than others (Wuthnow, 1999). Furthermore, Chaves and Tsitsos (2001) find that the social class of both a congregation and its surrounding community are important predictors of congregational social services. Despite what we might expect, congregations with a larger percentage of wealthy members provide fewer

services to their communities while more educated congregations and those located in counties with higher rates of poverty provide more services (see also Cnaan et al., 2002). All of these findings suggest that the social composition of a congregation and its community affect congregational community service. Chaves and Tsitsos (2001), however, are not able to directly examine the effects of ethnic and social diversity due to limitations of their data.<sup>3</sup>

Thus far, much of the existing research on the community service activities of congregations has developed independent of larger theoretical literatures on social capital and social network composition. I contend that linking concepts from these important literatures with findings on the community service activity of congregations may help us to understand better why some of these organizations tend to be more active in their communities than others.

### *Social Capital*

As stated previously, there appears to be a robust link between congregational participation and civic engagement at the individual level (Kellstedt, Green, Guth, & Smidt, 1996; Leege et al., 1993; Wuthnow, 1999). Attendance at religious services and participation in congregational activities is correlated with standard measures of civic engagement such as political involvement, volunteerism, and membership in voluntary associations like the Kiwanis or the Rotary Club (Beyerlein & Hipp, 2006; Cassel, 1999; Greeley, 1997; Leege et al., 1993; Park & Smith, 2000; Peterson, 1992; Putnam, 2000;

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<sup>3</sup> The measures of social and ethnic composition used by Chaves and Tsitsos (2001) are based on estimates gathered from key informants rather than members' self-reports. While the key informant method has been a standard practice in congregational research for many years and has provided quality data on these organizations, the accuracy of demographic and social estimates provided by them is not clear. A promising, albeit more expensive, alternative to this method is to survey every person in the congregation as the U.S. Congregational Life Survey (USCLS) has done (Woolever & Bruce, 2002).

Verba & Nie, 1972). But, what is it about religious participation that influences civic behavior? And does this individual level relationship suggest anything that might help us make sense of variation in the civic activity of congregations?

Verba et al. (1995) suggest that congregations serve as civic training grounds where individuals are regularly given the opportunity to develop important skills that they can use in other social contexts (e.g., leading a meeting, serving on a board). People who attend congregations frequently are given such opportunities more often and may be better equipped to participate in community life. Other scholars suggest that frequent participation in a congregation exposes one to religious messages that encourage civic responsibility (Brewer, Kersh, & Peterson, 2003; Guth, Green, Smidt, Kellstedt, & Poloma, 1997; Welch et al., 1993). The most common explanation for the connection between religious participation and civic activity, though, and the one that I believe offers the most promise for understanding variation in congregational community involvement, is that local religious organizations serve as important reservoirs of social capital, a valuable resource linking individuals and groups in a community (Ammerman, 1997a; Bartkowski & Regis, 2003; Putnam, 2000).

Social capital is a private and public good comprised of the social networks, norms of reciprocity, and bonds of trust that develop between individuals and groups. It inheres in the connections that exist between friends, neighbors, and acquaintances, and it contributes to social cohesion and social interaction in communities (Putnam, 2000, 2007). Robert Putnam has described social capital as a lubricant that, “greases the wheels,” of civil society (Putnam, 2000, p. 288). When people interact with one another on a regular basis and develop affective ties, they may be more likely to work together to

accomplish common goals and solve community problems. And because congregations are places where friendships naturally occur and bonds of trust are formed, they serve as important sources of this resource for many Americans. Consequently, participation in a congregation is likely to increase the chances that someone will become civically engaged (Ammerman, 1997a; Bartkowski & Regis, 2003).

However, not all forms of social capital are equally beneficial for civic life (Fiorina, 1999; Paxton, 1999, 2007; Putnam, 2000; Portes, 1998; Portes & Landolt, 1996). For example, exclusive social ties, such as those that exist within organizations like the Ku Klux Klan or some fundamentalist congregations, may deter members from becoming engaged with others in the community (Fiorina, 1999). Such associations restrict members' interactions and demand strict loyalty to the group. This type of social capital will tend to truncate rather than widen social networks and is not likely to contribute to more vibrant civil society. Putnam (2000, pp. 22-24) has, therefore, developed the terms "bridging" and "bonding" to distinguish between dimensions of social capital that affect civic life differently.

Bonding social capital is comprised of the durable ties and dense friendship networks that exist within relatively homogeneous groups. The existence of this type of social capital contributes to a strong sense of group solidarity and social cohesion. It might be thought of as the glue that holds a group together (Putnam, 2000, p. 23). Bridging social capital, on the other hand, is largely comprised of social ties connecting individuals across group boundaries and social cleavages, including race and social class. It approximates the "weak ties" or loose connections that Mark Granovetter (1973, 1983) suggests can be so valuable for individuals. Moreover, bridging social capital has the

capacity to create linkages between the members of a social group, such as a congregation or civic club, and the larger environment of which the group is a part (Putnam, 2000, p. 23).

Most congregations possess both types of social capital. Friendship ties within a congregation simultaneously bond members together and connect them to the wider community. One might expect, however, that congregations rich in bridging social capital would contribute more to local civic life than congregations characterized by strong internal ties and social homogeneity. Bridging congregations may be more effective at linking diverse segments of a society in ways that increase cooperation and collaboration, indirectly contributing to healthier and more stable communities (Frank & Yasumoto, 1998). Recent analyses of the impact that the presence of “civically engaged denominations” has on a variety of county level outcomes provide some support for this argument (Bartkowski & Lee, 2004; Tolbert et al., 1998; Tolbert, Irwin, Lyson, & Nucci, 2002).

Though social capital has long been conceptualized as both an individual and a group resource, its effects have been modeled primarily at the individual level. Few studies have explored the effects that bridging and bonding social capital have on organizations. In addition, there has been significant debate over the most accurate way to measure social capital (Paxton, 1999). In this paper, I suggest one possible direction for future development of this perspective. By linking the assumptions of Putnam’s social capital model with insights drawn from literature on the composition of social networks, it may be possible to approximate a congregation’s level of bridging capital using measures of social composition.

### *Social Network Composition*

Research on social networks reveals that friendship ties and social interaction, two elements central to the concepts of bridging and bonding social capital, are often patterned in important ways by characteristics such as race, gender, and social class (Blau, 1977; Feld, 1982; Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954; McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1987; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). People tend to develop relationships with others who occupy a similar “sociodemographic space” as themselves (McPherson, Popielarz, & Drobnic, 1992). At work, in school, and in daily life people’s social networks tend to be comprised of others who are like themselves (Ibarra, 1995; Kalmijn, 1998; Lincoln & Miller, 1979; Shrum, Cheek, & Hunter, 1988). This phenomenon has long been referred to by sociologists as the homophily principle (Blau, 1977).

As a result, membership in voluntary organizations also tends to be patterned by social and demographic characteristics (Kalleberg, Knoke, Marsden, & Spaeth, 1996; McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1987; Reskin, McBrier, & Kmec, 1999). For instance, a recent national survey of organizations in the U.S. found that most organizations were comprised of a majority of individuals from a single racial group (Kalleberg, 1996, as cited in McPherson et al., 2001). And recruitment into organizations and voluntary associations, which typically relies on existing social networks, is patterned by social and demographic characteristics as well (McPherson et al., 1992). Most organizations’ profiles become increasingly homogenous over time as individuals similar to the majority are brought into the organization and more marginal members choose to leave (Christerson & Emerson, 2003; McPherson et al., 1992).



We might expect, then, that most congregations are made up primarily of people drawn from similar segments of the population; that the rich gravitate towards wealthier congregations and that disadvantaged persons gravitate towards poorer congregations. Both classic and contemporary studies suggest that religious affiliation is significantly related to factors like race, ethnicity, and social class (Bainbridge, 1997; Lenski, 1961; Niebuhr, 1929; Park & Reimer, 2002; Pope, 1942; Reimer, 2007; Roof & McKinney, 1987; Smith & Faris, 2005; Troeltsch, 1960 [1911]).

What is more, a growing body of research on racially diverse congregations confirms that racial homogeneity is the norm in most religious organizations (Dougherty, 2003; Emerson & Kim, 2003; Emerson & Smith, 2000). In fact, congregational researchers have given the phenomenon a name: the homogeneous unit principle (HUP). The HUP states that, given a choice, most people will choose to join a congregation made up of others who are similar to themselves (McGavran, 1990). In essence, birds of a feather, even religious ones, flock together. Combining these insights from theories of social network composition with insights from the social capital model discussed above leads me to suggest three research hypotheses.

First, I contend that religious organizations characterized by high levels of homogeneity will be particularly adept at fostering bonding social capital and will, consequently, tend to engage in fewer bridging activities. In contrast, organizations comprised of a more diverse membership will possess latent bridging social capital that may be activated for the development of service programs that reach out to the wider community. To the extent that congregations are not strictly homophilous, but rather include social ties cutting across cleavages such as race, social class, and education, I

expect them to be more invested in the provision of community services. Therefore, I hypothesize that:

*H1: Congregations characterized by higher levels of ethnic, income, and educational diversity will provide more community service programs than homogeneous congregations.*

Furthermore, Robert Putnam (2007) has recently begun to explore the effects that ethnic and social diversity at the community level have on various measures of civic engagement. His findings suggest that living in more heterogeneous communities decreases overall levels of social cohesion and individual levels of civic activity. When faced with an increasingly diverse social environment, individuals tend to withdraw from social interaction. It remains to be seen, however, what effect diversity has on the civic activity of organizations. Rather than retreat from civic life, I contend that congregations in diverse settings may develop a wider variety of service programs aimed at meeting the multiplicity of needs that exist there and foster more robust ties to the community. As overall levels of social cohesion and civic engagement in a community decline, religious congregations may be especially motivated to develop service programs aimed at strengthening their communities. Therefore, I hypothesize that:

*H2: Congregations located in counties characterized by higher levels of ethnic and social diversity will provide more community service programs than congregations in homogenous counties.*

Finally, I contend that interactions between congregation and community diversity are likely to have a multiplicative effect on congregations' community service activity. Socially and ethnically heterogeneous congregations in diverse communities may be particularly well placed to activate latent stores of bridging social capital. Likewise, internal diversity might make it easier for some congregations to develop

programs that meet the needs of an increasingly diverse society. Therefore, I hypothesize the following interaction effect:

*H3: Being located in a more ethnically and socially diverse community will increase the positive effect that internal diversity has on the number of community service programs provided by a congregation.*

### *Data and Methods*

To test my research hypotheses, I analyze data drawn from the U.S. Congregational Life Survey (USCLS), conducted in 2001 by researchers at the Research Services office of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Hyper-sampling techniques were utilized to generate a random national sample of U.S. congregations using data gathered from respondents to the 2000 General Social Survey (GSS).<sup>4</sup> The congregations identified through this process were then asked to participate in the USCLS. Of the 1,214 congregations identified, 434 (36 percent) participated in the study. This participation rate poses some limitations to the generalizability of the data gathered. Despite its shortcomings, however, the USCLS represents a significant source of information on the organizational life of congregations from a wide variety of denominations and religious traditions, and from every region of the U.S.

This survey is one of the largest studies of religious worshipers ever conducted in the U.S. Researchers surveyed all worshipers at participating congregations during the weekend of April 29, 2001. This yielded survey data from 122,043 individuals, providing an unprecedented window into American congregational life (Woolever & Bruce, 2002). The USCLS included questions dealing with religious beliefs, attitudes,

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<sup>4</sup> Researchers at the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) asked participants in the 2000 GSS who reported attending worship at least once during the past year to provide the name of the place where they worshipped (Woolever & Bruce, 2002).

and practices as well as a set of standard demographic items. Researchers also collected organizational data (e.g., average attendance, date of founding, number and type of programs) from each congregation. Furthermore, by matching congregations with county level data from the 2000 U.S. Census it is possible to test relationships between congregation and community characteristics.

For the present study, I restrict multivariate analyses to data collected from 389 congregations. This smaller dataset is the result of excluding congregations missing data on key variables. Comparison of this restricted sample with other recent national congregational samples indicates that there is some bias, with larger congregations and mainline Protestant groups being over-represented. The smallest congregations (fewer than 100 regular attenders) are under-represented here (22 percent).<sup>5</sup> The sample is also skewed by religious tradition, with evangelical congregations being under-represented (29 percent) and mainline congregations being over-represented (39 percent).<sup>6</sup> Weights were constructed by NORC to correct for this bias and can be applied to the data when appropriate.<sup>7</sup> However, unweighted data are used for all multivariate analyses as weighting has been shown to bias standard errors in multivariate regression models (Winship & Radbill, 1994).

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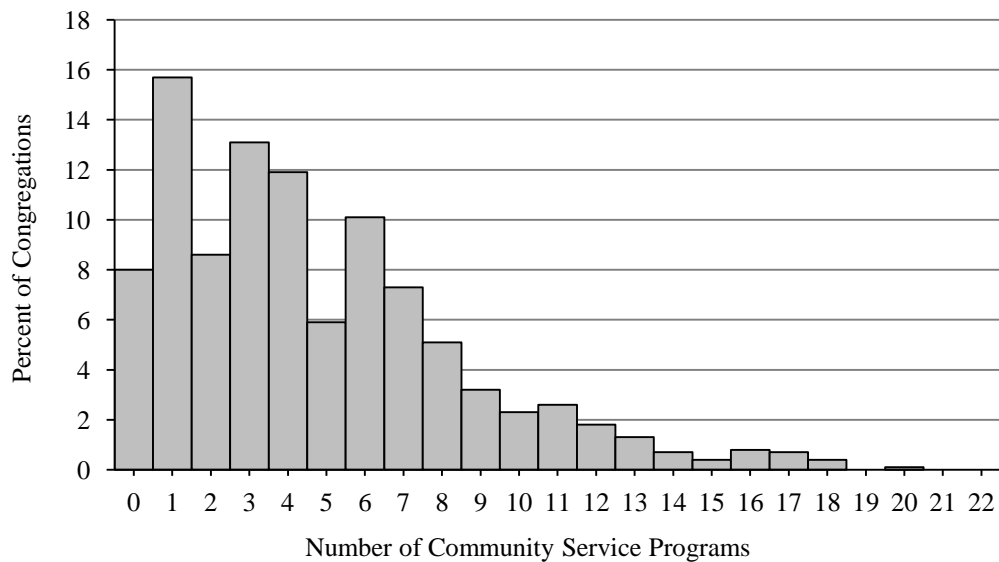
<sup>5</sup> The Faith Communities Today study (Dudley & Roozen, 2001) found that 50 percent of American congregations have fewer than 100 regularly participating adults.

<sup>6</sup> Data from the National Congregations Study (Chaves, 2004) indicate that 54 percent of American congregations are evangelical Protestant and approximately 26 percent are mainline Protestant.

<sup>7</sup> Once USCLS data are weighted, the sample appears similar to the samples of other recent national congregational surveys.

### *Dependent Variable*

The dependent variable under analysis in this chapter is a count of the community service programs provided by congregations. A key informant from each congregation was asked to indicate how many of 23 different service programs the congregation had provided during the past 12 months. These services included a wide variety of activities ranging from traditional social services to support groups to recreational and health-related services (Woolever & Bruce, 2002). For a full listing of the community service programs that congregations could provide, see Appendix B. As illustrated in Figure 1, descriptive analyses of the data reveal significant variation in the number of community services provided by congregations in the sample. Descriptive information for all variables is presented in Table 4.



*Figure 1.* Distribution of community service programs among U.S. congregations. Weighted data. N = 389. Mean = 4.70. SD = 3.78.

