

*Interdisciplinary Journal of
Research on Religion*

Volume 4

2008

Article 7

Religion and the Logic of the Civic Sphere:
Religious Tradition, Religious Practice, and
Voluntary Association

Matthew T. Loveland*

Assistant Professor of Sociology
LeMoyne College

Keely Jones-Stater

Adjunct Lecturer in Public Policy
University of Connecticut

Jerry Z. Park

Assistant Professor of Sociology
Baylor University

* lovelam@lemoyne.edu

Religion and the Logic of the Civic Sphere: Religious Tradition, Religious Practice, and Voluntary Association

Matthew T. Loveland

Assistant Professor of Sociology
LeMoyne College

Keely Jones-Stater

Adjunct Lecturer in Public Policy
University of Connecticut

Jerry Z. Park

Assistant Professor of Sociology
Baylor University

Abstract

This article considers the effects of religious affiliation, congregational participation, and religious service attendance on voluntary association membership. The U.S. voluntary sector owes much to the culture of mainline Protestantism, and we propose a theory that accounts for the varying affinities of the major Christian traditions with the U.S. civic logic. Recognizing this history implies that the relationship between religious practice and civic participation depends on the context of such practice. Using data from the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey, we find that attendance and religious participation do not have parallel effects on voluntary membership across traditions. Instead, we find patterns that are consistent with the theory that the logic of the U.S. voluntary sector resembles the logic of mainline Protestantism.

Civil society is an arena, separate from the state, in which citizens voluntarily organize around shared interests. An active civil society helps to sustain a vital democracy (Linz and Stepan 1996), and voluntary association membership is an often-used measure of the health of civil society (Babchuk and Booth 1969; Curtis, Grabb, and Baer 1992; Lam 2002). Many factors are connected to an active civil society, but religious organizations and religious people are frequently identified as major contributors (Putnam 2000; Wuthnow 1999). Religion and civic participation are complex, multidimensional concepts, and a large body of research has explored a range of empirical relationships.

In this article, we explore two forms of religious participation and their relationship with a common measure of civic involvement. Our measure of civic involvement is voluntary association membership, the meaning of which we briefly consider from a critical perspective to develop a theory of how the connection of religion to civic engagement depends on religious affiliation and religious participation. Our measures of religious participation are service attendance and congregational involvement beyond attendance. The recently emerging consensus is that it is not attendance that matters, but rather that more complex forms of involvement have a higher rate of civic return. The influence of involvement beyond attendance is nearly universally interpreted through the lens of the Civic Voluntarism Model (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). From this perspective, active participation in religious organizations provides transferable civic skills, and attendance does not (Loveland et al. 2005). Beyond empirical relationships, the theoretical relevance of attendance is rarely considered in much detail (for a recent exception, see Beyerlein and Hipp 2006).

A sociological perspective draws our attention to the context of religious participation. Recent research has demonstrated the continued importance of religious tradition by demonstrating that the assumption of equivalent effects across religious groups is inadequate (Beyerlein and Hipp 2006; Wuthnow 1999). In accord with this emerging view, we find that the effect of religious participation is not equivalent across the major U.S. religious traditions. However, we explain this finding with an argument about the degree of affinity between the cultural and organizational foundations of the U.S. civic sphere and the institutional logics of the major U.S. religious traditions. We replicate the findings of others regarding the effect of congregational participation, but we also show that the relationship of church attendance with civic life is too complex to be treated as unimportant once congregational participation is controlled. In particular, we find that tradition differences are strongest for people who nominally affiliate but do not frequently attend religious services. Tradition-level differences decrease as attendance at services increases, and we argue that the frequently noted institutional isomorphism of U.S. religious communities mediates the cultural differences of religious tradition. Unlike theories that focus

on the pro-social teachings of religious traditions, we call attention to something more basic: variation in the ethos of membership.

RELIGIOUS PARTICIPATION

Attendance at religious services is a frequently used measure of religious participation, often conceptualized as a proxy for connections to organizational networks that may produce invitations for community participation or exposure to pro-social messages (Gronbjerg and Never 2004; Jones 2006; Musick, Wilson, and Bynum 2000; Park and Smith 2000; Smidt 1999). Findings that link religious service attendance to pro-social behavior have been mixed. Lazerwitz (1962) found a positive, if tentative, relationship between frequency of attendance and number of voluntary associations, and Smidt (1999) found that attendance was linearly and positively related to civic engagement, the number of memberships increasing with frequency of attendance. It is worth noting that the count of civic memberships that was used in Smidt's analysis included "religious or church related groups" (1999: 179) but that Wilson and Musick found that "church attendance was more strongly related to secular volunteering than religious volunteering" (1997: 710, note 12).

More recently, Lam (2002) found a negative relationship between church attendance and voluntary association membership, explaining the finding in terms of organizational competition for individuals' time and resources. Research by McKenzie (2001) supports this conclusion, conceptualizing attendance as a choice of an acceptable congregation but finding attendance to have no relationship with civic participation once theology is taken into account. Lam posits that "the participatory dimension of religiosity can have very different effects on voluntary association participation, depending on the level of commitment demanded by the church or other religious organization" (2002: 415). Others have found religious tradition to moderate the effect of attendance on voluntary membership, arguing that organizational differences between the major traditions influence individual outcomes (Beyerlein and Hipp 2006).

The lack of consensus about the relationship between service attendance and civic participation is perhaps due to the prominence of Verba, Schlozman, and Brady's (1995) Civic Voluntarism Model, the seminal work in what could be called the civic skills paradigm. Routinely, empirical research confirms the model's basic premise: that people who participate with the organizational affairs of congregations are also more involved in the local, secular community (Beyerlein and Hipp 2006; Djupe and Gilbert 2006; Ecklund and Park 2005). Those who are active in the organizational aspects of congregations are said to learn transferable civic skills. For example, writing a letter asking fellow church members to participate in a church festival requires the same skills that one would

use in any community organization when writing a letter asking for participation. From this perspective, the key features of religious organizations are the practical similarities they have with other organizations. Organizations need human capital, and churches provide a location for potentially active people to cultivate such capital. The prominence of this approach has led analysts to focus on congregational participation while paying less attention to service attendance for a simple, persuasive reason: While congregational participation engenders civic skills, church attendance, a more passive form of involvement, does not.