### *Independent Variables*

I include several explanatory variables to test the proposed research hypotheses. First, in order to examine the effects of ethnic, income, and educational diversity, I construct three standardized measures of diversity for each congregation (i.e., one for ethnic diversity, one for income diversity, and one for diversity in educational achievement). The USCLS gathered detailed information about each worship attendee's race/ethnicity, income level, and level of education. For each of these three parameters individuals were asked to indicate to which of six separate categories they belonged. For instance, attendees were asked to select from six different income categories. Using this data, I constructed a standardized entropy index for each parameter (Dougherty, 2003; White, 1986). An entropy index measures the evenness of group members' distribution among distinct response categories and ranges from 0 to 1 with 0 representing complete homogeneity and 1 representing perfect heterogeneity. For instance, a congregation in which every member belongs to the same ethnic group will have an ethnic entropy index score of 0, while a congregation made up of six equally represented ethnic groups will have an ethnic entropy index score of 1. The same is true for income and education entropy index scores. The formula used to construct the standardized entropy indexes is

$$H = \frac{\sum_{k=1}^K P_k \log P_k}{\log K}$$

where  $P_k$  = the proportion of the  $k_{th}$  group in each congregation and  $K$  = the number of categories (e.g., ethnic groups, income ranges, education attainment categories) used in construction of the index (Dougherty, 2003; White, 1986).

Table 4

*Descriptive Statistics for Congregation Level Analyses*

Variables	Minimum	Maximum	Mean/ Proportion	SD
<i>Dependent variable</i>				
Service activities	0	20	7.36	4.30
<i>Control variables</i>				
Average attendance (ln)	1.95	8.59	5.59	1.25
Congregation age (years)	2	365	86.21	57.27
Average age	29.10	72.11	52.34	7.04
Percent greater than \$100K	0.00	0.63	0.12	0.12
Percent college graduates	0.00	0.94	0.51	0.19
<i>Religious tradition<sup>a</sup></i>				
Evangelical Protestant	0	1	0.29	0.46
Mainline Protestant	0	1	0.39	0.49
Black Protestant	0	1	0.04	0.17
Roman Catholic	0	1	0.23	0.42
Other religion	0	1	0.05	0.22
Percent of county in poverty	0.04	0.33	0.12	0.04
Metro area	0	1	0.76	0.43
<i>Census Region<sup>b</sup></i>				
Northeast	0	1	0.18	0.39
South	0	1	0.32	0.47
Midwest	0	1	0.29	0.46
West	0	1	0.21	0.41
<i>Diversity measures</i>				
Congregation ethnic diversity	0.00	0.77	0.19	0.17
Congregation income diversity	0.00	0.99	0.86	0.10
Congregation education diversity	0.00	1.00	0.82	0.10
Overall congregation diversity	0.58	2.65	1.85	0.28
Overall community diversity	1.64	2.71	2.17	0.26
Interaction term	1.09	7.11	4.05	0.91

Note. N = 389.

<sup>a</sup> The omitted reference category for all analyses is evangelical Protestant. <sup>b</sup> The omitted reference category for all analyses is South.

In the same fashion I constructed ethnic, income, and educational diversity measures for the counties where congregations were located using data from the 2000 U.S. Census. Then, to calculate an overall diversity score for each congregation and each county, I summed the three entropy index scores (i.e., ethnic, income, education) for each level (i.e., congregation and county). Overall diversity scores for each congregation and county range from 0 to 3 with 0 representing complete homogeneity on all of the parameters and 3 representing perfect heterogeneity on all of the parameters. Table 4 indicates the average overall diversity score for the congregations and counties in the study. Finally, using the diversity measures described above I created an interaction term to test for interaction effects between congregation and community diversity.

### *Control Variables*

Researchers have examined the community services of congregations in the past, and there are a number of control variables that should be included in any new analyses. At the congregation level, I include the natural log of each congregation's average weekly attendance<sup>8</sup>, congregation age in years, the average age of adult worshipers, the percent of attenders earning greater than \$100K, and the percent of attenders that are college graduates. I also include a series of five dichotomous controls for religious tradition using the RELTRAD scheme proposed by Steensland et al. (2000). Congregations are placed into one of five major religious traditions: evangelical

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<sup>8</sup> Five congregations did not report average worship attendance figures for 2000 but did report average weekly attendance at worship services for 2001. For those congregations, I substituted 2001 average worship attendance.



Protestant, mainline Protestant, Black Protestant, Roman Catholic, and other religious groups.<sup>9</sup>

I also control for a number of important county level factors. Drawing on 2000 U.S. Census data, I control for the percent of the county population in poverty. I control for geographic region using a set of four dichotomous variables (i.e., Northeast, South, Midwest, West).<sup>10</sup> And, I include a dichotomous variable indicating metropolitan status according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) urban influence codes (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2003).

### *Modeling Strategy*

Because the dependent variable represents a count of the community service programs offered by congregations, I use Poisson estimation to for all multivariate analyses. A negative binomial model would be appropriate if there were evidence of overdispersion, a situation occurring when the variance of the dependent variable exceeds its mean (Berk & MacDonald, 2008). However, initial diagnostics run in SPSS reveal that overdispersion is not a significant problem in the current analyses.<sup>11</sup>

### *Results*

Before running multivariate models, I examined bivariate correlations between the dependent variable (i.e., number of community services) and the primary independent variables. Table 5 presents these results. It appears that the measures of social and ethnic

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<sup>9</sup> For all analyses, evangelical Protestant is the omitted category. I include Jewish adherents in "other religious groups" because of the small number of Jewish congregations that participated in the USCLS.

<sup>10</sup> For all analyses, South is the omitted category.

<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, negative binomial analyses revealed similar results.

diversity that I utilize are all positively correlated with the number of community services sponsored by congregations. This finding provides initial support for my hypotheses and justifies the use of more sophisticated multivariate analyses.

Table 5

*Correlations between Diversity and Number of Service Programs*

	Service programs
Racial diversity (N = 389)	0.199***
Income diversity (N = 389)	0.252***
Education diversity (N = 389)	0.208***
Overall congregation diversity (N = 389)	0.304***
Overall community diversity (N = 389)	0.337***

*Note.* \*p < 0.05. \*\*p < 0.01. \*\*\*p < 0.001.

Tables 6 and 7 present results from a set of Poisson regression models predicting the number of community service programs provided by congregations. The control variables included in the models behave largely as expected given the findings of previous researchers, with average attendance and religious tradition acting as important predictors of a congregation's community service involvement (Chaves, 2004; Chaves & Tsitsos, 2001; Cnaan et al., 2002). In the remainder of this paper, however, I will focus on the effect that measures of social and ethnic diversity have on the dependent variable.

Table 6

*Poisson Results for Effects of Congregational Diversity on Service Programs*

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Control variables</i>			
Average attendance (ln)	0.315*** (0.021)	0.305*** (0.021)	0.308*** (0.021)
Congregation age (years)	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)
Average age	0.005 (0.003)	0.004 (0.004)	0.005 (0.004)
Percent greater than \$100K	0.318 (0.223)	0.404 (0.231)	0.488 (0.237)
Percent college graduates	-0.007 (0.161)	-0.068 (0.166)	-0.110 (0.170)
Religious tradition <sup>a</sup>			
Mainline Protestant	0.313*** (0.053)	0.306*** (0.052)	0.306*** (0.052)
Black Protestant	0.100 (0.116)	0.076 (0.116)	0.082 (0.116)
Roman Catholic	-0.105 (0.064)	-0.099 (0.064)	-0.105 (0.064)
Other	0.106 (0.101)	0.128 (0.101)	0.135 (0.101)
Metropolitan area	0.085 (0.055)	0.085 (0.054)	0.083 (0.054)
Percent in poverty	0.006 (0.005)	0.009 (0.005)	0.008 (0.005)
Region <sup>b</sup>			
Northeast	0.069 (0.060)	0.071 (0.060)	0.057 (0.060)
Midwest	0.028 (0.052)	0.023 (0.052)	0.022 (0.053)
West	-0.052 (0.059)	-0.055 (0.054)	-0.065 (0.055)
<i>Diversity measures</i>			
Congregation ethnic diversity	0.388* (0.160)	0.342* (0.161)	0.354* (0.160)
Congregation income diversity		0.485** (0.214)	
Congregation educational diversity			0.476* (0.200)
Intercept	-0.465* (0.146)	-0.791** (0.210)	-0.809** (0.204)
Reduction in error term	0.205	0.208	0.209
N	389	389	389

Note. \*p < 0.05. \*\*p < 0.01. \*\*\*p < 0.001.

<sup>a</sup> The omitted reference category for all analyses is evangelical Protestant. <sup>b</sup> The omitted reference category for all analyses is South.

Table 6, Model 1 reveals that ethnic diversity, measured using the standardized entropy index, is significantly related to a congregation's community service activity (0.388, SE = 0.160,  $p < 0.05$ ). A congregation that is more racially and ethnically diverse provides more community service programs, on average, than ethnically homogeneous congregations, even controlling for other congregation and community factors. For each unit increase in a congregation's ethnic diversity the number of community services provided increases by approximately 47 percent.

Likewise, Models 2 and 3 reveal that measures of income and educational diversity are significantly related to a congregation's community service activity. For each unit increase in a congregation's level of income diversity, the number of community services increases by a factor of 0.485 or about 62 percent (SE = 0.214,  $p < 0.01$ ). And for each unit increase in a congregation's level of educational diversity, the number of community service programs increases by a factor of 0.476 or 61 percent (SE = 0.200,  $p < 0.05$ ). These findings provide empirical support for my first hypothesis. Ethnic, income, and educational diversity are related to increased community service involvement among U.S. congregations.

Table 7 presents the results of three additional Poisson models. Model 1 reveals that overall congregation diversity, a measure created by summing congregation entropy scores, is related to the number of community services (0.321, SE = 0.083,  $p < 0.01$ ). For each unit increase in a congregation's overall diversity score, the number of community services can be expected to increase by approximately 39 percent. This finding provides additional support for hypothesis 1.

Table 7

*Poisson Results for Effects of Community Diversity on Service Programs*

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Control variables</i>			
Average attendance (ln)	0.304*** (0.021)	0.300*** (0.022)	0.297*** (0.022)
Congregation age (years)	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)
Average age	0.005 (0.003)	0.005 (0.003)	0.004 (0.003)
Percent greater than \$100K	0.491* (0.236)	0.309 (0.246)	0.312 (0.247)
Percent college graduates	-0.119 (0.168)	-0.123 (0.168)	-0.146 (0.170)
<i>Religious tradition<sup>a</sup></i>			
Mainline Protestant	0.304*** (0.052)	0.302*** (0.053)	0.299*** (0.053)
Black Protestant	0.071 (0.116)	0.061 (0.116)	0.055 (0.116)
Roman Catholic	-0.100 (0.064)	-0.100 (0.064)	-0.102 (0.064)
Other	0.141 (0.101)	0.130 (0.102)	0.123 (0.103)
Metropolitan area	0.085 (0.055)	0.005 (0.064)	-0.006 (0.065)
Percent in poverty	0.009* (0.005)	0.004 (0.005)	0.004 (0.005)
<i>Region<sup>b</sup></i>			
Northeast	0.063 (0.060)	0.056 (0.060)	0.059 (0.060)
Midwest	0.021 (0.052)	0.040 (0.053)	0.044 (0.053)
West	-0.060 (0.058)	-0.069 (0.058)	-0.062 (0.058)
<i>Diversity measures</i>			
Overall congregation diversity	0.321** (0.083)	0.277** (0.084)	0.982 (0.749)
Overall community diversity		0.308** (0.111)	0.892 (0.621)
Interaction term			-0.307 (0.323)
Intercept	-0.907*** (0.146)	-1.341** (0.246)	-2.630* (1.391)
Reduction in error term	0.210	0.214	0.214
N	389	389	389

Note. \*p < 0.05. \*\*p < 0.01. \*\*\*p < 0.001.

<sup>a</sup> The omitted reference category for all analyses is evangelical Protestant. <sup>b</sup> The omitted reference category for all analyses is South.

In addition, results reported in Model 2 provide support for my second hypothesis, that community diversity is positively related to the service involvement of congregations (0.308, SE = 0.111,  $p < 0.01$ ). For each unit increase in a community's overall diversity score, the number of community services can be expected to increase by about 36 percent. It is possible that community diversity, while negatively impacting the civic engagement of individuals (Putnam, 2007), creates a situation particularly well-suited for the development of congregation-based service programs.

Finally, my third hypothesis is not supported by the findings presented in Table 7, Model 3. There appears to be no significant interaction effect between congregation and community diversity. In other words, the diversity of the county in which a congregation is located has no effect on the relationship between congregation diversity and community services. Diverse congregations do not provide more services in diverse counties, and homogeneous congregations do not provide fewer services. Nevertheless, the results of my analyses provide support for my argument that ethnic and social diversity at the congregation and community levels is likely to increase the bridging activity of American congregations.

### *Discussion*

The community service programs of congregations have received much attention in recent years (Chaves, 2004; Putnam, 2000; Wuthnow, 2004; Cnaan et al., 2002; Hodgkinson & Weitzman, 1996). Policy-makers and researchers have sought to determine the extent of these programs and to understand more about their impact on communities. However, previous studies show that not all congregations are equally engaged in the provision of such services. Indeed, there is significant variation in the

level of congregations' involvement (Chaves & Tsitsos, 2001). In the current paper, I explore this variation and find that social and ethnic diversity are significant predictors of congregations' involvement in community services.

The small minority of congregations that are comprised of individuals from across a spectrum of ethnic, income, and education categories provide more community services on average than socially and ethnically homogenous congregations. While the specific causal mechanisms underlying this relationship cannot be determined from these data, I suggest that there is something about social and ethnic diversity that motivates or enables a congregation to establish programs to meet the needs of the wider community. I believe that diverse congregations are likely to possess unique stores of bridging social capital that make it easier for them to establish these programs. Future research should seek to examine more closely how religious diversity affects the community involvement and organizational health of local congregations. As U.S. society continues to become more diverse in the future, it will be important for religious leaders and social researchers to understand how internal and external diversity is likely to impact the community activities of religious organizations.

My findings have particular significance in light of recent work suggesting that social diversity may deter civic engagement (Putnam, 2007). At the very least, my findings contribute an important nuance to this line of research. In increasingly diverse environments which may be less conducive to the development of trust and civic engagement at the individual level, congregations and religious organizations may step in to fill a void, establishing programs that bring community members together and meet local needs. I suggest that the bridging social capital within a congregation can be a

particularly valuable resource in communities characterized by low levels of social integration and cohesion.

Clearly, the establishment of formal community service programs is not the only way that a congregation can become engaged in the community. Previous research shows that congregations often support the work of other public, private, and faith-based service organizations (Ammerman, 2005a; Chaves, 2004; Polson, 2008; Wineburg, 2001). Nevertheless, the establishment of congregation-based services represents a unique contribution that requires a significant investment of organizational resources (e.g., time, money, human capital). It appears that diverse congregations are more likely to make this type of investment than socially and ethnically homogeneous congregations. As American communities continue to grow more ethnically and socially diverse, religious congregations are likely to be one of the few community organizations with the ability to build strong bridges between diverse segments of the population.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### Congregational Contexts and Individual Civic Participation

#### *Introduction*

Religious congregations occupy an important social space in the United States. More citizens participate regularly in these organizations than in almost any other type of voluntary association or group (Chaves, 2004; Putnam, 2000). In fact, national surveys reveal that approximately 40 percent of the population reports attending religious services on a weekly basis (Gallup & Lindsay, 1999; Princeton Religion Research Center, 2002).<sup>1</sup> Millions of Americans gather in churches, synagogues, and mosques each week to renew their faith and seek spiritual guidance for their lives. The influence that congregations have on social life in the U.S. is not limited to the religious sphere, however.

Congregations also make significant contributions to civic life, or the patterns of public involvement and cooperation that exist in communities. Many congregations provide volunteers and financial support to a wide variety of community and nonprofit organizations (Ammerman, 2005a; Cnaan et al., 2002; Hodgkinson & Weitzman, 1996; Hodgkinson, Weitzman, & Kirsch, 1988; Wineburg, 2001). They afford members opportunities to develop skills that can be used in other civic contexts (Ammerman, 1997a; Verba et al., 1995). And they foster valuable bridging social capital that is believed to strengthen community ties and increase communication between diverse groups of citizens (Ammerman, 1997a; Putnam, 2000; Wuthnow, 1999). Yet, despite

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<sup>1</sup> Hadaway et al. (1993) and Hadaway and Marler (2005) argue that the percentage of Americans who attend religious services weekly is lower. Utilizing alternative methods to estimate worship attendance, they find that only 22 percent of Americans attend on a weekly basis.

growing interest in their contributions to the health of civic life, we still know little about the ways that varying congregational contexts affect individual behavior.

Certainly, many religious groups hold that serving the community is an important part of their mission and encourage individual members to do so (Ammerman, 2005a; Cnaan et al., 2002; Davidson, Johnson, & Mock, 1990; Hall, 2005). But does an organizational commitment to community service translate into a civically engaged membership? And if so, is the relationship uniform across congregations? Or do other characteristics such as congregation size, strictness, and religious tradition have any bearing on individuals' civic activity? Answers to these questions have important implications for our understanding of the relationship between religion and civic life in the U.S. Drawing on data from a national congregational dataset, and using multilevel modeling techniques, I seek to address these questions in this chapter. I begin by reviewing existing literature on the relationship between civic participation and religion as well as research on the influence that social contexts have on individual behavior. Next, I propose several research hypotheses and present findings from a series of multilevel analyses to help clarify the relationship between religious contexts and civic engagement. Finally, I discuss the theoretical implications of these findings.

### *Civic Participation and Religion*

In recent years scholars have expressed concern about declining levels of civic participation in the U.S. (Putnam, 2000; Wuthnow, 1998; Skocpol, 1999a). Data indicate that Americans are less likely to join voluntary associations, participate in local politics, and socialize with their neighbors than they were a generation or two ago (Putnam, 2000). As a result, an extensive research literature has developed examining factors

related to the health of local civic life. And involvement in religious congregations has emerged as a particularly salient predictor of civic activity. Religious participation is positively related to membership in voluntary associations (Beyerlein & Hipp, 2006; Wuthnow, 1999), volunteering (Becker & Dhingra, 2001; Greeley, 1997), voting (Cassel, 1999; Olsen, 1972; Peterson, 1992), donating money to charitable organizations (Hodgkinson & Weitzman, 1996), and engaging in political activism (Ayala, 2000; Harris, 1999; Verba et al., 1995).

This robust relationship is often attributed to the bridging social capital that is believed to exist within religious organizations (Putnam, 2000; Wuthnow, 1999). The social networks, religious norms, and bonds of trust that develop among congregation members facilitate individuals' involvement in the wider community (Bartkowski & Regis, 2003; Putnam, 2000; Wuthnow, 2002b). Especially important are the connections that are made in activities outside of the worship service (Beyerlein & Hipp, 2006; Park & Smith, 2002; Wuthnow, 1994b). In Sunday school classes, small groups, and on church committees, people interact with one another, build affective relationships, and take on leadership roles that create opportunities for them to become more engaged in their communities. Furthermore, participation in religious organizations provides increased opportunity for individuals to develop skills or resources (e.g., the ability to lead a meeting, plan an event, or chair a committee) that can be used in other contexts (Verba et al., 1995). For example, by serving on a church committee an individual may gain skills in negotiation and consensus building that can be used in other organizations. Social capital and social resource perspectives, then, provide useful theoretical lenses

through which to view the robust relationship between religious participation and individual civic activity.

There is a growing awareness, however, that religious participation does not always increase civic engagement. Beyerlein and Hipp (2006) find that increased activity in some types of congregations (i.e., evangelical Protestant) has little or no effect on civic engagement. And Schwadel (2005) recently discovered that involvement with conservative congregations may actually decrease individuals' participation in some non-church organizations. These studies are important because they suggest that the relationship between religious participation and civic engagement is contextual. While participation in some congregations is related to increased civic activity, participation in other congregations may actually decrease activity. But what factors account for this variation?

Certainly, denominational affiliation and religious tradition are likely to have an effect (Hall, 2005; Wuthnow, 1999). I suggest, however, that congregational factors may have an effect independent of religious tradition. The congregation is the most local level of religious affiliation in the U.S. and comprises a unique local culture. It is a social space where individuals develop relationships and commitments that inform and shape their daily lives (Ammerman, 1997b; Becker, 1999). Therefore, if we desire to understand how religious involvement influences civic activity it makes sense to take into consideration the effects that congregational contexts have on individual behavior.

### *Social Context Matters*

Recognition that social contexts or environments influence individual experience is an important contribution that the field of sociology has made to the social sciences.

That the groups, communities, and organizations of which one is a part influence attitudes and behavior is central to a sociological understanding of the individual. In his groundbreaking study of suicide, Emile Durkheim (1951 [1897]) first demonstrated the power that social forces can have for predicting even the most seemingly individualistic of behaviors. He discovered that different nations' suicide rates varied with levels of social integration and with religious composition (1951 [1897], pp. 152-170). Ever since, researchers have sought to understand how social contexts impinge upon a variety of individual and social outcomes (Djupe & Gilbert, 2006; Huckfeldt, 1986; Moore & Vanneman, 2003; Sampson, Morenoff, & Ganon-Rowley, 2002; Stark, 1996).

Some of the most recent work on contextual effects has focused on the influence that neighborhoods, communities, and schools have on outcomes such as adolescent delinquency and incidence of substance abuse (Billy et al., 1994; Brewster et al., 1993; Hoffman, 2002, 2006; Ku et al., 1993; Oberwittler, 2004; Sun, 1999; Wallace, Yamaguchi, Bachman, O'Malley, Schulenberg, & Johnston, 2007). Moreover, these studies illustrate that both structural and cultural characteristics of social contexts affect individual behavior. Particularly germane to the discussion of civic engagement, however, is classic research on the relationship between contextual effects and political behavior.

In a study of Swedish voting patterns, Herbert Tingsten (1937) first noticed that neighborhood class composition tended to be related to voter choice. He found that living in neighborhoods dominated by working class residents increased the likelihood that individuals would vote for socialist candidates, even if they did not identify with the socialist party themselves. Likewise, Robert Huckfeldt (1979) has demonstrated that

neighborhood class composition influences the likelihood of engaging in political activities such as letter writing and campaigning. And a spate of more recent studies extends these findings (Brooks & Prysby, 1991; Gilbert, 1993; Huckfeldt, 1986).

Some scholars contend that such contextual effects are merely a result of social interaction – that interaction between individuals in a group over time increases the likelihood that they will hold similar views or exhibit similar patterns of behavior (Brooks & Prysby, 1991; Huckfeldt, 1983; Weatherford, 1982). Others emphasize the ability that groups have to formally or informally sanction members and enforce social norms as the key to understanding contextual effects (Brooks & Prsyby, 1991; Wald et al., 1988). I contend that both processes are likely at work in local congregations. Close social interaction within these organizations and the ability that they have to enforce social norms among their members make them particularly effective as “political communities” (Wald et al. 1988, p. 535). Indeed, research shows that political messages communicated within congregations carry significant weight for worshipers (Brewer et al., 2003; Djupe & Gilbert, 2002; Huckfeldt, Plutzer, & Sprague, 1993; Wald, Owen, & Hill, 1990; Welch, Leege, Wald, & Kellstedt, 1993). Djupe and Grant (2001) refer to this as the “social contagion” process. Over time new members of a congregation will come to hold similar political and social views as the majority. Moreover, they find that worshipers who are aware of the political norms of their own religious group tend to be more politically active (p. 310). They are more likely to perceive political messages communicated within the group. And their behavior is more likely to be influenced by those messages.

All of these studies suggest that exposure to social norms within a religious organization is likely to have an influence on individual behavior. I contend, therefore, that worshipers attending congregations which place a high value on community service are more likely to be civically engaged than others. In contrast, I contend that worshipers in congregations emphasizing separation from wider society are less likely to be civically engaged (Regnerus & Smith, 1998; Schwadel, 2005; Smith, 1998). One important way that religious groups maintain distinction from society is through the use of moral restrictions and/or behavioral requirements (Bainbridge, 1997; Iannaccone, 1994).

Therefore, I propose the following hypotheses:

*H1: Individuals attending congregations perceived to have high levels of commitment to community service are more likely to be civically engaged than individuals attending congregations perceived to have lower levels of commitment to community service.*

*H2: Individuals attending more restrictive congregations are less likely to be civically engaged than individuals attending less restrictive congregations.*

Another contextual factor that should be taken into consideration is congregation size. Organizational research has often indicated that group size can have adverse effects on levels of individual commitment and activity within an organization (Caplow, 1957; Finke, 1994; Knoke, 1981). Large groups tend to have a more difficult time communicating social norms and enforcing conformity among their constituent members. In addition, they often have difficulty monitoring the behavior of members and are likely to attract a significant number of free-riders, or individuals who seek the benefits of membership without contributing time or resources to the group and its mission (Iannaccone, 1994; Olson & Caddell, 1994; Wilken, 1971).

Whether it is in a corporation, a fraternity, or a voluntary association, the presence of free-riders decreases the average level of commitment to the organization and its mission as well as the value of the collective goods produced by the organization. Iannaccone (1994) and Finke (1994) have shown that this dynamic is present in religious organizations as well. Levels of commitment, giving, and conformity to religious beliefs tend to be lower in larger congregations. If we view civic responsibility as a collective good fostered within some congregations, we may expect that larger congregations will be less effective in the production of this good. Moreover, many of the factors believed to motivate civic responsibility (e.g., social norms, expectations, civic messages) are likely to have less influence on individuals in large congregations. I propose, therefore, that:

*H3: Individuals attending larger congregations are less likely to be civically engaged than individuals attending smaller congregations.*

Finally, as mentioned previously, one of the most consistent findings of past research is that civic participation varies by religious tradition (Ammerman, 2005a; Beyerlein & Hipp, 2006; Hall, 2005; Hodgkinson et al., 1988; Mock, 1992; Schwadel, 2005; Smidt, 1999; Warner & Lunt, 1941; Wilson & Janoski, 1995; Wuthnow, 1991a, 1999). Mainline Protestants tend to be more civically engaged than either Roman Catholics or evangelical Protestants (Smidt, 1999; Wuthnow, 1999).<sup>2</sup> This is likely due to the emphasis that mainline Protestant denominations have historically placed on civic responsibility (Hall, 2005). Other traditions have had a more ambiguous commitment to civic life. For instance, throughout their history evangelical Protestants have attempted to engage society while also maintaining distinction from it, creating a set of countervailing

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<sup>2</sup> Some recent studies, however, indicate that evangelical Protestants may be more civically engaged than previously thought (Becker & Dhingra, 2001; Uslaner, 2002).



forces capable of both encouraging and deterring civic activity (Hall, 2005; Smith, 1998). And within the Roman Catholic Church, despite a long tradition of teachings that emphasize social responsibility, a hierarchical organization and the existence of professional service agencies (e.g., Catholic Charities) may contribute to decreased levels of civic activity among individual parishioners (Bane, 2005; Lam, 2002; Leege, 1988; Verba et al., 1995).

Taking these historical patterns into consideration, I contend that the relationship between a congregation's service commitment and attenders' civic behavior is likely to vary by religious tradition, with mainline Protestants being the most positively affected. In contrast, I believe that the relationship between congregational strictness and civic participation should remain negative across religious traditions. Congregations emphasizing distinction or separateness from society should deter attenders from becoming civically engaged, regardless of tradition. Therefore, I propose that:

*H4: The relationship between a congregational culture of service and individual civic participation will vary by religious tradition, with individuals in mainline Protestant congregations being more positively affected than individuals in either evangelical Protestant or Roman Catholic congregations.*

*H5: The relationship between congregational strictness and individual civic participation will remain negative across religious traditions.*

#### *Data and Methods*

To test my research hypotheses, I analyze data drawn from the U.S. Congregational Life Survey (USCLS), conducted in 2001 by researchers at the Research Services office of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Hyper-sampling techniques were utilized to generate a random national sample of U.S. congregations using data gathered

from respondents to the 2000 General Social Survey (GSS).<sup>3</sup> The congregations identified through this process were then asked to participate in the USCLS. Of the 1,214 congregations identified, 434 (36 percent) participated in the study. This participation rate poses some limitations to the generalizability of the data gathered. Despite its shortcomings, however, the USCLS represents a significant source of information on the organizational life of congregations from a wide variety of denominations and religious traditions, and from every region of the U.S.

This survey is one of the largest studies of religious worshipers ever conducted in the United States. Researchers surveyed all worshipers at participating congregations during the weekend of April 29, 2001. This yielded survey data from 122,043 individuals, providing an unprecedented window into American congregational life (Woolever & Bruce, 2002). The USCLS included questions dealing with religious beliefs, attitudes, and practices as well as a set of standard demographic items. Researchers also collected organizational data (e.g., average attendance, date of founding, number and type of programs) from each congregation. The inclusion of this information resulted in a hierarchically structured dataset that is ideal for testing the proposed research hypotheses.

For this paper, I restrict statistical analyses to data collected from 92,089 individuals in 412 congregations. This smaller set of respondents is the result of excluding individuals under the age of 18 and the listwise deletion of cases missing data on key variables. Comparison of this restricted sample with other recent national congregational samples indicates that there is some bias, with larger congregations and

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<sup>3</sup> Researchers at the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) asked participants in the 2000 GSS who reported attending worship at least once during the past year to provide the name of the place where they worshipped (Woolever & Bruce, 2002).

mainline Protestant groups being over-represented. The smallest congregations (fewer than 100 regular attenders) are under-represented here (22 percent).<sup>4</sup> The sample is also skewed by religious tradition, with evangelical congregations being under-represented (29 percent) and mainline congregations being over-represented (39 percent).<sup>5</sup> Weights were constructed by NORC to correct for this bias and can be applied to the data when appropriate.<sup>6</sup> However, unweighted data are used for all multivariate analyses as weighting has been shown to bias standard errors in multivariate regression models (Winship & Radbill, 1994).

### *Dependent Variables*

The dependent variables under analysis consist of three dichotomous measures of civic participation. The first two items ask respondents to indicate whether they are regularly involved in two types of community groups: social service or charity groups (1 = yes) and advocacy, justice, or lobbying groups (1 = yes). And the third dependent variable is a dichotomous measure indicating whether respondents have worked with others to solve a community problem in the last 12 months (1 = yes). Descriptive information for all variables is provided in Table 8.

### *Individual Level Variables*

While I am primarily interested in observing congregation level effects, I also include in my analyses important individual level variables that researchers have found to

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<sup>4</sup> The Faith Communities Today study (Dudley & Roozen, 2001) found that 50 percent of American congregations have fewer than 100 regularly participating adults.

<sup>5</sup> Data from the National Congregations Study (Chaves, 2004) indicate that 54 percent of American congregations are evangelical Protestant and approximately 26 percent are mainline Protestant.

<sup>6</sup> Once USCLS data are weighted, the sample appears similar to the samples of other recent national congregational surveys.

be related to civic engagement in the past. First, I include two measures of religious participation. Frequency of service attendance is an ordinal variable ranging from 0 (first time/hardly ever attend) to 5 (attend more than once a week). And congregational involvement, ranging from 0 to 5, represents a count of the congregational activities (e.g., Sunday school, prayer groups, outreach activities) in which a respondent is involved.

I also include three other individual level religion variables that have been shown to predict civic participation in the past. It is widely recognized that conservative religion is related to lower levels of civic involvement (Schwadel, 2005; Wuthnow, 1999). Therefore, I utilize a five point ordinal variable measuring respondents' biblical literalism as a proxy for conservative religious identity. Responses to this item range from 0 to 4, with higher scores indicating a more literal interpretation of the Bible. Research has also demonstrated that participation in devotional practices such as prayer and meditation increases civic engagement (Loveland et al., 2005). Therefore, I include a six point ordinal variable for frequency of devotional activity ranging from 0 (never) to 5 (every day or most days). And because some scholars of civic life contend that social networks facilitate civic participation (Putnam, 2000; Verba et al., 1995), I include a four point ordinal variable measuring the strength of respondents' congregational friendship networks. Respondents were asked if they had any close friends within the congregation. Responses ranged from 0 (I have little contact with others from this congregation outside of activities here) to 3 (Most of my closest friends are part of this congregation). It should be noted that some scholars of civic life suggest that dense intra-group networks can have a negative effect on civic engagement. In fact, some have referred to this as the "dark side" of social capital (Fiorina, 1999; Portes & Landolt, 1996; Putnam 2000).