Certainly, the civic skills approach adds much to our understanding of the connections between religious and civic life. Yet it does not fully explain the differences in civic choices that are seen among members of major religious traditions. The organizational and behavioral emphases of the model overlook the cultural and historical aspects of religious traditions that make them unique social entities. Religious traditions reproduce frameworks of meaning that participants enact, consciously and unconsciously, in their social lives. New institutional theory suggests that adherents are socialized to understand their religious and secular civic engagement on the basis of a set of meanings tied to an institutional logic of action (Friedland and Alford 1991; Jepperson 1991; Meyer and Rowan 1977). While institutional theory suggests that people who attend and participate more will accept the organizational logic to a greater degree than will those who are less involved, it also proposes that over time, organizations begin to act alike and mirror one another's processes (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). This institutional isomorphism means that as religious groups interact with one another, they begin to adopt similar structures and practices.

In the following sections, we argue that the influence of religion on voluntary association is twofold. First, a key feature of religious traditions is the meaning of membership in the religious community. Specifically, a defining characteristic of white Protestantism is individualistic, voluntary membership. Membership in an evangelical church is countercultural in a way that membership in a mainline church is not, but each tradition values an active choice to belong. In contrast, black Protestantism and Catholicism have sustained a competing logic of membership that owes less to individual choice than to generational, communal membership (Ellison and Sherkat 1999; Hunt and Hunt 1999; Sandomirsky and Wilson 1990). Second, an individual's participation in religious communities is related to civic participation. However, the result of institutional isomorphism is that the experiences of frequent attenders, regardless of tradition, will converge. Therefore we expect that differences in tradition regarding voluntary association will be most apparent among the members who attend services the least. The levels of civic engagement for those who frequently attend or are highly involved will likely be quite similar.

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION AND THE PROTESTANT LOGIC OF VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATION

Many studies have used membership in nonreligious voluntary associations as a measure of civic involvement to show that religiosity increases secular participation (Curtis, Grabb, and Baer 1992; Lam 2002, 2006; Loveland et al. 2005). Williams, commenting on the body of research about religion and civic life, refers to the voluntary association as “the bedrock form of social organization in this . . . current conceptualization of civil society” (2007: 11). It is common in discussing religion and secular civic participation to call on Alexis de Tocqueville’s observations about the civic ethos of early U.S. Christianity and the role of congregations in promoting an active civil society (Smidt 1999). Williams and others (Chaves 1998; Hall 1992), however, call attention to the rarely articulated but clearly related point that the typical organizational form of modern U.S. voluntary associations owes much to the white Protestants who were the architects of the early voluntary sector. As Friedland and Alford (1991) explain, institutions organize symbols and action around a defining logic that informs individual and organizational behavior. Today, U.S. civic associations manifest an institutional logic that resonates culturally and structurally with the voluntary, local, individualistic ethos of white Protestantism.

The influence of white Protestantism on voluntary associations is not only in terms of cultural logic, but also in terms of concrete historical and legal realities that are important in shaping organizational action (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Williams notes that the “legal structures and cultural models of how one organizes voluntary associations were both built with Protestant congregations in mind” (Williams 2007: 18). Likewise, both Chaves (1998) and Hall (1992) argue that many voluntary organizations that exist today began as religious-based groups and evolved into secular civic organizations. Further, Kaufman (2002) argues that the early motivations of U.S. voluntary organizations were often exclusionary. Organized primarily by socially dominant white Protestants in response to increasing diversity, including religious diversity, these early voluntary associations were often as much about voluntarily associating with people who shared one’s economic interests as they were about maintaining the common good. Thus in addition to the meaning of membership within the religious group, the external environment in which each group is situated also affects its civic logic and contributes to the ease with which members can join nonreligious civic groups. These issues bring into question the validity of using voluntary association membership as a measure of nonreligious involvement without accounting for historical contexts, organizational networks, or the framework through which religious beliefs are translated into civic action.

Even among white Protestants, divisions emerged (Smith et al. 1998). Mainline denominations developed a social gospel that focused on political and social activism, while evangelical Protestants withdrew from the sort of activism that defined the social gospel, preferring to focus on individual salvation (Moberg 1972). Although Regnerus and Smith (1998) outline the process of selective deprivatization, wherein evangelical Protestants have made targeted inroads into U.S. public life during the late 20th century, the presence of evangelicals can be largely classified as political rather than civic. For example, Ammerman (1987) writes of “worlds of opposition” to describe the general orientation of conservative Protestantism. Although conservative Christian churches and social movement organizations are politically savvy, analyses have repeatedly shown that individual evangelical Christians are involved in civil society to a lesser degree than are their mainline Protestant counterparts (Beyerlein and Hipp 2006; Lam 2002; Loveland et al. 2005; Schwadel 2005). Affiliation with the evangelical Protestant tradition often involves making a dramatic, voluntary break with one’s past, as in a born-again experience (Dixon, Lowery, and Jones 1992), and is in many ways an expression of opposition to mainstream society.

Other religious groups have historically responded to civic exclusion by developing alternative civic organizations. The 20th century was a time of change in U.S. Catholicism (D’Antonio et al. 2001; Dolan 1985), and contemporary research about religion and civil society is least clear regarding the Catholic tradition. As an immigrant population who practiced a religion that was fundamentally different from that of the Protestant establishment, Catholics were historically excluded from community institutions and civic organizations (Kaufman 2002; Putnam 2000). Important to our theory, the nonvoluntary parish model of religious organization stood in contrast to the voluntary, congregational model of Protestantism (Williams 2007), as did the hierarchical nondemocratic structure through which theological decisions were made in Catholicism. Although distinctions have blurred and scholars have explored *de facto* congregationalism in modern Catholicism (Maines and McCallion 2004; Wuthnow 1988), contemporary Catholic affiliation is still less voluntary than is affiliation with white Protestant traditions. For example, Sandomirsky and Wilson (1990) note that the quasi-ethnic nature of Catholic affiliation reduces religious mobility. Accordingly, Catholicism’s relationship with the civil sphere remains unique. This, we argue, is a result of both historical exclusion from white Protestant civic organizations and a tradition-specific logic that emphasizes collective identity and participation (Greeley 2000).