Finally, I include a set of standard demographic control variables for age (measured in years), sex (1 = female), race (1 = nonwhite), marital status (1 = married), number of children (ranging from 0 to 13), and educational attainment (a six point ordinal variable ranging from no formal schooling to graduate degree). Each respondent's score for age, educational attainment, religious service attendance, congregational involvement, view of the Bible, and frequency of devotional activity is centered on the grand mean.

### *Congregation Level Variables*

The first congregation level variable that I include in my analyses is average attendance, a continuous variable representing each congregation's average worship attendance for the year 2000.<sup>7</sup> The second is perceived congregational service commitment, a variable representing the proportion of attenders in each congregation who report that the congregation is focused on serving the community. In other words, this variable measures the extent to which a congregations' service commitment is evident to attenders (Djupe & Grant, 2001). The third congregational variable that I use is a measure of congregational strictness (Bainbridge, 1997). A key informant in each congregation was asked whether the congregation had rules or prohibitions regarding nine commonly prohibited behaviors (e.g., smoking, dancing, drinking alcohol). I summed responses to these nine items to create a strictness index ranging from 0 to 9.

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<sup>7</sup> Five congregations did not report average worship attendance figures for 2000 but did report average weekly attendance at worship services for 2001. For those congregations, I substituted 2001 average worship attendance.

Table 8

*Descriptive Statistics for Multilevel Analyses*

Variables	Minimum	Maximum	Mean/ Proportion	SD
<i>Dependent variables</i> <sup>a</sup>				
Service group	0	1	0.27	0.45
Advocacy group	0	1	0.05	0.22
Cooperation	0	1	0.21	0.41
<i>Individual level variables</i> <sup>a</sup>				
Age	18	100	51.16	16.64
Female	0	1	0.61	0.49
Nonwhite	0	1	0.20	0.40
Married	0	1	0.69	0.46
Children	0	13	2.15	1.76
Education	0	5	3.07	1.24
Service attendance	0	5	3.87	0.94
Congregational involvement	0	5	1.01	1.28
Friendship network	0	3	1.64	0.91
Biblical literalism	0	4	3.12	0.78
Devotional activity	0	5	3.66	1.54
<i>Congregation level variables</i> <sup>b</sup>				
Average attendance	7	5400	577.76	856.98
Average education	0.33	4.50	2.98	0.58
Service commitment	0.32	1.00	0.80	0.13
Strictness	0	9	2.07	2.05
<i>Religious tradition</i> <sup>c</sup>				
Evangelical Protestant	0	1	0.29	0.45
Mainline Protestant	0	1	0.39	0.49
Black Protestant	0	1	0.03	0.18
Roman Catholic	0	1	0.23	0.42
Other religion	0	1	0.05	0.22
Metropolitan area	0	1	0.77	0.42

Note. <sup>a</sup> N = 92,089. <sup>b</sup> N = 412.

<sup>c</sup> The omitted reference category for all analyses is evangelical Protestant.

I also include several congregation level controls. First, I construct a variable for the average education level of each congregation. Then, drawing on a common method for classifying denominations, I construct five dichotomous religious tradition variables: evangelical Protestant, mainline Protestant, Black Protestant, Roman Catholic, and other religions (Steensland et al., 2000).<sup>8</sup> Finally, I include a dichotomous variable indicating metropolitan status according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's urban influence codes (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2003). Each congregation's score for average attendance, service commitment, strictness, and average education is centered on the grand mean.

### *Multilevel Modeling*

To examine the effects that congregational contexts have on individual civic behavior, I develop a series of multilevel logistic models using HLM6 software (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). Multilevel modeling is appropriate for these analyses because it combines an individual level regression equation with one or more group level equations in order to predict the effects of contextual level variables on coefficients from the individual model. In other words, multilevel modeling makes it possible to examine the effects that contextual factors such as a congregation's size or culture have on individual civic behaviors. While traditional regression techniques treat each case as an independent observation, multilevel models take into account the nested structure of hierarchically organized datasets. This results in more accurate standard errors. Because the dependent variables in my analyses are dichotomous, a special application of HLM6

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<sup>8</sup> For all analyses, evangelical Protestant is the omitted category. I include Jewish adherents in "other religious groups" because of the small number of Jewish congregations that participated in the USCLS.

software was employed for modeling outcomes with a Bernoulli distribution

(Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). Below are the individual level (1) and congregation level

(2) predication equations estimated using HLM6:

$$\eta_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 (\text{age}) + \beta_2 (\text{female}) + \beta_3 (\text{nonwhite}) + \beta_4 (\text{married}) + \beta_5 (\text{children}) \\ + \beta_6 (\text{education}) + \beta_7 (\text{service attendance}) + \beta_8 (\text{congregational involvement}) \quad (1) \\ + \beta_9 (\text{friends}) + \beta_{10} (\text{biblical literalism}) + \beta_{11} (\text{devotional activity}) + r$$

$$\beta_0 = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01} (\text{service commitment}) + \gamma_{02} (\text{strictness}) + \gamma_{03} (\text{average attendance}) \\ + \gamma_{04} (\text{average education}) + \gamma_{05} (\text{mainline Protestant}) + \gamma_{06} (\text{Black Protestant}) \quad (2) \\ + \gamma_{07} (\text{Roman Catholic}) + \gamma_{08} (\text{other religion}) + \gamma_{09} (\text{metropolitan area}) + u_0$$

### *Results*

Initial descriptive analyses of the dependent variables in this study support my contention that civic participation is not evenly distributed across congregations. In some, a considerable number of attenders report engaging in civic activities, while in others almost no one does. Figures 2 through 4 illustrate the distributions of the dependent variables across the congregations in the sample. Figure 2 reveals that in the average congregation approximately one third of attenders (31 percent) are involved in a social service or charity group outside of the congregation. This is a fairly common mode of civic engagement among worship attenders. What is most interesting, however, is the variation that exists among congregations ( $SD = 0.12$ ). The distribution of this variable approximates a normal curve with half of the congregations having more than 30 percent of attenders involved in a service group and the other half having less than 30 percent involved in this type of group. Further analyses are required to determine whether congregational factors help explain this variation.



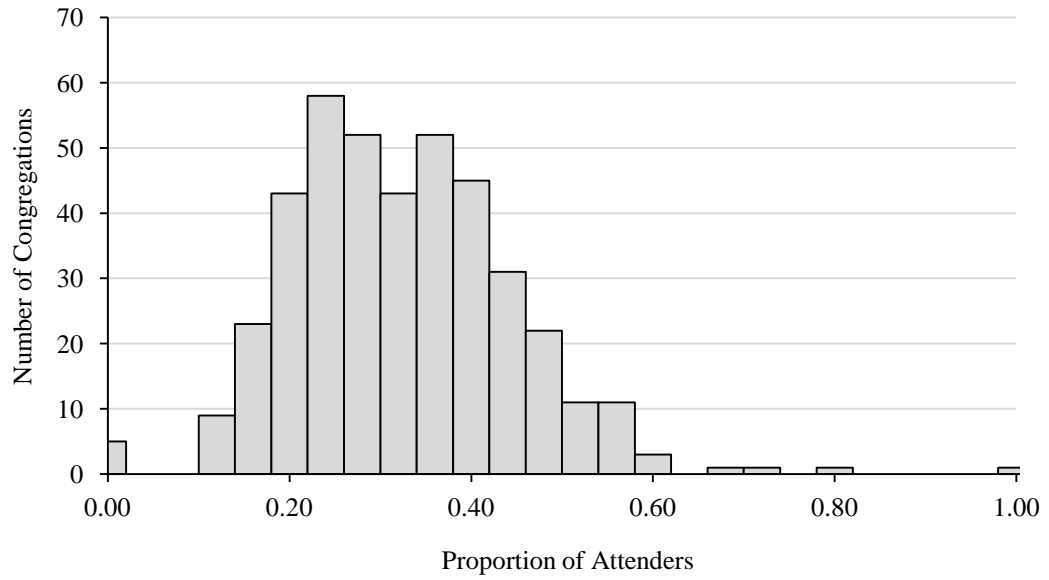


Figure 2. Proportion of attenders who are members of a service group. N = 412. Mean = 0.31. SD = 0.12.

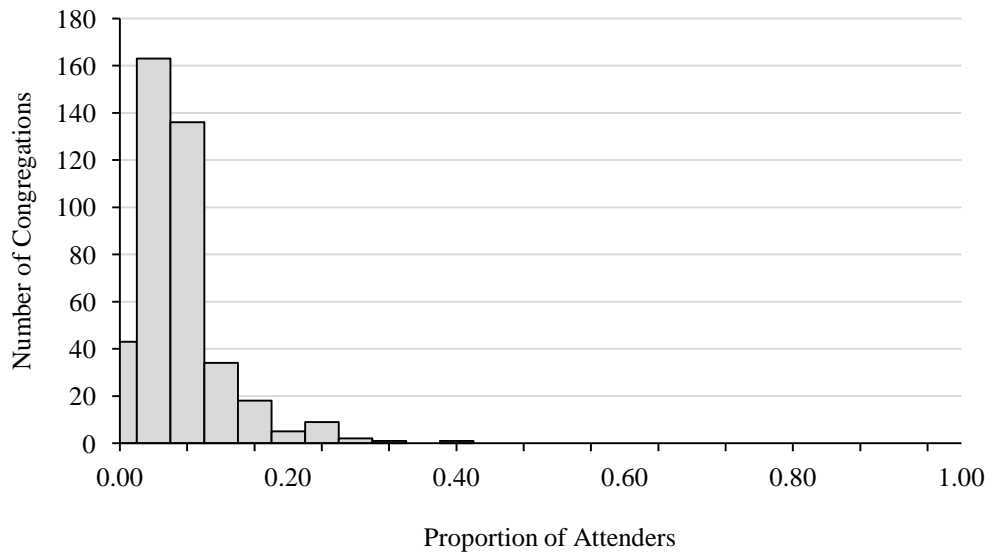
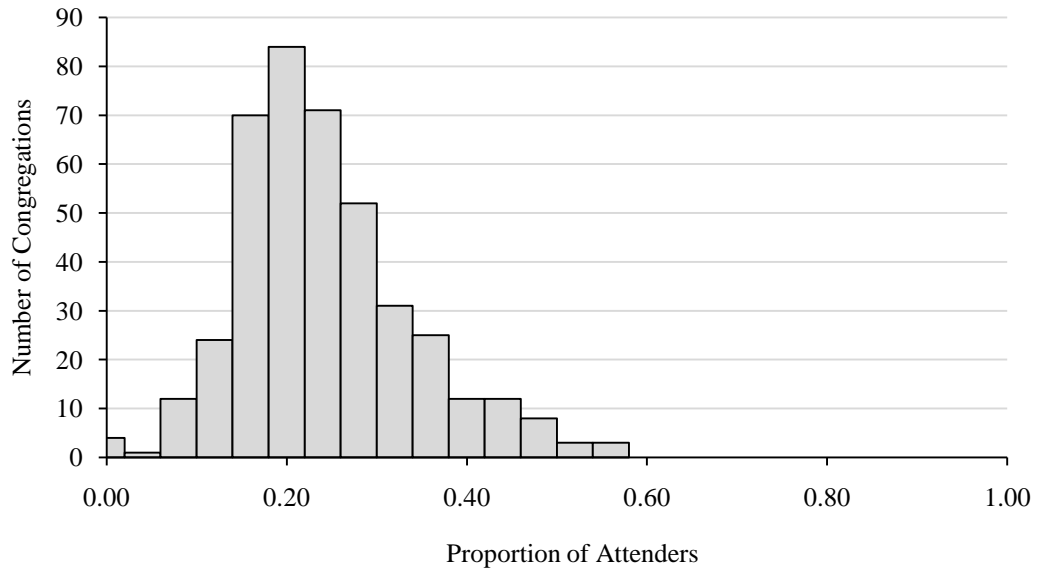


Figure 3. Proportion of attenders who are members of an advocacy group. N = 412. Mean = 0.06. SD = 0.05.



*Figure 4.* Proportion of attenders who have worked to solve a community problem.  $N = 412$ . Mean = 0.23.  $SD = 0.10$ .

Figure 3 reveals a very different pattern. Involvement with advocacy groups is much less common than service group membership. Only about six percent of attenders in the average congregation indicate this type of engagement, and there is less variation among congregations on this measure ( $SD = 0.05$ ). Activist congregations are the exception rather than the rule, with no congregation in the sample having more than 40 percent of attenders involved in this type of group. This finding is consistent with previous research indicating low levels of political activism among U.S. congregations (Ammerman, 2005a; Beyerlein & Chaves, 2003; Chaves et al., 2002). Nevertheless, in a small minority of congregations ( $n = 53$ ), ten to 40 percent of attenders are involved in advocacy groups. Finally, Figure 4 reveals that almost a quarter of attenders in the average congregation (23 percent) say that they have worked with others to try to solve a community problem in the past year. Like involvement in a service group, there appears to be more congregational variation on this measure of participation ( $SD = 0.10$ ). These

descriptive results lend initial support to the argument that congregational contexts have some influence on individuals' civic behavior.<sup>9</sup> Yet, descriptive analyses do not indicate why these patterns exist. I now turn to multivariate analyses to specify how congregational contexts are related to these patterns.

Table 9 presents results from multilevel logistic regression models predicting the likelihood of individuals' involvement in three different types of civic activity. These models reveal both individual and congregation level effects on civic participation. Individual level measures behave largely as expected based on previous findings. Congregational involvement, friendship networks, and devotional activity all increase the likelihood of civic participation, while biblical literalism decreases it. Therefore, I focus primarily on examining congregation level effects in the remainder of this paper.

The models in Table 9 reveal mixed support for my first hypothesis. A congregational culture of service appears to be positively related to two of the three dependent variables under examination. As a congregation's perceived commitment to the community increases among its members, so too does the likelihood that individual attenders will be involved with an advocacy group (odds ratio = 1.76,  $p < 0.01$ ) or will have cooperated with others to solve a community problem in the past year (odds ratio = 1.44,  $p < 0.05$ ). This finding supports the notion of a contagion effect, whereby the social norms and values predominant in a congregation influence the behavior of worshipers (Djupe & Grant, 2001). It is possible, however, that this relationship is the result of self-selection. Respondents predisposed to civic participation may choose to attend a

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<sup>9</sup> In the case of a standard two-level hierarchical linear model it would be customary to present variance components derived from the null model alongside the full model. This would reveal the magnitude of level-two variation relative to the total variation. However, computing the interclass correlation for a nonlinear hierarchical model is problematic since the level-one variance is heteroscedastic (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002).

congregation that values such activity. Nevertheless, the relationship has important implications for our understanding of religion and civic life. Interestingly, a congregation's perceived commitment to the community does not appear to be related to worshipers' involvement with social service or charity groups. If there is any contagion effect, it does not seem to extend to this, the most common type of civic participation measured here.

The models in Table 9 also reveal support for hypothesis 2. A restrictive congregational context is negatively related to all three measures of civic participation. Attending a strict congregation decreases the likelihood that someone will join a service group (odds ratio = 0.96,  $p < 0.001$ ), join an advocacy group (odds ratio = 0.97,  $p < 0.05$ ), or cooperate with others to solve a community problem (odds ratio = 0.96,  $p < 0.001$ ). Congregations emphasizing separation or distinction from society may deter their members' from these forms of civic engagement.

Providing support for hypothesis 3, Table 9 indicates that congregations' average attendance is negatively related to all three measures of civic participation. Attending a larger congregation decreases the likelihood that someone will join a service group (odds ratio = 0.99,  $p < 0.05$ ), join an advocacy group (odds ratio = 0.99,  $p < 0.05$ ), or cooperate with others to solve a community problem (odds ratio = 0.99,  $p < 0.05$ ). While it is not possible, using the current data, to parse out the specific causal mechanisms underlying the relationship between congregation size and civic participation, these findings provide support for the argument that individuals in larger congregations may be less susceptible to norms of community service involvement that exist within some congregations.