The central role of the black Protestant church among African-Americans is a result of exclusion from civic domains (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). African-American Protestantism is not as closely tied to mainstream U.S. culture as is mainline Protestantism; its boundary is less permeable, owing to a history of

marginalization (Steensland et al. 2000). However, “the Black Church” (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990) is a primary institution in the lives of African-Americans because it serves as a location where a socially marginalized constituency can find autonomy, and existing research often finds the rate of black Protestant voluntary membership to be similar to that of mainline Protestants (Beyerlein and Hipp 2006; Smidt 1999). The black church provides a structure that facilitates charity and civic engagement and cultivates human capital (Barnes 2005; Brown and Brown 2003; Harris 1994; Musick, Wilson, and Bynum 2000), and historically African-American secular institutions are more closely connected to religious institutions than is the case for other religious and racial communities (Gilkes 1998; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). In the black Protestant context, religious participation is semi-involuntary (Ellison and Sherkat 1999) and occurs in a setting where secular and religious lives are explicitly connected (Calhoun-Brown 1996; Patillo-McCoy 1998). Not being involved in the church means being absent from the central organization in the community. This mode of membership along with the historical response to racism puts black Protestantism at a distance from the logic of the white mainline-influenced civic sphere today.

Discussion of the possible implications of the cultural imprint of white Protestantism and early discrimination for patterns of contemporary civil society has been absent from the literature on religion and civic life. If the U.S. civic sphere coalesced around a religious logic that tends toward a white, mainline Protestant worldview, then one would expect to find this reflected in patterns in the degree to which adherents of other religious traditions, especially Catholics and black Protestants, are involved in civic organizations.¹

In sum, institutional theory suggests that religious affiliation will differentially affect civic engagement on the basis of a tradition-specific logic of membership and the external environment in which the tradition developed historically and currently resides. The theory of institutional isomorphism suggests that as Catholic and black Protestant congregations become increasingly involved with the civic world, a civic world that is grounded in white Protestantism, they will adopt practices and civic cultural ideas that are similar to those of white Protestantism. Furthermore, institutional isomorphism leads us to believe that individual differentiation based on the tradition specific logic will decline as individual participation in local religious organizations increases, since organizations too tend to copy similar organizations’ practices as they interact more frequently. This modern institutional isomorphism is what makes the Civic Voluntarism Model robust across traditions today.

¹ The civic sphere is not homogeneous, and it is reasonable to argue that the logics of the various traditions may resonate more or less with different types of voluntary associations. We model a count of types to address several articles in the literature that have adopted this strategy.

HYPOTHESES

Variation Within Traditions

The Civic Voluntarism Model leads us to expect that being active in a religious organization in ways beyond service attendance is positively related to nonreligious voluntary association. We anticipate that the main effect of service attendance on secular participation will be negative in models that account for more complex forms of involvement. In essence, the Civic Voluntarism Model will explain the impact of religious participation for highly involved members across traditions. Those who participate more will build skills that are appropriate for engagement and networks to the civic world.

Variation Across Traditions

In the mainline environment, the civic skills approach would seem to work quite well. If we account for attendance by tradition interactions, we expect that mainline service attendance will reduce membership counts, while mainline participation beyond attendance will increase membership counts. Religious participation in the evangelical context carries with it a unique meaning relative to mainstream culture. When evangelical Christians participate in religious organizations, they are helping to build a world of opposition (Ammerman 1987). We expect the positive effects of congregational participation to be attenuated relative to mainline Protestants and the negative effect of attendance to be exaggerated. The effect of congregational participation on secular participation is likely to be stronger for black Protestants than for mainline Protestants because of the more complete organizational connection outlined above. Further, because the church is the primary entry into civic life for African-Americans, we expect that service attendance will not have the negative effect that it does for mainline Protestants. Whereas service attendance has an opportunity cost for mainline Protestants (Lam 2002; McKenzie 2001), the lack of service attendance for a black Protestant precludes participation in the primary or gateway voluntary association of the African-American community.

For Catholics, congregational participation beyond attendance is likely to be similar to congregational participation for mainline Protestants in that it allows one to practice civic skills in an environment where the civic sphere is neither tightly coupled nor explicitly rejected. The less voluntary nature of Catholic affiliation often means that disaffected Catholics retreat from the parish while continuing to identify with the Catholic tradition (Sandomirsky and Wilson 1990). Choosing to attend a Catholic church is less like choosing one voluntary organization over another than is the case in the Protestant context and more

about maintaining a distinctive religious identity. For this reason, the relationship between church attendance and civic participation in the Catholic context is likely to be null; it does not provide civic skills, and it does not represent a competing choice.

DATA AND METHODS

The Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey (SCCBS) was done as part of the Civic Engagement in America Project at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government. It can be downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives (www.thearda.com). The survey was administered to a stratified sample of adult Americans in forty communities across the United States, yielding a total of 26,230 respondents. Previous analyses have shown these data to be demographically consistent with the U.S. population, except for overrepresenting women and underrepresenting rural residents (Brooks 2004). Our analyses include only the respondents from the forty communities who identified as members of a religious tradition, because respondents who did not report identification were not asked about church attendance or congregational participation. These restrictions and listwise deletion reduce our sample size to 19,316.² The analyses that follow were conducted with STATA 9.2; they take into account the stratified sampling design of the project and apply the final sampling weight developed by the principal investigators.

With the caveats outlined above, the dependent variable follows a vein of similar research by summing the number of group types to which a respondent belongs (Beyerlein and Hipp 2006; Curtis, Grabb, and Baer 1992; Loveland et al. 2005). To model our count-dependent variable and to account for observed overdispersion, we use negative binomial regression (Long 1997). Our measure includes sports groups, youth groups, parent teacher associations, veterans groups, neighborhood associations, elderly groups, social service groups, fraternal organizations, ethnic associations, arts and culture groups, hobby groups, and a general "other groups" option. It does not include any religious groups to which the respondent belongs.

To limit the degree to which the categories of religious groups and civic organizations can be confounded, the SCCBS is structured to identify religious practices first, before discussing civic involvement. The first set of questions

² The SCCBS was a random digit dialing phone survey that was carried out in forty communities plus a national sample. Our analysis uses those from the forty communities. The overall response rate for the community samples was 27 percent, with a cooperation rate of 41 percent. See the survey documentation for a detailed description of survey methods (Saguaro Seminar 2000). Our sample size is also reduced, owing to the use of the RELTRAD religious identification measure, which makes classification of some identifications difficult.

focuses on church attendance and participation and leads the respondent into the questions about group membership. The survey then asks whether the respondent is a part of a group that is affiliated with religion. As a result of this question ordering, respondents should be thinking about what it means to be a part of a church and religious group and indicate the extent of their involvement in these practices before they begin to think about civic group membership in the questions that follow.