Nevertheless, it is also possible that larger congregations simply attract individuals who are less involved in civic life.

Table 9 also reveals that religious tradition is significantly related to civic participation. However, the relationship is not as straightforward as might be expected. While members of evangelical Protestant congregations are the least likely to engage in all three forms of civic activity, mainline Protestant attenders are not the most likely in every case. They are the most likely to participate in a service group (odds ratio = 1.43,  $p < 0.001$ ). However, members of other religions (odds ratio = 1.87,  $p < 0.001$ ) and Roman Catholics (odds ratio = 1.55,  $p < 0.001$ ) are the most likely to be involved in an advocacy group. And Black Protestants are the most likely to say that they have cooperated with others to solve a community problem during the past 12 months (odds ratio = 1.67,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Finally, my findings indicate that attenders of congregations located in metropolitan areas are less likely to join a service group (odds ratio = 0.78,  $p < 0.001$ ) and less likely to cooperate with others to solve a community problem (odds ratio = 0.84,  $p < 0.001$ ) than attenders of congregations in non-metropolitan areas. This corresponds with findings from other studies that suggest smaller communities may be more conducive to some forms of civic engagement (Gamm & Putnam, 1999). The likelihood of involvement in an advocacy group, however, is not related to metropolitan classification.

Table 9

*Odds Ratios for Multilevel Analyses of Civic Participation Measures*

	Model 1 Service Group	Model 2 Advocacy Group	Model 3 Cooperation
<i>Individual level</i>			
Age	1.01***	1.00	0.99***
Female	1.12***	0.76***	0.78***
Nonwhite	0.93*	0.97	0.97
Married	0.90***	0.79***	1.06*
Children	1.01	1.05***	1.05***
Education	1.27***	1.60***	1.38***
Service attendance	0.92***	0.92**	0.89***
Congregational involvement	1.47***	1.34***	1.34***
Friendship network	1.07***	1.01	1.10***
Biblical literalism	0.95***	0.87***	0.93***
Devotional activity	1.07***	1.06***	1.06***
<i>Congregation level</i>			
Average attendance	0.99*	0.99*	0.99*
Average education	1.38***	1.19**	1.19***
Service commitment	0.94	1.76**	1.44*
Strictness	0.96***	0.97*	0.96***
Religious tradition <sup>a</sup>			
Mainline Protestant	1.43***	1.12	1.30***
Black Protestant	1.36***	1.39*	1.67***
Roman Catholic	1.26***	1.55***	1.58***
Other religion	1.29*	1.87***	1.42***
Metropolitan area	0.78***	0.91	0.84***
Intercept	0.31***	0.05***	0.18***
<i>Variance component</i>			
Intercept	0.05**	0.09	0.05
Individual level N	92,089	92,089	92,089
Congregation level N	412	412	412

Note. \*p < 0.05. \*\*p < 0.01. \*\*\*p < 0.001.

<sup>a</sup> The omitted reference category for all analyses is evangelical Protestant.

Next, to determine how the relationship between congregations' service commitment or strictness and individual civic participation varies across religious traditions, I developed separate multilevel models for evangelical Protestant, mainline Protestant, and Roman Catholic congregations. Table 10 presents the odds ratios for the key independent variables in each of these six models.<sup>10</sup> Results indicate that a congregation's commitment to service has no significant effect on the civic participation of individuals in evangelical Protestant or Roman Catholic congregations. Attenders in these traditions appear to be no more or less likely to be civically engaged when there is a strong emphasis on community service. In contrast, mainline Protestants are much more susceptible to a congregation's emphasis on community services. Mainline attenders are more likely to join an advocacy group (odds ratio = 3.21,  $p < 0.01$ ) and cooperate with others to solve a community problem (odds ratio = 2.36,  $p < 0.01$ ) when they attend a congregation that they perceive to be concerned about the wider community. These findings support my fourth hypothesis, that a congregational culture of service is likely to increase civic participation most for mainline Protestants. However, these findings also suggest that the positive relationship between a congregational service commitment and individual civic engagement reported in Models 2 and 3 of Table 9 is largely the result of mainline Protestantism.

The results presented in Table 10 provide mixed support for hypothesis 5. As expected, within evangelical congregations strictness is negatively related to membership in a service group (odds ratio = 0.93,  $p < 0.001$ ) and cooperating with others to solve a

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<sup>10</sup> All of the individual and congregation level variables from previous models (see Table 2) were included in these analyses. Regression coefficients revealed similar relationships for most independent variables. To make interpretation of the results simpler, however, I report odds ratios for key independent variables only.

community problem (odds ratio = 0.97,  $p < 0.05$ ). However, strictness in evangelical congregations has no significant relationship with involvement in an advocacy group. Strictness is also negatively related to cooperation with others for mainline Protestants (odds ratio = 0.96,  $p < 0.05$ ) and with all three civic participation measures for Catholics. Catholic attenders in strict parishes are less likely to join a service group (odds ratio = 0.96,  $p < 0.05$ ), join an advocacy group (odds ratio = 0.93,  $p < 0.01$ ), or cooperate with others to solve a community problem (odds ratio = 0.95,  $p < 0.05$ ) than those in more lenient parishes. However, strictness has no effect on community group memberships for mainline Protestants. It may be that the civic orientation of mainline Protestantism insulates attenders in more strict mainline congregations from any negative effects.

Table 10

*Odds Ratios for Multilevel Analyses by Religious Tradition*

	Service Group	Advocacy Group	Cooperation
<i>Effects of service commitment</i>			
For evangelical Protestants	0.79	0.62	1.27
For mainline Protestants	1.28	3.21**	2.36**
For Roman Catholics	0.76	1.67	1.08
<i>Effects of strictness</i>			
For evangelical Protestants	0.93***	0.99	0.97*
For mainline Protestants	0.99	0.96	0.96*
For Roman Catholics	0.96*	0.93**	0.95*

*Note.* Analyses included all individual and congregation level variables from previous models.

\* $p < 0.05$ . \*\* $p < 0.01$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

*Discussion*

In this study, I set out to examine the effects that congregational contexts have on individual civic behavior. Much attention has already been given to the relationship between religious participation and civic engagement. However, few studies have



investigated the ways in which the structural and cultural characteristics of the congregation that one attends are likely to influence their civic activity. Utilizing multilevel modeling techniques, I have attempted to address this gap in the literature.

Results from my analyses suggest that some churches make better neighbors than others. I find that, controlling for frequency of attendance, a congregation's commitment to community service, its size, and its religious tradition are all significantly related to the likelihood that an attender will report participating in community groups or cooperating with others to solve a community problem. Individuals attending smaller congregations that emphasize service to the community are more likely to be involved in their community than megachurch attenders or those who attend very strict congregations.

The positive effect that a congregational commitment to service has on civic engagement appears to exist primarily among attenders of mainline Protestant congregations, however. In contrast, I find that restrictive congregations are negatively related to individual civic engagement across all traditions. Those congregations that put more extensive boundaries between themselves and society are comprised of fewer civically engaged individuals. This is especially the case for congregations in the evangelical Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions.

Direct causality cannot be determined from the current data, and it is possible that the relationship between congregational contexts and civic behavior is the result of a selection effect. However, I believe it is more likely that causality is multidirectional. Civically engaged individuals are attracted to smaller, more community-minded congregations, while participation in such congregations increases individuals' civic activity. And megachurches and more strict congregations attract individuals who

already tend to be less engaged in society. However, congregational participation likely reinforces their current posture towards the community. Future research is needed to determine if this is the case or if there are other explanations for the relationship between congregational context and individual civic activity.

In addition, my findings hold several important implications for our understanding of the relationship between religion and civic life in the U.S. First, they tell us that congregations' orientation towards society matters. A congregation's ethos is likely to shape the way that attenders view their responsibility to the community. While religious participation generally increases civic activity, participation in congregations that promote service to the community may be especially effective at increasing such behavior. And participation in a congregation that emphasizes separation from the world appears to deter civic activity. However, these effects vary significantly by tradition.

Norms of civic responsibility and messages emphasizing community service appear to be especially influential within mainline Protestant congregations. This is probably a result of mainline Protestantism's historical commitment to maintaining civil society (Hall, 2005). Interestingly, evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics are not affected significantly by a congregational commitment to the community. In contrast, mainline Protestants are less affected by congregational strictness than either evangelical Protestants or Roman Catholics. This, too, may be a result of mainline Protestantism's historical commitment to civic participation. These findings intimate the importance of congregational contexts. The more information that we can gather about the congregation that someone attends, the better we can predict levels of civic engagement. However, they also confirm the enduring significance of religious tradition in the U.S.

Second, my results emphasize the need to understand more about the impact that congregation size has on individual behavior. Average congregational attendance is negatively related to all three dependent variables in my analyses. In light of the success that megachurches have enjoyed in the U.S. in recent decades and the large size of many Catholic parishes, this finding may have particular significance for future research on civic engagement (Thumma, Travis, & Bird, 2005). It raises the issue of whether the rise of large congregations is ultimately a positive thing for American civic life. Are churches that meet in stadiums and sports arenas capable of motivating attenders for wider involvement in the community? Or do they merely attract individuals seeking spectator religion and congregations that demand little in the way of religious and civic involvement? Future studies must examine the megachurch context more closely to determine its influence on various measures of civic engagement. It is plausible that members of large congregations become involved in church-based community services and groups that do not show up in the current analyses of extra-congregational civic activity. However, more research is needed to determine if this is, in fact, the case.

Finally, my findings suggest a possible antidote to the deleterious effect that congregational size has on civic participation. Individuals with significant congregational friendship networks are more likely to be engaged in community activities than those with fewer congregational friends. Therefore, congregations that foster strong intra-group friendships may be able to mobilize attenders for community services, regardless of congregation size. This is consistent with previous findings on the capacity of small groups to motivate individuals for community participation (Wuthnow, 1994b).

Future studies should explore the impact that small group participation has on individual civic engagement in large congregations.

Congregations are religious institutions and social spaces capable of shaping individual members' beliefs, behaviors and attitudes. Social scientists have long recognized their ability to inspire concern for the larger community and to mobilize individuals for community action. Yet, very little research has examined the impact that structural and cultural characteristics of these organizations have on individuals' behavior. In this chapter I have attempted to do just that. And my findings indicate that congregational contexts do matter. The impact of congregational contexts should not be ignored in future research on religion and civic engagement.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Religious Conservatism and Volunteering in the United States

#### *Introduction*

During an era in which many people have become concerned about declining levels of civic participation, at least one form of community involvement has remained relatively common in the United States – volunteering. Each year, millions of Americans donate their time to helping others through volunteer programs and community service organizations such as the YMCA, the Salvation Army, and Habitat for Humanity (Baggett, 2001; Hodgkinson & Weitzman, 1996; Wuthnow, 2004). In fact, the U.S. Department of Labor reports that over a quarter of American adults (26.4 percent) volunteered at least once in 2008 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009). And data gathered by the U.S. Census Bureau suggests that the rate of volunteering in the U.S. has remained relatively stable over the last 30 years (Grimm et al., 2007; Wing et al., 2008). Hospitals, schools, athletic programs, and a host of other organizations depend on the work of millions of volunteers to provide valuable services to their communities.

A growing recognition of this work among academics and policy-makers has led to the development of an extensive research literature on volunteerism (Smith, 1994; Wilson, 2000; Wuthnow, 1994a, 2004). Researchers have begun to examine the ways that various demographic, social, and contextual factors affect the likelihood that someone will volunteer as well as the types of volunteering they are likely to do (Eckstein, 2001; Gallagher, 1994; Musick, Wilson, & Bynum, 2000; Rotolo, 2000; Rotolo & Wilson, 2006; Wilson & Musick, 1997). They have also explored changing

patterns of volunteer behavior (Putnam, 2000; Rotolo & Wilson, 2004; Wuthnow, 1998), individuals' motivations for volunteering (Becker & Dhingra, 2001; Janoski & Wilson, 1995; Oesterle, Johnson, & Mortimer, 2004; Wuthnow, 1991a, 1995, 2004), and the effects that volunteer labor has on volunteers themselves (Wilson, 2000; Wilson & Musick, 1999a, 1999b).

Within this body of work, however, one of the most consistent findings has been a positive relationship between religious participation and volunteering (Wuthnow, 2004). Regular attendance at religious services and activities increases the likelihood that someone will volunteer for their local homeless shelter, become a leader for the local Boy Scout Troop, or give up an hour per week to tutor children in a local elementary school. Indeed, religious involvement increases the likelihood that individuals will volunteer for many types of community service programs (Becker & Dhingra, 2001; Beyerlein & Hipp, 2006; Hodgkinson & Weitzman, 1996; Park & Smith, 2002; Wuthnow, 1994a, 1999).

What is less clear from previous research, however, is how different styles of religiosity may affect volunteering. Does the type of religion to which someone adheres affect their likelihood of becoming a volunteer? And are certain styles of religiosity more or less likely to encourage volunteering than others? In recent years scholars have made much of the growing influence of religious conservatism in the U.S. (Green, Guth, Smidt, & Kellstedt, 1996; Wuthnow, 1988). However, it is unclear how this type of religiosity may influence the likelihood that someone will volunteer for their community. Previous studies have attempted to address this issue, but it has been difficult due in large part to a paucity of information on the religious life of American volunteers.

In this study, I seek to address this gap in the literature by analyzing a new dataset – one that contains detailed information on the religious beliefs and practices of the American public – to explore the relationship between aspects of religiosity often associated with conservatism and the likelihood of volunteering. In addition, because much volunteering is done through religious organizations, I explore whether these aspects effect congregational volunteering differently than non-congregational volunteering.

I begin by reviewing previous work on the relationship between religious participation and volunteerism. Then, drawing on classic theories of church-sect differences, I suggest several ways that conservative religion may influence volunteer behavior. To test these relationships, I develop and run a series of logistic regression models using data from the Baylor Religion Survey (BRS). Finally, I discuss the implications that my findings have for our understanding of the relationship between religion and volunteering.

### *Religious Participation and Volunteerism*

As stated above, previous studies reveal that religious participation is one of the strongest and most consistent predictors of volunteer behavior (Wuthnow, 2004). Individuals who attend religious services more often and who are more frequently involved in other congregational activities, such as Sunday school or religious education classes, are more likely to report volunteering than individuals who rarely participate in such activities (Beyerlein & Hipp, 2006; Greeley, 1997; Hodgkinson & Weitzman, 1996; Wilson & Janoski, 1995). In fact, Virginia Hodgkinson and Murray Weitzman (1996) find that people who attend religious services at least once a week are twice as likely to

volunteer as those who attend only a few times a year. Furthermore, research shows that the relationship between frequency of attendance and volunteerism tends to be fairly consistent across religious traditions (Becker & Dhingra, 2001; Greeley, 1997; Uslander, 2002; Wuthnow, 2004). Religious participation has a net positive effect on the likelihood of volunteering regardless of whether someone attends an Episcopal church, a Baptist congregation, or a Mormon ward. The reason for this robust relationship is not entirely clear. However, researchers typically attribute it to one of several phenomena.

One of the most compelling explanations is that religious congregations function as civic training grounds where individuals are given opportunities to develop skills and resources that they can then use in other community contexts (Peterson, 1992; Verba et al., 1995). Within a congregation, members are asked to help lead meetings, teach classes, plan events, and serve on various committees or boards. These experiences teach transferrable civic skills (e.g., public speaking, interpersonal communication) that make it easier for individuals to participate in other such projects. For instance, someone serving as the chair of a congregational fund-raising committee may gain skills that enable them to volunteer in a similar capacity for a local nonprofit organization.

Another explanation for the relationship between religious participation and volunteerism is that congregations serve as moral communities that promote a “culture of benevolence” and encourage their members to take an active role in improving the lives of others (Wald et al., 1988; Wilson & Musick, 1997, p. 696; Wuthnow, 1991a).

According to this view, regular religious participation results in the development of a type of cultural capital that can influence behavior (Park & Smith, 2002; Wilson & Musick, 1997). The more frequently someone participates in congregational activities,



the more likely they will be to accumulate such capital and then put it to use by volunteering for community organizations.

The most common explanation, however, is that congregations are important sources of social capital, a resource that has the capacity to draw individuals into community life (Ammerman, 1997a; Bartkowski & Regis, 2003; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). Social capital is comprised of the social ties that exist among individuals in a group, linking them to one another and to others in the community (Putnam, 2000). Because more Americans participate in congregations than any other type of voluntary association, these organizations represent a major way that Americans stay connected to their communities. (Ammerman, 1997a; Putnam, 2000). Regular participation is likely to increase one's access to valuable stores of social capital and, in turn, increase their likelihood of volunteering. In addition, social capital facilitates communication networks through which information about volunteer opportunities can be passed and volunteers recruited (Park & Smith, 2002; Snow, Zurcher, & Eklund-Olson, 1980).

Each of these perspectives provides important insights into the relationship between religion and volunteerism. However, these approaches suggest little about the effect that different styles of religiosity are likely to have on volunteering. The religious landscape in the U.S. is extremely diverse; comprising a patchwork of denominations, congregations, and religious groups, each with its own unique history, theology, and practices (Finke & Stark, 2005; Melton, 2002; Steensland et al., 2000; Wuthnow, 2005). And we might expect that these differences are likely to affect volunteer behavior. Some groups take great pride in their theological and social progressivism, while others strive to maintain a strong conservative or fundamentalist identity (Ammerman, 1987; Hart,

1992; Roof & McKinney, 1987; Wuthnow, 1988). Yet, beyond controlling for religious tradition and denominational affiliation, few studies have examined the effect that different styles of religiosity are likely to have on volunteering. In the next section I draw on theories of church-sect differences to suggest ways that different aspects of conservative religiosity may influence volunteering.

### *The Effects of Religious Conservatism*

Over the last thirty years, the rise of religious conservatism has garnered much attention from social scientists and the media (Ammerman, 1987; Green et al., 1996; Hempel & Bartkowski, 2008; Iannaccone, 1994; Kelley, 1972; Schwadel, 2005). This phenomenon has fascinated many observers of American religion and concerned others (Hunter, 1991; Wuthnow, 1988, 1999). Moreover, the political activity of the Religious Right, the outspokenness of religious fundamentalists, and the phenomenal growth of evangelical megachurches have led some to ask how increasing religious conservatism is likely to impact civil society in the U.S. (Hunter, 1991; Johnson, Tamney, & Burton, 1989; Smith, 1998; Wuthnow, 1988, 1989). Research suggests that religious conservatism may be negatively related to some forms of civic engagement such as voluntary association membership (Ammerman, 2005b; Chaves, 2004; Stark, 2008; Wuthnow, 1999). However, recent studies examining the effects of religious tradition on individual volunteering have produced inconsistent results (Becker & Dhingra, 2001; Beyerlein & Hipp, 2006; Wilson & Janoski, 1995). Some studies show that members of conservative groups are less likely to volunteer while others show no differences.

The majority of these studies focus only on the significance of religious tradition, however. They examine the effect that belonging to a liberal or conservative

denomination has on volunteering. However, religiosity is a multidimensional phenomenon that may be manifested by individuals and groups in a variety of ways (Bainbridge, 1997; Christiano, Swatos, & Kivisto, 2008). And religious conservatism, one style of religiosity, may also be exhibited in a number of ways (Ammerman, 2005b; Legee & Kellstedt, 1993; Schwadel, 2005; Smith, 1998; Woodberry & Smith, 1998). For instance, elements of conservative religion may be manifested in one's view of the Bible, a group's attitudes about society, a congregation's strictness, or one's commitment to spreading their faith.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, each of these elements of religious conservatism may have an independent relationship with other behaviors such as voting or volunteering. Therefore, in this chapter I seek to provide a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between conservatism, as a religio-cultural context, and volunteering. Drawing on classic theories of church-sect differences, I specify several features sometimes associated with conservative religious groups and examine the effects that they have on community volunteering.

Classic church-sect theory, emerging out of the work of Max Weber (2002 [1904]) and expanded upon by theologians Ernst Troeltsch (1960 [1911]) and H. Richard Niebuhr (1929), provides a conceptual framework that allows us to compare religious groups based on their general posture towards society (Stark & Bainbridge, 1985; Swatos, 1998). Some religious groups are fairly accepting of the social order and are considered to be more church-like while other groups tend to emphasize distinction or separation from society and are considered more sect-like (Johnson, 1963; Stark & Bainbridge, 1985).

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<sup>1</sup> Recent studies have used biblical literalism as a proxy for religious conservatism, with some success (Schwadel, 2005; Kellstedt & Smidt, 1993). However, this measure also gauges only one aspect of religious conservatism.

The value of church-sect theory for the current study, however, is that it delineates a number of characteristics of sect-like religion which function to create social distance between group members and wider society. Some of these characteristics are strictness, tension with the socio-cultural environment, supernaturalism, social network closure, and an emphasis on conversion (Bainbridge 1997; Johnson 1963; Stark & Bainbridge, 1985; Troeltsch, 1960 [1911]; Weber, 2002 [1904]). I contend that each of these characteristics is also generally applicable to conservative religiosity in the U.S. and may have a significant impact on individuals' behavior. Therefore, I focus on analyzing the effect that each has on the likelihood that someone will volunteer in their community, either through their place of worship or through some other organization.

First, according to classic church-sect theory, sect-like groups tend to reject the social environment of which they are a part and create significant distinctions between themselves and others in society (Niebuhr, 1929; Troeltsch, 1960 [1911]; Weber, 2002 [1904]). They adopt customs, habits, or states of mind that reinforce their separation from the world and create "tension" with the larger socio-cultural environment of which they are a part (Stark & Bainbridge, 1985, p. 48). Contemporary research suggests that conservative religious groups are also often characterized by the experience of such tension. Many conservative religionists view themselves as being at odds with society and feel persecuted by, or at conflict with, the wider social world (Hunter, 1991; Smith, 1998; Woodberry & Smith, 1998). Indeed, the term "culture war" has been used by some religious conservative leaders to describe the antagonism that exists between their groups and society (Green et al., 1996; Hunter, 1991). I contend that the experience of socio-cultural tension will be negatively related to community volunteering. Individuals who

feel like they are at odds with others in the community or persecuted as a result of their religion may see little reason to become more active in that community. Socio-cultural tension is likely to lead to isolation rather than civic engagement. Therefore, I hypothesize that:

*H1: Individuals who experience a higher level of tension with the socio-cultural environment as a result of their religion will be less likely to volunteer in the community than individuals who experience less tension.*

Second, sect-like groups also emphasize “ethical austerity” or moral strictness (O’Dea, 1966, p. 68; Troeltsch, 1960 [1911]). They hold members to high standards of conduct and behavior that may diverge from the norms of secular society. Likewise, many conservative religious groups place moral restrictions or prohibitions on their members. For instance, they may forbid such things as dancing, gambling, and sexual promiscuity. These restrictions increase the cost of group membership by limiting members’ involvement with others in society. Furthermore, they underscore the distinctiveness of the group (Iannaccone, 1994; Kelley, 1972). I expect that participation in a strict religious group (i.e., one with many moral prohibitions) will tend to decrease the likelihood of volunteering because it reinforces separateness from society. I hypothesize that:

*H2: Individuals who attend stricter congregations will be less likely to volunteer in the community than individuals who attend more lenient congregations.*

Third, another feature of sect-like religion that is characteristic of some conservative religious groups in the U.S. is the tendency to cultivate dense intra-group friendship networks. Sect-like religious groups tend to be small in size and encourage their members to build strong bonds of friendship with each other (Stark & Bainbridge, 1985; Troeltsch, 1960 [1911]). Similarly, scholars have noted that some forms of

conservative religiosity emphasize the development of bonding social ties that limit members' interaction with others in society (Ammerman, 1987; Beyerlein & Hipp, 2005; Hoge, Zech, McNamara, & Donahue, 1998; Schwadel, 2005; Wuthnow, 2002a). It is not clear from previous research, however, what effect dense friendship networks have on volunteer behavior. Very dense networks could deter members from becoming involved with community service organizations. However, theorists also suggest that network closure can contribute to the production of social capital by facilitating the transmission of information between individuals and by fostering high levels of trust among group members (Burt, 2001; Coleman, 1988, 1990; Putnam, 2000). I anticipate that the density of congregational friendship networks will likely have a positive effect on volunteerism, increasing the likelihood of volunteering by increasing individuals' social ties and creating communication channels through which information about volunteer opportunities may flow. I hypothesize that:

*H3: Individuals with more dense congregational friendship networks will be more likely to volunteer in the community than individuals with less dense congregational friendship networks.*

Fourth, according to church-sect theory, sect-like groups also place a high degree of importance on the supernatural or otherworldly dimension of life (Niebuhr, 1929; Troeltsch, 1960 [1911], p. 331). As a consequence of the stress placed on the supernatural, some group members may exhibit indifference towards the secular world (Troeltsch, 1960 [1911]). Conservative religions also tend to emphasize the supernatural dimension of life (Ammerman, 2005a; Bainbridge, 1997; Stark, 1987, 2008). I contend that such an emphasis may deter individuals from being engaged in the community through volunteerism. Rather than striving to ameliorate poverty or to meet concrete

human needs, members may choose to focus their energies on living a pure life in the hopes of being rewarded in another world. I hypothesize, therefore, that:

*H4: Individuals who report having had more supernatural experiences will be less likely to volunteer in the community than individuals reporting fewer supernatural experiences.*

It is also plausible, however, that an emphasis on the supernatural motivates volunteer behavior in some. Robert Wuthnow (1994a, pp. 240-245) has suggested that religious experiences such as feeling called by the divine or witnessing a miraculous healing may motivate charitable activity by convincing someone that there is more to life than the pursuit of personal gain or materialism.

Finally, sect-like groups tend to emphasize conversion. Membership is viewed as an achieved rather than an ascribed status. Someone must make the conscious choice to join the group (O'Dea, 1966). Likewise, many conservative religious groups place importance on voluntary conversion. As a result, these groups often engage in evangelical activities to bring new members into the fold (Ammerman, 1987, 2005a). Groups like the Mormons, the Jehovah's Witnesses, and evangelical Protestant groups invest time and energy into training members to share their faith with others (Stark & Iannaccone, 1997). And some scholars have suggested that the resources invested in evangelism may discount members from being involved in other forms of service such as community volunteering (Ammerman, 1997c, 2005a, 2005b; Roozen et al., 1984). I contend, therefore, that the more frequently someone engages in personal evangelism the less likely they will be to volunteer for the community through organizations outside of their congregation. However, because congregational community service programs may entail an evangelism component as well as a service component, I expect that the amount

of time spent evangelizing may increase the likelihood of volunteering through the congregation. Therefore, I propose the following two hypotheses:

*H5: Individuals who engage in personal evangelism more frequently will be more likely to volunteer in the community through their congregation than individuals who engage in evangelism less frequently.*

*H6: Individuals who engage in personal evangelism more frequently will be less likely to volunteer in the community through secular organizations than individuals who engage in evangelism less frequently.*

In the remainder of this chapter, I set out to explore the relationship between volunteerism and the aspects of conservative religiosity outlined above. Examining the effects of each characteristic individually will help us further specify the relationship between religion and volunteering and will shed light on the influence that religious conservatism is likely to have on this most robust form of civic engagement.

### *Data and Methods*

To analyze the relationship between these characteristics of conservative religion and the likelihood of volunteering, I develop a series of logistic regression models using data drawn from the second wave of the BRS, a national survey developed by researchers at Baylor University to gauge the religious beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of the American public. I utilize the second wave of the BRS because it contains a number of religion items, relevant to the current study, that were not included in the first wave, as well as several items measuring respondents' volunteer involvement. The second wave was administered by the Gallup Organization using a mixed-mode sampling design that resulted in a nationally representative sample of 1,648 American adults.<sup>2</sup> Because I am primarily interested in examining the relationship between aspects of conservative

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<sup>2</sup> For additional information on the BRS and data collection methods used by the Gallup Organization, see Bader, Mencken, and Froese (2007).



religiosity and volunteerism, I restrict statistical analyses to data collected from 968 respondents who indicated that they attend religious services at least once a year.

### *Dependent Variables*

Two separate BRS items ask respondents to report how many hours per month they volunteer for the community, either through their place of worship or not through their place of worship. I recode individuals' responses to these items into three dichotomous measures of volunteering which serve as the dependent variables for my analyses. I rely on dichotomous measures rather than analyzing the number of hours volunteered because approximately half of all BRS respondents reported no volunteering at all. Further, most studies of volunteerism utilize a dichotomous measure of volunteer activity. In the current study, community volunteer (1 = yes) indicates whether a respondent volunteers for the community at all, congregational volunteer (1 = yes) indicates if a respondent volunteers for the community through their place of worship, and non-congregational volunteer (1 = yes) indicates if a respondent volunteers for the community, not through their place of worship. Descriptive statistics for all variables are presented in Table 11.

### *Independent Variables*

The second wave of the BRS includes a number of new religion measures that make it possible to examine the relationship between religiosity and volunteerism with more precision than previous surveys have allowed. Utilizing several of these new measures, I construct three indexes approximating characteristics of conservative religiosity that I anticipate will affect an individual's involvement in community life:

congregational strictness, socio-cultural tension, and supernatural experience. Factor analysis of individual survey items was used to identify and construct these indexes.

Some religious groups place significant moral restrictions or prohibitions on their members' behavior (Bainbridge, 1997; Kelley, 1972; Iannaccone, 1994). Therefore, to estimate the effect that congregational strictness has on individuals' volunteer behavior, I construct a strictness index by summing responses to the following survey items:

*By your best guess, how would your place of worship feel about the following?*

- Pornography (1 = forbids)*
- Gambling (1 = forbids)*
- Wearing revealing clothing (1 = forbids)*
- Pre-marital sex (1 = forbids)*
- Living together before marriage (1 = forbids)*
- Abortion (1 = forbids)*
- Homosexual behavior (1 = forbids)*

Respondents' scores on the strictness index range from 0 to 7, and the index has an alpha reliability coefficient of 0.88.

In addition, some individuals' religious commitments cause them to experience high levels of tension with their socio-cultural environment (Bainbridge, 1997). To examine the effects that socio-cultural tension has on volunteering, I construct a tension index by summing respondents' answers to the following survey items:

- My religious beliefs have caused problems in my workplace (1 = strongly agree).*
- I tend to have trouble maintaining close relationships because of my religious beliefs (1 = strongly agree).*
- Because of my religious devotion I have missed financial opportunities (1 = strongly agree).*

Respondents scores on the tension index range from 0 to 3, and the index has an alpha reliability coefficient of 0.70.

Table 11

*Descriptive Statistics for Individual Level Analyses*

Variables	Minimum	Maximum	Mean/ Proportion	SD
<i>Dependent variables</i>				
Community volunteer	0	1	0.53	0.50
Congregational volunteer	0	1	0.35	0.48
Non-congregational volunteer	0	1	0.39	0.49
<i>Control variables</i>				
Age <sup>a</sup>	18	96	47.75	17.17
Female	0	1	0.57	0.50
White	0	1	0.85	0.35
Married	0	1	0.69	0.46
Children	0	6	0.69	1.08
Education	1	5	2.98	1.10
Income <sup>b</sup>				
< \$20,000	0	1	0.15	0.36
\$20,001 - \$35,000	0	1	0.13	0.33
\$35,001 - \$50,000	0	1	0.17	0.37
> \$50,001	0	1	0.56	0.50
Full-time employment	0	1	0.45	0.50
City/suburb	0	1	0.39	0.49
<i>Standard religion measures</i>				
Service attendance	0	5	3.01	1.49
Prayer	0	5	3.66	1.46
Bible	0	1	0.28	0.45
Religious tradition <sup>c</sup>				
Evangelical Protestant	0	1	0.38	0.49
Mainline Protestant	0	1	0.23	0.42
Black Protestant	0	1	0.06	0.24
Roman Catholic	0	1	0.24	0.43
Jewish	0	1	0.02	0.12
Other religion	0	1	0.06	0.24
No religion	0	1	0.01	0.12
<i>Conservative religiosity</i>				
Strict congregation	0	7	2.65	2.32
Socio-cultural tension	0	3	0.03	0.25
Supernatural experience	0	6	1.77	1.69
Network closure	0	4	1.26	1.04
Evangelism	0	6	1.23	1.54

Note. N = 968.