Yet it is possible that some respondents will place religiously affiliated groups into a civic category. For instance, they might identify the evangelical Youth For Christ (YFC) as a youth organization or the Catholic Knights of Columbus as a fraternal organization. Researchers working with survey data must acknowledge such potential confounding of categories. However, researchers using survey data must also assume that respondents mean what they say when they are asked to indicate their various affiliations. To use the previous example, if the respondent considers the mission of YFC to be youth activities or the Knights of Columbus to be a source of fraternal bonding, then the decision to refer to participation in these groups as “youth-related” or “fraternal” suggests that these religiously based civic groups act more as civic than religious groups for the respondent. As a result, even though respondents might belong to the same group, their logics for belonging can differ. Using this rationale, we argue that respondents are likely to select the category that they believe is most appropriate, given their perception of the organization and the meaning of their involvement. This allows us to tease out different logics for belonging from the survey data, which are then reflected in our model.

Our independent variables of interest are frequency of church attendance, participation in congregational activities beyond attendance, and tradition of affiliation.

Religious service attendance was measured with the question “Not including weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services.” It is measured on a five-point scale from 0 to 4 (0 = less than a few times per year, 1 = a few times per year, 2 = once or twice a month, 3 = almost every week, 4 = every week or more often).³ We include a dichotomous measure (1 = participant) of church participation beyond service attendance based on responses to the question “In the past 12 months, have you participated in church activities other than attending services? This might include teaching Sunday school, serving on a committee, attending a choir rehearsal, retreat, etc.” See Table 1 for descriptive statistics.

³ We use the variable RELATEN2 from the original data. This variable was originally coded so that nonaffiliates were included as zero, but our analysis drops nonaffiliates entirely, meaning that those who report the lowest level of attendance also reported a religious affiliation.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Minimum	Maximum
Memberships	2.28	0	12
Religious service attendance	2.47	0	4
Religious participation	0.46	0	1
Mainline Protestant	0.20	0	1
Evangelical Protestant	0.29	0	1
Black Protestant	0.09	0	1
Catholic	0.32	0	1
Other religion	0.09	0	1
Religious group membership	0.17	0	1
Age	45.86	18	118
Female	0.54	0	1
Married	0.60	0	1
Number of children	0.82	0	20
Hours worked	29.06	0	96
Economically satisfied	0.27	0	1
Education level	3.34	1	5
Politically liberal	0.24	0	1
Politically conservative	0.46	0	1
Nonwhite	0.24	0	1
Southern residency	0.31	0	1

For our measure of religious affiliation, we followed Steensland and colleagues (2000), who provide a guide for dividing the many denominations into more general traditions. Thus our religious traditions include the following: black Protestant, evangelical Protestant, mainline Protestant, Catholic, and other religion.⁴ On the basis of our argument that mainline Protestantism is more strongly connected to the civic sphere than are the other religious traditions, we make this group the reference category in all models. The “other religion” category is too heterogeneous to allow for strong theoretical expectations; therefore we comment on this group only in the findings and conclusion. After initial models examine the hypotheses about attendance and congregation participation, we include product terms to test for interactions between religious tradition, frequency of attendance, and participation.

⁴ See the article by Steensland and colleagues (2000) for a detailed breakdown of these religious groups by denomination. Clearly, any attempt that is made to categorize U.S. religious denominations will emphasize some distinctions while blurring others. The scheme that was developed by Steensland and colleagues is widely accepted among analysts of American religion as a strong approach.

We include several controls in each model. Age is added to the model in 10-year increments, and dummy variables are included for female (1 = female), marital status (1 = married), and membership in a religious voluntary group (1 = member). Race is coded dichotomously (1 = nonwhite), and dummy variables are included to account for identification as a political liberal or conservative (moderates are the reference group). Education is measured in five categories (1 = less than high school, 2 = high school, 3 = some college, 4 = college degree, and 5 = graduate or professional degree). We use a dichotomous economic satisfaction variable (1 = satisfied) as a proxy for disposable income, and employment status is measured by the number of hours worked each week divided by 8. To account for residency in the South, a dichotomous variable is entered (1 = lives in the southern census region), and we include a measure of the number of children under 18 years of age in the household.

RESULTS

Several control variables are significantly related to the count of civic membership types. Models 1 and 2 in Table 2 show that age, number of children, hours worked, economic satisfaction, and level of education are each positively related to membership rate, all else being held constant. Identifying as a political liberal is related to having more membership types than moderates have. On average, women have fewer memberships than men do. Respondents who belong to religious voluntary groups, on average, belong to more civic groups than do those who do not belong to religious groups. Each of these relationships holds when the measure of religious participation beyond service attendance is added to the model (column 2).

In model 1, if we exclude the measure of congregation participation, frequency of attendance is significantly and positively associated with membership count. To interpret negative binomial regression, it is helpful to examine predicted counts and changes in overall predictions that result from changes in the independent variables (Long 1997). For example, for a mainline Protestant who is average on other independent variables in the model, we predict a membership rate of 2.35. As frequency of attendance changes from the minimum to the maximum value, the predicted number of memberships increases by 0.56. The predicted count for a mainline Protestant who never attends services is 2.05, while for a mainline Protestant who attends weekly or more, the predicted count is 2.61 memberships.

Table 2: Negative Binomial Regression of Membership Count on Independent Variables

Variable	Model 1	Model 2
	Membership Count	Membership Count
Age (10-year increments)	0.04* (0.01)	0.05* (0.01)
Female	-0.05* (0.02)	-0.06* (0.02)
Married	0.01 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)
Number of children	0.06* (0.01)	0.05* (0.01)
Workdays	0.02* (0.00)	0.02* (0.00)
Economically satisfied	0.07* (0.02)	0.07* (0.02)
Education level	0.12* (0.00)	0.11* (0.00)
Politically liberal	0.11* (0.02)	0.10* (0.02)
Politically conservative	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.03** (0.02)
Nonwhite	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)
Southern residence	0.02 (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)
Evangelical Protestant	-0.14* (0.02)	-0.15* (0.02)
Black Protestant	0.09** (0.03)	0.09** (0.03)
Catholic	-0.10* (0.02)	-0.05* (0.02)
Other religion	-0.06** (0.03)	-0.07* (0.03)
Religious group membership	0.43* (0.02)	0.34* (0.02)
Religious service attendance	0.06* (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Religious participation		0.45* (0.02)
Constant	-0.12* (0.05)	-0.10** (0.05)
Observations (<i>F</i>)	19,316 (150.8)	19,316 (177.7)

* $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$.