<sup>a</sup> The continuous form of age is used here for descriptive purposes. The omitted reference category for all analyses is middle-aged adults (45-64 years). <sup>b</sup> The omitted reference category for all analyses is > \$50,001. <sup>c</sup> The omitted reference category for all analyses is evangelical Protestant.

Some types of conservative religion also place a high level of importance on supernatural or otherworldly experiences. To examine whether such an emphasis has any direct relationship to volunteering, I construct a supernatural experience index by summing respondents' answers to six dichotomous survey items:

*I witnessed a miraculous, physical healing (1 = yes).*

*I received a miraculous, physical healing (1 = yes).*

*I spoke or prayed in tongues (1 = yes).*

*I felt called by God to do something (1 = yes).*

*I heard the voice of God speaking to me (1 = yes).*

*I had a religious conversion experience (1 = yes).*

Respondents' scores on the supernatural experience index range from 0 to 6, and the index has an alpha reliability coefficient of 0.75.

I also include two other new religion measures. To examine the effect that the density of congregational friendship networks has on volunteerism, I include a measure of congregational network closure indicating how many of a respondent's personal friends attend their place of worship (0 = none/don't know; 1 = a few; 2 = about half; 3 = most; 4 = all). And I construct a measure of involvement in personal evangelism by summing individuals' responses to the following question:

*How often did you participate in the following religious or faith based activities in the last month?*

*Witnessing/sharing your faith with friends (0 = not at all; 1 = 1-2 times; 2 = 3-4 times; 3 = 5 or more times)*

*Witnessing/sharing your faith with strangers (0 = not at all; 1 = 1-2 times; 2 = 3-4 times; 3 = 5 or more times)*

Respondents' evangelism scores range from 0 to 6.

### *Standard Religion Measures*

Because other studies have examined religion's impact on volunteering, there are several standard religion measures that must be included as controls in any new analyses of the relationship between religion and volunteering. Therefore, I include variables to control for religious service attendance (1 = less than once a month; 2 = once a month; 3 = 2-3 times a month; 4 = weekly or about weekly; 5 = several times a week) and frequency of prayer (0 = never; 1 = only on certain occasions; 2 = once a week or less; 3 = a few times a week; 4 = once a day; 5 = several times a day). In addition, research suggests that religious tradition is related to levels of civic participation (Beyerlein & Hipp, 2006; Wuthnow, 1999). To account for this effect, I construct seven dichotomous measures indicating the religious tradition to which an individual belongs (i.e., evangelical Protestant; mainline Protestant; Black Protestant, Roman Catholic; Jewish; other religion; no religion) (Steensland et al., 2000). And because biblical literalism has been used in some studies as a proxy for religious conservatism, I include a dichotomous variable indicating whether or not respondents holds a literal view of the Bible (1 = yes).

### *Control Variables*

I also incorporate a series of standard control variables in my analyses. Dichotomous measures for sex (1 = female), race (1 = white), marital status (1 = married), employment status (1 = employed full-time), and community type (1 = city/suburb) are included. Because previous research suggests there may be life-course effects on the relationship between age and volunteering and because middle-aged individuals tend to be more likely to volunteer than other age groups (Gallagher, 1994; Oesterle et al., 2004; Sundeen, 1990), I construct six dichotomous variables representing

separate age categories (i.e., 18-24 years; 25-34 years; 35-44 years; 45-64 years; 65-74 years; 75 and older) and allow middle-aged adults (45-64 years) to serve as the reference group for all analyses. Similarly, I construct four dichotomous variables for household income (i.e., less than \$20K; \$20K-\$35K; \$35K-\$50K; greater than \$50K) and allow the wealthiest category to serve as the reference group for all analyses. Finally, I include controls measuring the highest level of education attained (1 = less than high school; 2 = high school graduate; 3 = some college/vocational training; 4 = college graduate; 5 = advanced degree) and the number of children living in the household.

### *Results*

Table 12 presents results from the first three logistic regression models predicting the likelihood of any community volunteering among survey respondents, either congregational or non-congregational. Model 1 in Table 12 contains only control variables and serves as a base model. This model supports previous findings of a curvilinear relationship between age and volunteering. Among BRS respondents, 18 to 24 year olds are the most likely to volunteer (odds ratio = 1.84,  $p < 0.05$ ), while 24 to 34 year olds are the least likely (odds ratio = 0.65,  $p < 0.05$ ). Moreover, Model 1 indicates that educational attainment is also a significant predictor of community volunteerism (odds ratio = 1.35,  $p < 0.001$ ).

In Model 2, I add several measures of religiosity which previous studies have found to be related to community involvement. Consistent with the findings of those studies, these results indicate that regular attendance at religious services increases the likelihood that someone will volunteer (odds ratio = 1.43,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Table 12

*Odds Ratios for Analyses of Community Volunteering*

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Control variables</i>			
Age <sup>a</sup>			
18 – 24 years	1.84*	1.72	1.94*
25 – 34 years	0.65*	0.61*	0.63*
35 – 44 years	1.03	1.13	1.22
65 – 74 years	1.58	1.32	1.44
75 and older	1.49	1.12	1.23
Female	1.01	0.94	0.96
White	1.33	1.30	1.35
Married	0.93	0.87	0.87
Children	1.15	1.13	1.16
Education	1.35***	1.29***	1.33***
Income <sup>b</sup>			
< \$20,000	0.70	0.68	0.63
\$20,001 - \$35,000	1.00	0.96	0.89
\$35,001 - \$50,000	1.03	1.02	1.06
Full-time employment	1.06	1.05	1.09
City/suburb	0.91	0.92	0.90
<i>Standard religion measures</i>			
Service attendance		1.43***	1.26***
Prayer		0.98	0.93
Bible		0.93	0.87
Religious tradition <sup>c</sup>			
Mainline Protestant		2.16***	2.10***
Black Protestant		1.27	0.94
Roman Catholic		1.30	1.61*
Jewish		2.69	2.51
Other religion		3.01***	3.18***
No religion		1.54	1.58
<i>Conservative religiosity</i>			
Strict congregation			0.88***
Socio-cultural tension			0.73
Supernatural experience			1.11*
Network closure			1.25**
Evangelism			1.32***
Intercept	0.36**	0.13***	0.12***
-2 Log likelihood	1289.07	1220.03	1169.17
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.06	0.15	0.21
N	981	981	981

Note. \*p < 0.05. \*\*p < 0.01. \*\*\*p < 0.001.

<sup>a</sup> The omitted reference category of all analyses is middle-aged adults (45-64 years).

<sup>b</sup> The omitted reference category for all analyses is > \$50,001. <sup>c</sup> The omitted reference category for all analyses is evangelical Protestant.

Further, results in Model 2 indicate that mainline Protestants are more likely than evangelical Protestants to volunteer in the community (odds ratio = 2.16,  $p < 0.001$ ). Individuals affiliated with other religious groups (e.g., Buddhist, Hindu, Mormon) are also more likely than evangelical Protestants to volunteer (odds ratio = 3.01,  $p < 0.001$ ).

My newly constructed religion measures are incorporated into the prediction equation for Model 3. These measures represent various features of religiosity that may be associated with conservative religion. The resulting odds ratios reveal a more complex relationship between conservative religion and volunteerism than I expected. They suggest that some characteristics increase the likelihood of volunteering while other characteristics decrease it.

It appears that belonging to a strict congregation – one that places significant moral and behavioral restrictions on its members – decreases the likelihood that an individual will volunteer in the community (odds ratio = 0.88,  $p < 0.001$ ). For each additional prohibition, the likelihood of volunteering in the community decreases by approximately 12 percent. This provides some initial support for my second hypothesis, that congregational strictness decreases the likelihood that someone will volunteer in their community. In contrast, however, I find that experiencing tension with the socio-cultural environment has no significant effect on the dependent variable. And contrary to what I propose in hypotheses 4 and 5, individuals who report having had more religious or supernatural experiences (e.g., hearing the voice of God or experiencing a miraculous healing) (odds ratio = 1.11,  $p < 0.05$ ) and those who more frequently engage in personal evangelism (odds ratio = 1.25,  $p < 0.001$ ) are more likely to report volunteering than others. The first finding supports Wuthnow's (1994a) contention that supernatural



experiences may motivate some individuals for charitable behavior. Finally, supporting hypothesis 3, my findings indicate that dense congregational friendship networks do increase the likelihood that someone will volunteer (odds ratio = 1.32,  $p < 0.001$ ). The social capital developed in close-knit religious organizations appears to draw members into community life.

Much of the volunteering that takes place in the U.S. is done through religious organizations (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009; Hodgkinson & Weitzman, 1996). And it is likely that measures of religiosity effect congregational and non-congregational volunteering differently. Therefore, for the models in Tables 13 and 14, I disaggregate volunteering into two types of volunteering; congregational community volunteering and non-congregational community volunteering. Table 13 presents odds ratios predicting respondents' likelihood of volunteering through a place of worship. The first model in Table 13, including only control variables, reveals that age has a curvilinear relationship with congregational volunteering. Respondents 25 to 34 years old are less likely to volunteer through their place of worship than others (odds ratio = 0.62,  $p < 0.05$ ). Interestingly, however, education does not have a significant effect on this type of volunteering. Respondents with less than a high school education are no more or less likely to volunteer through their place of worship than respondents with an advanced degree. This finding comports with recent scholarship indicating that congregations provide opportunities for individuals to become civically engaged regardless of their social status or class (Verba et al., 1995). The number of children a respondent has increases their likelihood of congregational volunteering (odds ratio = 1.17,  $p < 0.05$ ).

However, this relationship becomes non-significant once additional variables are incorporated into the model.

Model 2 specifies the effects that standard religion measures have on congregational community volunteering. Not surprisingly, individuals who attend religious services more frequently are more likely to volunteer for the community through a place of worship (odds ratio = 2.07,  $p < 0.001$ ). And mainline Protestants (odds ratio = 2.95,  $p < 0.001$ ), Jewish respondents (odds ratio = 10.28,  $p < 0.001$ ), and members of other religious groups (odds ratio = 3.93,  $p < 0.001$ ) are more likely than evangelical Protestants to volunteer through their congregation. The very strong relationship between Judaism and congregational volunteering is indicative of the emphasis that Jewish congregations have traditionally placed on serving the community (Ammerman, 2005a).

In Model 3, I include additional measures of religiosity. This model suggests that the only aspects associated with religious conservatism that significantly influence congregational volunteering are network closure and participation in evangelism. Individuals who participate more often in personal evangelism are more likely to volunteer through their place of worship (odds ratio = 1.29,  $p < 0.001$ ) as are individuals who attend a congregation with many of their friends (odds ratio = 1.59,  $p < 0.001$ ). These findings provide support for hypotheses 3 and 6. Respondents who belong to more restrictive congregations are no more or less likely to volunteer through a place of worship. And variables measuring socio-cultural tension and supernatural experience have no significant effect on congregational volunteering either.

Table 13

*Odds Ratios for Analyses of Volunteering, Through a Place of Worship*

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Control variables</i>			
Age <sup>a</sup>			
18 – 24 years	1.17	0.97	1.20
25 – 34 years	0.62*	0.52**	0.56*
35 – 44 years	0.68	0.77	0.84
65 – 74 years	1.01	0.73	0.75
75 and older	1.25	0.78	0.76
Female	0.85	0.67*	0.70*
White	1.16	1.47	1.58
Married	1.09	0.94	0.92
Children	1.17*	1.11	1.13
Education	0.98	0.88	0.90
Income <sup>b</sup>			
< \$20,000	0.77	0.69	0.64
\$20,001 - \$35,000	1.30	1.09	0.98
\$35,001 - \$50,000	0.94	0.86	0.89
Full-time employment	0.93	0.90	1.01
City/suburb	1.01	1.10	1.10
<i>Standard religion measures</i>			
Service attendance		2.07***	1.76***
Prayer		1.06	0.97
Bible		0.97	0.77
Religious tradition <sup>c</sup>			
Mainline Protestant		2.95***	3.25***
Black Protestant		2.07	1.94
Roman Catholic		1.31	1.51
Jewish		10.28***	11.24***
Other religion		3.93***	3.66***
No religion		0.29	0.15
<i>Conservative religiosity</i>			
Strict congregation			0.95
Socio-cultural tension			0.58
Supernatural experience			1.11
Network closure			1.59***
Evangelism			1.29***
Intercept	0.54	0.04***	0.03***
-2 Log likelihood	1237.22	1029.99	967.72
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.02	0.28	0.35
N	981	981	981

Note. \*p < 0.05. \*\*p < 0.01. \*\*\*p < 0.001.

<sup>a</sup> The omitted reference category of all analyses is middle-aged adults (45-64 years).

<sup>b</sup> The omitted reference category for all analyses is > \$50,001. <sup>c</sup> The omitted reference category for all analyses is evangelical Protestant.

Finally, Table 14 presents odds ratios predicting the likelihood of volunteering for the community, not through a place of worship. The first model contains only control variables and once again reveals a curvilinear relationship between age and volunteering. In addition, educational attainment increases the likelihood that someone will volunteer outside of their place of worship (odds ratio = 1.42,  $p < 0.001$ ). Model 2 incorporates standard measures of religiosity and indicates that mainline Protestants are the most likely to volunteer outside of their place of worship (odds ratio = 1.68,  $p < 0.01$ ). In Model 3, however, the additional measures of religiosity appear to affect non-congregational volunteering differently than they affected congregational volunteering. Belonging to a more restrictive congregation significantly decreases the likelihood that someone will volunteer for the community outside of their congregation (odds ratio = 0.89,  $p < 0.001$ ). This provides additional support for hypothesis 2.

However, contrary to expectations, and in contradiction to what I predict in hypothesis 4, reporting more supernatural experiences actually increases the likelihood that someone will volunteer for the community outside of their place of worship (odds ratio = 1.14,  $p < 0.05$ ). This suggests that the relationship between general volunteering and supernatural experience first reported in Table 12 is accounted for largely by non-congregational volunteering. Finally, more frequent involvement in personal evangelism also increases the likelihood that someone will volunteer outside of their congregation (odds ratio = 1.26,  $p < 0.001$ ). This, too, is an unexpected finding and contradicts my prediction in hypothesis 6.

Table 14

*Odds Ratios for Analyses of Volunteering, Not Through a Place of Worship*

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Control variables</i>			
Age <sup>a</sup>			
18 – 24 years	1.89*	1.98*	2.16*
25 – 34 years	0.57**	0.56**	0.57*
35 – 44 years	1.00	1.04	1.09
65 – 74 years	1.95**	1.84*	2.08**
75 and older	1.49	1.34	1.63
Female	1.27	1.28	1.31
White	1.12	1.20	1.29
Married	0.92	0.98	1.03
Children	1.14	1.15	1.19*
Education	1.42***	1.37***	1.40***
Income <sup>b</sup>			
< \$20,000	0.82	0.87	0.86
\$20,001 - \$35,000	0.79	0.85	0.81
\$35,001 - \$50,000	1.09	1.14	1.16
Full-time employment	1.19	1.21	1.19
City/suburb	0.96	0.96	0.93
<i>Standard religion measures</i>			
Service attendance		1.02	0.93
Prayer		1.01	0.96
Bible		0.79	0.76
Religious tradition <sup>c</sup>			
Mainline Protestant		1.68**	1.68*
Black Protestant		1.50	1.11
Roman Catholic		1.23	1.65*
Jewish		1.41	1.30
Other religion		1.67	1.96*
No religion		1.68	1.66
<i>Conservative religiosity</i>			
Strict congregation			0.89***
Socio-cultural tension			0.78
Supernatural experience			1.14*
Network closure			1.01
Evangelism			1.26***
Intercept	0.16***	0.12***	0.11***
-2 Log likelihood	1241.06	1227.67	1192.55
R <sup>2</sup>	0.08	0.10	0.14
N	981	981	981

Note. \*p < 0.05. \*\*p < 0.01. \*\*\*p < 0.001.

<sup>a</sup> The omitted reference category of all analyses is middle-aged adults (45-64 years).

<sup>b</sup> The omitted reference category for all analyses is > \$50,001. <sup>c</sup> The omitted reference category for all analyses is evangelical Protestant.

## *Discussion*

The findings presented above suggest that the relationship between conservative religion and volunteerism is more complex than previous studies have been able to show. Some features associated with religious conservatism in the U.S. have a positive effect on community volunteering, while others appear to have a negative effect. I believe that the more nuanced picture which emerges from these analyses will provide those who are concerned about declining levels of civic engagement in the U.S. a more complete account of the way that conservative religion is likely to affect civic life and help us to comprehend how the changing religious landscape is likely to affect civic participation in the future. In the remainder of this chapter, I review key findings and suggest some of the implications that these findings hold for our understanding of the relationship between religion and volunteering.

First, as I hypothesized, I find that belonging to a strict religious group decreases the likelihood that someone will volunteer through an organization outside of their congregation. Behavioral and moral restrictions create significant boundaries between group members and society, and it appears that these boundaries do have an effect on secular volunteer involvement (Iannaccone, 1994). Members of prohibitive religious groups may be less likely to volunteer for the local homeless shelter or food bank than members of more lenient religious groups. Surprisingly, however, I find that strictness does not deter community volunteering through a congregation. Indeed, the negative effect that strictness has on volunteering appears to be primarily the result of its effect on non-congregational volunteering. This suggests to me that strict congregations may develop their own service programs as an alternative to secular community service

programs. Further, it is conceivable that some congregations actually view volunteering as another way to reinforce distinctions between themselves and wider society.

Charitable activities have aided in the maintenance of social boundaries and have helped to reproduce the social status of both helpers and recipients in the past (Day, 2000; Kendall, 2002). Regardless, these findings suggest that religious strictness and moral rigidity are elements of religiosity that weaken secular forms of civic engagement. Furthermore, my findings indicate that this could be one of the primary elements of conservative religion that deters community volunteering.

A finding that is quite surprising is the positive effect that supernatural experience has on the likelihood of non-congregational volunteering. Individuals who report having had more supernatural experiences, such as hearing God talk to them or feeling called by God to do something, are more likely to volunteer in their community through an organization other than their congregation. This finding provides support, however, for the argument made by Robert Wuthnow (1994a) that some religious experiences are capable of motivating charitable activity. Rather than contributing to otherworldly escapism, as I had predicted and as church-sect theory might suggest, experience of the supernatural seems to motivate individuals for community engagement. Furthermore, as with strictness, it appears that the effect supernatural experience has on general volunteering is primarily the result of its effect on non-congregational volunteering. The rapidly growing charismatic movement in the U.S. should probably not be viewed as a threat to community volunteering if this is the case. However, future research should examine more closely the community involvement of members of charismatic and Pentecostal groups as they place a particularly high level of importance on religious

experiences such as speaking in tongues, spiritual healings, and hearing the voice of God (Poloma, 1982). Further, it would be beneficial to examine the types of community organizations for which many of these individuals are volunteering.

Third, my findings indicate that network closure, or the existence of dense intra-group friendship networks, also increases the likelihood of community volunteering. However, in contrast to the effects of strictness and supernatural experience, the effect that this characteristic has on volunteering is largely the result of its impact on congregational volunteering. The relationship does not exist in the models for non-congregational volunteering. Rather than propelling individuals out into other community agencies and nonprofit organizations, dense congregational networks increase the likelihood that someone will volunteer for a congregation-based feeding program, youth services program, or community service project. This finding provides evidence for the notion that network closure contributes to the development of social capital within congregations as well as the argument that in-group ties may deter individuals from extra-congregational involvement. In other words, the strong bonding social capital that develops within many conservative religious groups may be a mixed blessing for civil society. It may facilitate more religious volunteering. However, it may not contribute significantly to non-religious community volunteering.

One of the most interesting and unexpected findings in this study is the positive relationship that exists between evangelism and volunteering. It appears that Americans who are more actively engaged in sharing their faith with friends and strangers are also more likely to volunteer for the community than Americans who do not share their faith with others. This is the case for non-congregational as well as congregational



volunteering. This is surprising given some scholars' contention that time and energy spent on evangelism are likely to detract from the amount of time and energy available to be spent in other activities such as volunteering (Ammerman, 2005a; Iannaccone, 1994). I would like to suggest several plausible explanations for this relationship.

First, as some sociologists have argued in recent years, there may be something unique about evangelical forms of conservative religion, as distinct from more strict forms (e.g., fundamentalism), that motivate individuals to engage society rather than retreat from it (Smith, 1998). Individuals who actively share their faith with others may be motivated to do so by a desire to improve the lives of others. It is plausible, therefore, that the same convictions motivating personal evangelism might also motivate someone to volunteer for the local shelter, food pantry, or youth athletic club. Evangelicals may seek to improve the lives of their neighbors in various ways – not only by sharing their faith with them, but by meeting concrete needs as well. However, other explanations for this relationship exist too. This finding could be the result of some respondents reporting missionary work as volunteer activity. And some individuals may seek out volunteer opportunities as an avenue for evangelism or proselytizing.

It is not possible, using these data, to determine respondents' motives for volunteering or to specify what activities their volunteering entails. I contend that the positive relationship between volunteering and evangelism is probably the result of the combination of all three of these phenomena. Some individuals seek volunteer opportunities as way to further their efforts at evangelism. Some consider their evangelism efforts to be community volunteering. And others, motivated by a faith that is characteristic of Smith's (1998) "engaged orthodoxy", engage in both evangelism and

community service in an effort to improve the lives of others. Future studies should explore the relationship between evangelism and volunteer activity more closely.

The findings in this chapter indicate that the relationship between religious conservatism and volunteering is more complex than previous studies have been able to show. Religious conservatism is a multifaceted religious phenomenon, manifested in a diversity of ways. Furthermore, these findings suggest that researchers should attempt to specify more precisely the aspects of religiosity that affect various measures of civic life in the U.S. There are several factors commonly associated with conservative religiosity that appear to have a positive impact on volunteerism. The same may be true for other measures of civic engagement such as voluntary association involvement, charitable giving, or political participation.

Finally, the current study has several important limitations that must be taken into consideration and should be addressed in future studies of religion and volunteering. First, the primary independent variables utilized in this study are new measures of religiosity and are, thus, relatively untested. It is likely that other items or survey questions may better measure the underlying concepts that these variables are intended to represent. Future studies should continue to test the validity of these particular measures as well as their utility for predicting individual civic outcomes.

Second, these measures still represent only a few specific aspects of conservative religiosity. While I contend there are sound theoretical reasons for using these variables, there is any number of other measures of religiosity that could have been used. Future research should examine the impact that various other aspects of conservative and liberal religiosity have on community volunteering.

Lastly, the dependent variables under analysis here, while standard for volunteer research, could be improved upon significantly in future studies. Specifically, more information on the types of volunteering in which respondents are engaged would allow researchers to examine more closely how different types of religion impact patterns of civic and community involvement in the U.S.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Conclusion

The relationship between religion and civic life in the United States has been examined extensively by social scientists over the last several decades (Ammerman, 2005a; Bartkowski & Regis, 2003; Greeley, 1997; Uslaner, 2002; Verba et al., 1995; Wuthnow, 1999, 2004). As scholars and policy-makers have grown concerned about declining levels of civic engagement and the long-term effects that such declines are likely to have on democracy in the U.S., some researchers have sought to identify factors related to civic involvement. Religion appears to be one such factor. Numerous studies reveal that Americans who attend religious services more often, and who participate more frequently in other religious activities, are also more likely to volunteer in the community (Becker & Dhingra, 2001; Greeley, 1997; Wuthnow, 2004), join civic associations (Beyerlein & Hipp, 2006; Wuthnow, 1999), and participate in politics (Ayala, 2000; Cassel, 1999; Harris, 1999). Furthermore, a growing body of research suggests that many congregations and faith-based organizations contribute to the well-being of their communities by providing needed community services (Chaves, 2004; Chaves & Tsitsos, 2001; Cnaan et al., 2002). The relationship between religion and civic life may be more complex than previous studies have shown, however.

In the preceding chapters, I have sought to advance our understanding of this relationship by exploring the effects that different characteristics of religious contexts have on individual, organizational, and community level measures of civic life. Religion, despite being measured most often at the individual level, is a highly contextualized

phenomenon. Religious congregations comprise distinct local cultures with the capacity to shape individual belief and behavior (Ammerman, 1997c; Becker, 1999). For instance, the religion practiced in a Mormon ward in Utah may be very different from the religion practiced in a Buddhist congregation on the Upper East Side of New York or even a Baptist congregation a few blocks away. And aggregate level data reveal that different regions of the country tend to be dominated by different religious groups and traditions (Jones et al., 2002). The religious composition of suburban Seattle, WA differs significantly from the religious composition of suburban Atlanta, GA. Furthermore, each of these religious contexts is likely to impact measures of civic engagement slightly differently.

The four studies that comprise the body of this dissertation reveal several specific ways that varying religious contexts in the U.S. affect measures of civic life. While each chapter sets out to answer its own unique research question or address its own set of research hypotheses, these four chapters, taken together, provide data that help us begin to address the broader question posed in the introduction:

*Q: In what ways do religious contexts influence civic life in the U.S.?*

Indeed, the findings of each of the preceding chapters tell us something important about the effects of social and religious contexts. They do not answer this question in full, but intimate the effects that varying religious environments have on measures of civic engagement. In closing, I would like to briefly review several of the key findings from these chapters and suggest their implications for our understanding of the relationship between religion and civic life. Furthermore, I will highlight what I see as fruitful directions for future research.

First, findings in chapter two indicate that the composition of religious environments have a significant impact on the size and scope of local nonprofit sectors. Some religious environments, particularly those with higher levels of mainline Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, appear to be more conducive to the development of a densely populated nonprofit social service sector than others. This finding suggests two important things for our understanding of religion and civic life in the U.S. First, mainline Protestantism and Roman Catholicism may contribute to a local culture of institutionalized caring, one that fosters the development of institutions and organizations aimed at improving the community. Second, these findings provide additional support for the idea, advanced by others, that religion can be a structural characteristic of neighborhoods and communities (Blanchard et al., 2008). The makeup of local religious environments should be taken into consideration in future studies of civic life in the U.S. The religious composition of an area may be related to any number of community level measures of civic engagement such as rates of charitable giving, voter turnout, voluntary association membership, and volunteering.

In the third chapter, my findings suggest that future research should pay closer attention to the effects that socially and ethnically diverse contexts have on the civic involvement of both individuals and organizations. While growing diversity in the U.S. may pose significant challenges for the strength of community life (Putnam, 2007), my findings indicate that it may also create unique opportunities for religious organizations to become more actively involved in the community. Diversity may serve as a catalyst for community involvement within some congregations by creating latent bridging social ties that motivate civic activity. Much additional research is needed, however, to

determine if this is the case. In particular, ethnographic and qualitative research is needed to examine the impact that social and ethnic diversity has on individual congregations. Furthermore, it may be beneficial for future studies to examine the effect that religiously diverse environments have on the community service activities of congregations. Being located in a very religiously diverse community may have a different effect on the civic engagement of congregations than other types of social diversity. And more research is needed to determine the effects that social and ethnic diversity within a congregation are likely to have on organizational strength and religious commitment. An important question for future studies to address may be, “Are diverse congregations likely to be strong congregations?”

In chapter four, I focus on the effects that congregational contexts have on individual civic behavior. My analyses result in several findings that have important implications for our understanding of religion and civic life. I find that both cultural and structural characteristics of the congregation someone attends are related to the likelihood they will engage in civic activity beyond the congregation. And I find that these relationships vary by religious tradition. Congregational strictness appears to deter civic engagement for evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics, while a congregational emphasis on community responsibility increases the likelihood of civic engagement for Mainline Protestants. These results support the idea that congregations comprise unique local cultures that have the capacity to shape individual attenders’ beliefs, practices, and behaviors (Becker, 1999). Future research should continue to examine the affects that congregational cultures, and the messages communicated within congregations, have on individual civic behavior. I also find that individuals who worship in larger

congregations are less likely to be civically engaged than individuals who worship in smaller congregations. This finding is especially relevant to contemporary research on religion and civic life because of the increasing prevalence of megachurches in the U.S. It suggests that the rapid growth of such organizations could weaken the relationship between religious participation and civic life in the future. However, much more research is needed to understand how regular participation in megachurches affects all types of civic engagement. Studies of both civic engagement and congregations should seek to address this issue. There is much fascination with the megachurch movement. However, little is known about the impact that this movement will have on the strength of civic life.

Finally, chapter five specifies the effects that several factors, often associated with religious conservatism, have on community volunteering in the U.S. My findings imply that the relationship between conservative religious affiliation and civic engagement is more complex than scholars have previously assumed. Some characteristics of conservative religion appear to increase community volunteering (i.e., supernatural experiences, frequency of evangelism, congregational network closure), while congregational strictness decreases community volunteering outside of the congregation. These findings are important because they refute the notion that growth of religious conservatism is detrimental to civic life in the U.S. Rather, it seems that some forms of religious conservatism are likely to decrease community involvement (i.e., strict religion), while others may actually increase it. Because many of the independent variables utilized in chapter five are novel measures, however, it will be beneficial for future studies to attempt to replicate these findings using other datasets and similar



measures of religiosity. Moreover, future research should examine the relationship between other characteristics of religious conservatism or liberalism and different types of civic engagement. Efforts should be made to more precisely specify the effects that religiosity has on all forms of civic engagement in the U.S. Such studies will contribute significantly to our understanding of the effects that the changing religious landscape in the U.S. is having on the strength of community life.

Each of these individual chapters tells us something important about how social and religious contexts affect civic engagement in the U.S. And they demonstrate what social scientists have long recognized; that social contexts matter. More specifically, they demonstrate the utility that various religious contexts such as local congregations, religious traditions, and religious environments have for predicting important measures of civic life. The picture that the preceding chapters paint, however, is far from complete. There is still much for researchers to discover about the impact that religious contexts have on the strength and vitality of civic participation in American communities. Moreover, as the religious landscape in the U.S. continues to shift, and as America's population continues to grow more diverse, it will become increasingly important for social researchers to understand how changing religious contexts affect American civic life.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### Types of Nonprofit Social Service Organizations in County Level Analyses

The dependent variable analyzed in chapter one, representing the rate of nonprofit social services per 100,000 residents in each U.S. county, is constructed using data drawn from the NCCS core files. This dataset includes descriptive information on all nonprofit organizations in the U.S. that are required to file a Form 990 with the IRS. Using the NTEE-CC, I include the following categories of organizations in the construction of the dependent variable:

- Community clinics
- Community and neighborhood development
- Community improvement and capacity building
- Counseling
- Crime and legal related
- Crime prevention
- Economic development
- Employment preparation and procurement
- Food, agriculture, and nutrition
- Food programs
- Housing and shelter
- Human services
- Legal services
- Mental health associations
- Mental health treatment
- Protection against abuse
- Public health
- Rehabilitation services for offenders
- Substance abuse prevention and treatment
- Vocational rehabilitation
- Youth development

## APPENDIX B

### Types of Community Services Provided by USCLS Congregations

The dependent variable in chapter three is a count of the community service programs provided by each congregation participating in the U.S. Congregational Life Survey (USCLS). A key informant from each congregation was asked to report how many of 23 different service programs the congregation had provided during the past 12 months. The types of service programs that key informants were asked to select from are listed below:

- 12-step programs
- After-school programs
- Animal welfare or environmental awareness programs
- Arts or cultural programs
- Care for persons with disabilities
- Community action or organizing
- Elementary school
- Emergency assistance program
- Health-related programs
- Hobby or crafts programs
- Housing for seniors
- Housing for other groups
- Immigrant support services
- Other community service or social action activities
- Other senior programs
- Other social or recreational programs
- Prison or jail programs
- Programs for unemployed adults
- Social justice activities
- Sporting programs
- Support groups
- Voter registration programs
- Youth programs

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