Standard errors in parentheses.

Mainline Protestant is the reference category.

In model 2 of Table 2, we introduce the measure of congregational participation. Although the control variables perform similarly as in model 1, we see that identifying as a political conservative is significantly related to a lower membership count. Moving on to our hypotheses, frequency of church attendance is no longer a significant predictor of number of memberships; however, the change is not negative, as we expected. Congregation participation is, however, significantly and positively associated with membership count. When other predictors are set to their mean values, a mainline Protestant who does not participate in the congregation has an expected count of 1.90, while a mainline Protestant who does participate in congregation activities has an expected count of 2.98. We base further conclusions from Table 2 on model 2.

As was expected, mainline Protestants, on average, report more memberships than do respondents who are affiliated with evangelical Protestantism, Catholicism, and other religious traditions. Black Protestants, on average, report more memberships than do mainline Protestants. According to model 2 in Table 2 and with all other variables set to mean levels, a mainline Protestant has an expected membership count of 2.28. When we hold other variables at the mean but vary religious identification, the model produces the following predicted membership counts: evangelical Protestant, 1.97; Catholic, 2.16; other religion, 2.13; black Protestant, 2.48. See Table 3 for predicted counts and confidence intervals.

Table 3: Predicted Membership Count by Religious Tradition, Preferred Model

Religious Tradition	Predicted Count	95% Confidence Interval of Prediction	
		Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Mainline Protestant	2.28	2.21	2.35
Evangelical Protestant	1.97	1.91	2.03
Black Protestant	2.48	2.34	2.63
Catholic	2.16	2.10	2.22
Other religion	2.13	2.03	2.23

Two more models are necessary to test for the moderating role of tradition on practice: one that includes product terms of attendance by religious tradition (Table 4) and one that includes other congregation participation by tradition (Table 6). Table 4 reports the results of including attendance by tradition interactions along with all variables in model 2. Significant interaction terms suggest that the effect of attendance on membership count varies by tradition, while the main effects for tradition indicate differences in membership among

those who identify as part of a tradition but do not attend religious services. The main effect of attendance refers to mainline Protestants, and as expected, it is significant and negative. The significant and negative main effects for tradition indicate that among nonattenders, evangelical Protestants, black Protestants, and Catholics have fewer secular membership types than do mainline Protestants. Two of the interaction effects are significant: those for Catholics and black Protestants. This indicates that service attendance is differently related to civic membership for these two traditions in comparison to mainline Protestants. Figure 1 reports these findings graphically by predicting the membership count at each level of attendance for each group. We do not graph evangelical Protestants or those in other religions because for these groups, attendance operates similarly to that of mainline Protestants.

Table 4: Attendance by Tradition Interactions

Religious Tradition	Membership Count
Evangelical Protestant	-0.13* (0.04)
Black Protestant	-0.15** (0.07)
Catholic	-0.18* (0.04)
Other religion	-0.09 (0.05)
Religious service attendance	-0.04* (0.01)
Religious participation	0.46* (0.02)
Attendance by Black Protestant	0.09* (0.02)
Attendance by Evangelical Protestant	-0.00 (0.01)
Attendance by Catholic	0.05* (0.01)
Attendance by other religion	0.00 (0.02)
Constant	-0.04 (0.05)
Observations (<i>F</i>)	19,316 (147.4)

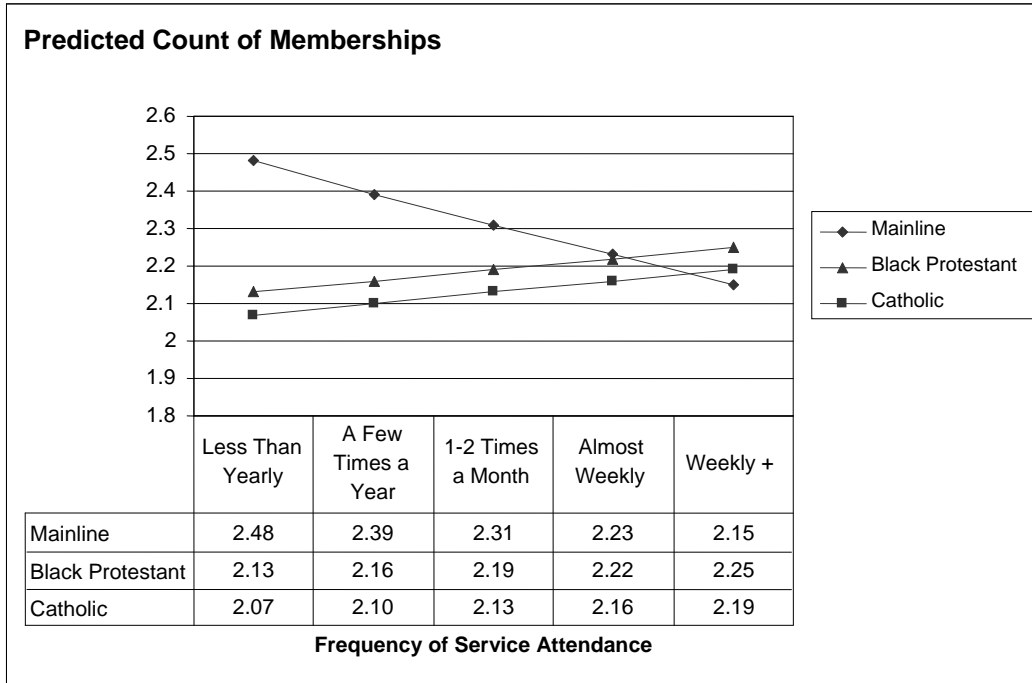
* $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$.

Standard errors in parentheses.

The model includes all control variables from the base model.

Mainline Protestant is the reference category.

Figure 1: Attendance by Tradition, Predicting Count of Civic Memberships



When interaction effects are not included, as in model 2 in Table 2, it appears that attendance is not related to civic membership. Accounting for the proposition that service attendance will affect outcomes differently depending on the tradition within which a person is attending services reveals a more complex situation. In fact, the effect of service attendance is negative for mainline Protestants, evangelical Protestants, and those in other religious traditions, while it has no effect for Catholics and black Protestants. Table 5 reports predicted membership counts, by tradition, at the lowest and highest levels of service attendance, along with the difference between the estimates and confidence intervals for this difference. For mainline Protestants, evangelical Protestants, and those from other religious traditions, the change is negative, and the estimated upper and lower bounds of the change are below zero. For Catholics and black Protestants, however, predicted positive changes show upper and lower bounds that straddle zero.

Table 5: Change in Predicted Membership Counts for Minimum and Maximum Attendance Levels by Tradition

Religious Tradition	Less Than Yearly	Weekly + Attendance	Change	95% Confidence Interval of Change	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Mainline Protestant	2.48	2.15	-0.33	-0.53	-0.13
Evangelical Protestant	2.17	1.87	-0.30	-0.47	-0.13
Other religion	2.27	2.00	-0.27	-0.53	-0.01
Catholic	2.07	2.19	0.12	-0.06	0.29
Black Protestant	2.13	2.25	0.12	-0.07	0.31

To summarize, among nominal affiliates, that is, those who do not attend worship services, mainline Protestants stand out by having more memberships than do evangelicals, black Protestants, and Catholics; and at the highest level of attendance, evangelical Protestants stand out by having the smallest number of memberships, on average. The effect of religious service attendance is not constant across traditions, and no negative attendance effect is found for black Protestants or Catholics. Mainline Protestants, Catholics, and black Protestants who attend services frequently are similar in their rates of voluntary association, and evangelical Protestants who attend services frequently are the least involved in civil society. Failing to account for the moderating role of tradition would lead analysts to conclude that there was no attendance effect for members of any tradition.

Table 6 reports the results when we include the participation by tradition interaction along with the variables from model 2, and the results are presented graphically in Figure 2. Again, the main effect of congregation participation is the effect for mainline Protestants, while the main effects for the other religious traditions refer to those respondents who did not report participation beyond attendance at church services. Congregation participation is a significant and positive predictor of secular membership count for adherents of all traditions, while nonparticipating evangelical Protestants, Catholics, and members of other religions each have lower membership counts than do nonparticipating mainline Protestants. The effect of participation is similar for mainline Protestants, evangelical Protestants, and those in other religious traditions; but for black Protestants and Catholics, the effect of participation is more extreme. Nonparticipating black Protestants have a membership rate similar to that of

nonparticipating mainline Protestants, and nonparticipating Catholics have significantly fewer civic memberships than mainline Protestants do. Among those who participate in congregational activities beyond attendance at services, the membership rate for black Protestants and Catholics is higher than that for mainline Protestants.

Table 6: Participation by Tradition Interactions

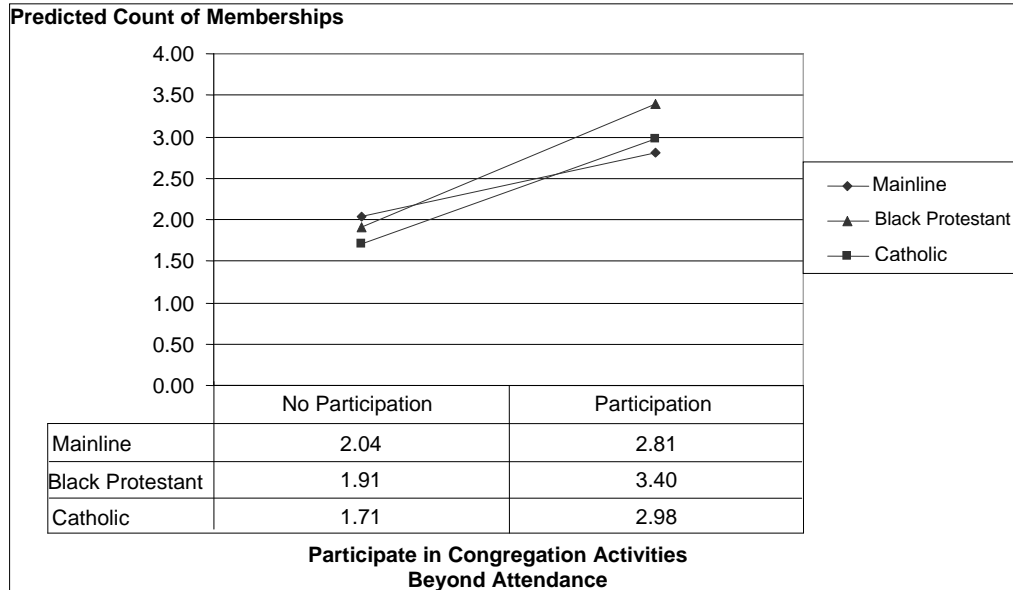
Religious Tradition	Membership Count
Evangelical Protestant	-0.18* (0.03)
Black Protestant	-0.07 (0.06)
Catholic	-0.18* (0.03)
Other religion	-0.13* (0.04)
Religious service attendance	-0.01 (0.01)
Religious participation	0.32* (0.03)
Participation by Black Protestant	0.26* (0.07)
Participation by Evangelical Protestant	0.06 (0.04)
Participation by Catholic	0.23* (0.04)
Participation by other religion	0.10 (0.05)
Constant	-0.03 (0.05)
Observations (<i>F</i>)	19,316 (148.3)

* $p < 0.01$.

Standard errors in parentheses.

The model includes all control variables from the base model.

Mainline Protestant is the reference category.

Figure 2: Participation by Tradition, Predicting Count of Civic Memberships

The civic effect of congregation participation is not equivalent across the major religious traditions in the United States. As the Civic Voluntarism Model would predict, congregation participation is positively associated with voluntary association memberships. However, the degree of the relationship is moderated by tradition. Nonparticipating Catholics are further removed from civil society than are nonparticipating mainline Protestants, but parish participation reverses the relationship. Black Protestants are similar to mainline Protestants in their rates of voluntary association, but black Protestants also appear to get a stronger civic push from congregational participation. We do not find the expected smaller participation effect for evangelicals; instead, it appears that tradition alone explains the reduced voluntary membership rate for evangelicals. These findings have important implications for our understanding of the relationship between religion and civic involvement—implications that we now consider. We note here as well the null relationship between attendance and membership count when the congregational participation and religious tradition interactions are included.

DISCUSSION

The connection between religion and civic life is complex and calls for a theory that not only accounts for the organizational and cultural aspects of

religion, but also considers the logic of the U.S. civic sphere. The emphasis of the Civic Voluntarism Model on skill learning and social capital tends to reduce religion to its organizational aspects, and few analyses have considered how the white Protestant roots of the civic sphere might affect the relationship between religious affiliation, religious practice, and civic engagement. Our findings replicate others in showing, first, variation in membership rates by affiliation; second, that increased congregational participation is related to larger voluntary association membership counts; and third, that the form of this relationship varies by tradition. Unique in the literature, we explain this variation in terms of distinct religious logics that have been shaped by their particular histories and theologies. The findings that Catholics more than make up for an initial affiliation-based gap through participation and that black Protestants surpass active mainline Protestants provide some evidence that congregations can make the civic sphere more inclusive (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). More important is the evidence that we find in support of recent claims about the history and culture of the U.S. civic sphere (Kaufman 2002; Williams 2007) and the suggestion that the democratizing effect of religious participation could be a result of institutional isomorphism.

Our analysis incorporates the observations of those who write about the Protestant nature of the U.S. civic sphere to point out that the foundational logic and an exclusionary history continue to effect contemporary patterns of civic engagement. We believe that this is most valuable in explaining the voluntary membership rates of black Protestants and Catholics. The groundwork of U.S. civil society was built by white Protestants, who later divided into today's evangelical and mainline traditions. Catholics and black Protestants were frequently excluded from early fraternal organizations and do not share the voluntary logic that is so fundamental to Protestant religiosity.

Figure 1 reports the most compelling finding of this study. Looking at those who report a religious affiliation but attend services infrequently, we find that Catholics and black Protestants who rarely attend religious services are the least involved in voluntary organizations. Evangelical Protestants who rarely attend services are also less involved than are mainline Protestants who rarely attend services. The prominence of mainline Protestants is an unsurprising finding when one considers that the U.S. voluntary sector was founded by white Protestants (Williams 2007) and today is heavily populated by secularized mainline Protestant charities (Chaves 1998). We did not find evidence, as we expected, that religious service attendance uniquely affects civic involvement for evangelical Protestants relative to mainline Protestants. Simple church attendance appears to draw white Protestants away from secular civil society, while congregational participation does allow one to practice useful civic skills and is related to greater levels of civic participation. This is the emerging consensus grounded in the Civic

Voluntarism Paradigm, but it might be most appropriate in the white Protestant context.

For Catholics and black Protestants, connections to the congregation by way of attendance do not have a negative secular civic impact. Instead, participation with a religious community negates the initial distance between these constituencies and the U.S. civic sphere. Although the most frequently attending evangelical Protestants do have fewer voluntary memberships than mainline Protestants, the form of the attendance effect is not different. This finding modifies that of McKenzie (2001). Perhaps service attendance works primarily as an associational choice without further, or even negative, civic effects in the white Protestant context but functions differently for Catholics and black Protestants. For black Protestants and Catholics, who have historically been excluded from the mainstream civic outlets, service attendance could serve as the primary exposure to what remains a generally religion-friendly U.S. civic sphere. For these constituencies, then, the church, which was historically the primary venue for involvement, might act as a gateway association.⁵

The centrality of religious institutions to black Protestants has been well described (Gilkes 1998; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Patillo-McCoy 1998). As one would expect, someone who identifies with a black Protestant tradition but does not attend services is very unlikely to have a high membership count, suggesting that such an individual is quite disconnected from opportunities for civic membership. For Catholics, the initial disparity that disappears as service attendance increases might be related to the post-Vatican II congregationalism of contemporary U.S. Catholicism (Maines and McCallion 2004). Parish life is not as inclusive as it once was, and Catholics who choose to participate in a congregation in essence practice the voluntarism that is ingrained in Protestant theology and the U.S. civic sphere. Attendance at Mass, then, could be a gateway to U.S. associational life.

In general, the connection between Catholicism and pro-social behavior is poorly understood. The theory that we have advanced in this article helps to make sense of Catholic membership rates using concepts that also explain the patterns for other religious traditions. This is possible primarily because we focus on the cultural logic and concrete history of the civic sphere rather than relying on expected outcomes of Catholic social teaching or theological differences. As the differences between Catholics and Protestants continue to decline (D'Antonio et al. 2000; Wuthnow 1988), explanatory power is gained with a historical perspective that accounts for the nature of the civic sphere, historical differences

⁵ Our cross-sectional data do not allow for claims of causality, and so we propose the idea that churches act as a gateway only as a possibility—a possibility, however, that is supported by our correlational findings and calls for future research.

between traditions, and contemporary similarities in congregational experiences across traditions.

This brings us to a puzzle that calls for future research. It might be that the cultural differences between the major U.S. religious traditions are most salient for people who continue to identify with a tradition but have tenuous connections to religious organizations. As the process of institutional isomorphism (Williams 2007) continues to transform organizational models across U.S. religious traditions, it is reasonable to expect that the logic of affiliation will become similar across these traditions. If this is the case, then service attendance could be important to the existing form of U.S. civic life not because it provides social capital or teaches civic skills, but because it exposes adherents to the classic logic of the American civic sphere: that of local, individualistic, voluntary association.

REFERENCES

- Ammerman, Nancy T. 1987. *Bible Believers: Fundamentalists in the Modern World*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Babchuk, Nichols, and Alan Booth. 1969. "Voluntary Association Membership: A Longitudinal Analysis." *American Sociological Review* 34(1): 31–45.
- Barnes, Sandra L. 2005. "Black Church Culture and Community Action." *Social Forces* 84(2): 967–994.
- Beyerlein, Kraig, and John R. Hipp. 2006. "From Pews to Participation: The Effect of Congregation Activity and Context on Bridging Civic Engagement." *Social Problems* 53(1): 97–117.
- Brooks, Arthur C. 2004. "What Do 'Don't Know' Responses Really Mean in Giving Surveys?" *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 33(3): 423–434.
- Brown, R. K., and Ronald E. Brown. 2003. "Faith and Works: Church-Based Social Capital Resources and African American Political Activism." *Social Forces* 82(2): 617–641.
- Calhoun-Brown, Allison. 1996. "African American Churches and Political Mobilization: The Psychological Impact of Organizational Resources." *Journal of Politics* 58(4): 935–953.
- Chaves, Mark. 1998. "The Religious Ethic and the Spirit of Nonprofit Entrepreneurship." In *Private Action and the Public Good*, edited by W. W. Powell and E. S. Clemens, 47–65. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Curtis, James E., Edward G. Grabb, and Douglas E. Baer. 1992. "Voluntary Association Membership in Fifteen Countries: A Comparative Analysis." *American Sociological Review* 57(2): 139–152.
- D'Antonio, William V., James D. Davidson, Dean R. Hoge, and Katherine Meyer. 2001. *American Catholics: Gender, Generation, and Commitment*. Walnut Creek CA: AltaMira Press.
- DiMaggio, Paul J., and Walter W. Powell. 1983. "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields." *American Sociological Review* 48(2): 147–160.

- Dixon, Richard D., Roger C. Lowery, and Lloyd P. Jones. 1992. "The Fact and Form of Born-Again Religious Conversions and Sociopolitical Conservatism." *Review of Religious Research* 34(2): 117–131.
- Djupe, Paul A., and Christopher P. Gilbert. 2006. "The Resourceful Believer: Generating Civic Skills in Church." *Journal of Politics* 68(1): 116–127.
- Dolan, Jay P. 1985. *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Ecklund, Elaine H., and Jerry Z. Park. 2005. "Asian American Community Participation and Religion: Civic Model Minorities?" *Journal of Asian American Studies* 8(1): 1–21.
- Ellison, Christopher G., and Darren E. Sherkat. 1999. "Identifying the Semi-Involuntary Institution: A Clarification." *Social Forces* 78(2): 793–802.
- Friedland, Roger, and Robert R. Alford. 1991. "Bringing Society Back in: Symbols, Practices, and Institutional Contradictions." In *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, edited by Walter W. Powell and Paul J. DiMaggio, 232–263. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gilkes, Cheryl T. 1998. "Plenty Good Room: Adaptation in a Changing Black Church." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 558: 101–121.
- Greeley, Andrew. 2000. *The Catholic Imagination*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gronbjerg, Kirsten A., and Brent Never. 2004. "The Role of Religious Networks and Other Factors in Types of Volunteer Work." *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* 14(3): 263–289.
- Hall, Peter D. 1992. *Inventing the Nonprofit Sector*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Harris, Fredrick C. 1994. "Something Within: Religion as a Mobilizer of African-American Political Activism." *Journal of Politics* 56(1): 42–68.
- Hunt, Larry L., and Matthew O. Hunt. 1999. "Regional Patterns of African American Church Attendance: Revisiting the Semi-Involuntary Thesis." *Social Forces* 78(2): 779–791.
- Jepperson, Ronald L. 1991. "Institutions, Institutional Effects, and Institutionalism." In *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, edited by Walter W. Powell and Paul J. DiMaggio, 143–163. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Jones, Keely S. 2006. "Giving and Volunteering as Distinct Forms of Civic Engagement: The Role of Community Integration and Personal Resources in Formal Helping." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 35(2): 249–266.
- Kaufman, Jason A. 2002. *For the Common Good?: American Civic Life and the Golden Age of Fraternity*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lam, Pui-Yan. 2002. "As the Flocks Gather: How Religion Affects Voluntary Association Participation." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 41(3): 405–422.
- Lam, Pui-Yan. 2006. "Religion and Civic Culture: A Cross-National Study of Voluntary Association Membership." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 45(2): 177–193.

- Lazerwitz, Bernard. 1962. "Membership in Voluntary Associations and Frequency of Church Attendance." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 2(1): 74–84.
- Lincoln, C. E., and Lawrence H. Mamiya. 1990. *The Black Church in the African-American Experience*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Linz, Juan J., and Alfred Stepan. 1996. *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Long, J. S. 1997. *Regression Models for Categorical and Limited Dependent Variables*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Loveland, Matthew T., David Sikkink, Daniel J. Myers, and Benjamin Radcliff. 2005. "Private Prayer and Civic Involvement." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 44(1): 1–14.
- Maines, David R., and Michael J. McCallion. 2004. "Evidence of and Speculations on Catholic de Facto Congregationalism." *Review of Religious Research* 46: 92–101.
- McKenzie, Brian D. 2001. "Self-Selection, Church Attendance, and Local Civic Participation." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 40(3): 479–488.
- Meyer, John W., and Brian Rowan. 1977. "Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony." *American Journal of Sociology* 83(2): 340–363.
- Moberg, David O. 1972. *The Great Reversal: Evangelism Versus Social Concern*. Philadelphia: Lippincott.
- Musick, Marc A., John Wilson, and William B. Bynum, Jr. 2000. "Race and Formal Volunteering: The Differential Effects of Class and Religion." *Social Forces* 78(4): 1539–1570.
- Park, Jerry Z., and Christian Smith. 2000. "'To Whom Much Has Been Given...': Religious Capital and Community Voluntarism Among Churchgoing Protestants." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 39(3): 272–286.
- Patillo-McCoy, Mary. 1998. "Church Culture as a Strategy of Action in the Black Community." *American Sociological Review* 63(6): 767–784.
- Putnam, Robert D. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Regnerus, Mark D., and Christian Smith. 1998. "Selective Deprivatization Among American Religious Traditions: The Reversal of the Great Reversal." *Social Forces* 76(4): 1347–1372.
- Saguaro Seminar. 2000. *Social capital community benchmark survey*. Cambridge, MA: John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. Retrieved November 25, 2008, from www.thearda.com.
- Sandomirsky, Sharon, and John Wilson. 1990. "Processes of Disaffiliation: Religious Mobility Among Men and Women." *Social Forces* 68(4): 1211–1229.
- Schwadel, Philip. 2005. "Individual, Congregational, and Denominational Effects on Church Members' Civic Participation." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 44(2): 159–171.
- Smidt, Corwin. 1999. "Religion and Civic Engagement: A Comparative Analysis." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 565: 176–192.

- Smith, Christian, Michael Emerson, Sally Gallagher, Paul Kennedy, and David Sikkink. 1998. *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Steenland, Brian, Jerry Z. Park, Mark D. Regnerus, Lynn D. Robinson, W. B. Wilcox, and Robert D. Woodberry. 2000. "The Measure of American Religion: Toward Improving the State of the Art." *Social Forces* 79(1): 291–318.
- Verba, Sidney, Kay L. Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady. 1995. *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Williams, Rhys H. 2007. "The Languages of the Public Sphere: Religious Pluralism, Institutional Logics, and Civil Society." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 612: 42–61.
- Wilson, John, and Marc Musick. 1997. "Who Cares?: Toward an Integrated Theory of Volunteer Work." *American Sociological Review* 62(5): 694–713.
- Wuthnow, Robert. 1988. *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Wuthnow, Robert. 1999. "Mobilizing Civic Engagement: The Changing Impact of Religious Involvement." In *Civic Engagement in American Democracy*, edited by Theda Skocpol and Morris P. Fiorina, 331–366. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.