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Social Status Diversity in  
Religious Congregations

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# Neighbors in the Pews: Social Status Diversity in Religious Congregations

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## Abstract

For the most part, Americans interact with other people like themselves—those with similar social and economic backgrounds. This homogeneity of social networks contributes in turn to social stratification and to the unequal distribution of social capital and civic integration. Religious congregations offer a rare opportunity for Americans to interact across social status lines. I use data from the 2001 U.S. Congregational Life Survey, which includes survey responses from relatively large samples of attendees nested within a large random sample of congregations, to examine the prevalence of income and education diversity in religious congregations. In contrast to racial diversity, which is minimal, there are high levels of social status diversity in most congregations. Status diversity in congregations also varies with congregational characteristics, such as religious tradition, age of the congregation, and racial makeup of the congregation; neighborhood characteristics, such as urbanity and proportion racial minority; and region of the country. I conclude by discussing the implications of the opportunities for cross-status interactions in religious congregations.

There is little diversity of social status in most American voluntary organizations (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001). For the most part, people interact with others like themselves, that is, with people who have similar social and economic backgrounds (Byrne 1971; Feld 1982; Knoke 1986; McPherson and Smith-Lovin 1987). The lack of interaction between Americans of different social status contributes to social stratification and to the unequal distribution of social capital and civic integration (Popielarz 1999). Although most voluntary organizations are homogeneous in terms of social status, religious congregations could offer the opportunity for Americans to interact across status lines. Just as interracial congregations promote more amicable relations between African-Americans and whites (Yancey 1999), social status diversity in congregations could contribute to better relations among people of different social strata. While low-status Americans are unlikely to participate in most voluntary organizations or to be politically active (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), there appears to be little social status difference in religious service attendance (Alston and McIntosh 1979; Hoge and Carroll 1978; Mueller and Johnson 1975). Of course, the fact that low-status Americans attend religious services does not mean that low-, middle-, and high-status Americans attend the same congregations.

In this article, I ask whether religious congregations are, like most voluntary organizations, predominantly homogeneous in terms of social status. I empirically explore the prevalence of income and education diversity in U.S. religious congregations and factors that are associated with more or less diversity. I estimate measures of diversity in congregations using survey responses from relatively large samples of attendees nested within a large random sample of congregations. This analysis supplies the first generalizable estimates of social status diversity in U.S. congregations. In contrast to racial diversity, the results demonstrate that most religious congregations are highly status diverse, providing opportunities for Americans to interact with people from different social strata.

#### *WHY CONGREGATIONS SHOULD BE STATUS DIVERSE*

The traditional view is that “eleven o’clock on Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in America” (Wagner 1979: 9; see King 1958 for the original reference). Sociologists have long viewed religious congregations as homogenous social contexts (e.g., Lenski 1953, 1963; Niebuhr 1929; Pope 1942; Bryan Wilson 1969). According to McGavran (1980: 223), people “like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers.” More recently, Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995: 333) concluded that “religious congregations tend to be relatively socially homogeneous. Those who worship together are likely to share not only their faith but also their race or ethnicity and social class.” Although the view that religious congregations exhibit high levels of status

homogeneity is widespread, this proposition remains largely untested (for exceptions, see Dougherty 2003; Reimer 2007).

Trends in denominational affiliation and neighborhood segregation suggest that congregations may be more status diverse than is generally assumed. Religious denominations in the United States have become increasingly status diverse over the last few decades (Roof and McKinney 1987; Wuthnow 1988, 1996). This does not mean that congregations within these denominations are necessarily status diverse; to assume so would be a form of the ecological fallacy (Robinson 1950), which assigns to individuals in a population the average characteristics of that population. Increasing denominational diversity, however, provides greater opportunities for status diversity in congregations.

Evidence from residential segregation research also suggests that congregations are likely to be status diverse. Neighborhoods tend to be highly segregated by race, which inhibits racial diversity in religious congregations (e.g., Emerson and Kim 2003; Hadaway, Hackett, and Miller 1984). Conversely, neighborhoods are only moderately segregated by social status (Cook, Shagle, and Degirmencioglu 1997; Farley 1977; Jargowsky 1996). Since most Americans live reasonably close to the religious institutions they attend (Chaves 2004), relatively low levels of residential status segregation should translate into relatively high levels of status diversity in religious congregations.

Other sociologists have proposed that religious congregations could be status diverse (e.g., Demerath 1965; Stark and Finke 2000). These authors note that case studies of specific congregations provide evidence of status diversity (e.g., Bultena 1949; Charles Lee Wilson 1945). In his recent comparison of congregational and denominational social class, Reimer (2007: 590) concludes, "Class matters at the congregational (and denominational) level, but class boundaries are porous and nonexclusive." More directly relevant to the current research, Dougherty (2003) uses key informant data to show that congregations are more status diverse than race diverse. Although this research is suggestive of social status diversity in religious congregations, it is based on key informant data in which a congregational leader estimates characteristics of congregants. As recent research demonstrates, samples of congregants provide more reliable portraits of congregations than do key informant estimates (Schwadel and Dougherty 2010). The current research improves on previous research by analyzing diversity in congregations using data from samples of congregants and by examining factors that are associated with social status diversity in congregations.

*FACTORS RELEVANT TO CONGREGATIONAL STATUS DIVERSITY*

In addition to establishing the mean level of social status diversity in congregations, I examine neighborhood, regional, and congregational characteristics that might influence congregational diversity. Previous research, using key informants' estimates of the racial distributions in their congregations, suggests that congregations affiliated with certain religious traditions are more racially diverse than other congregations are (e.g., Dougherty 2003; Dougherty and Huyser 2008; Emerson and Woo 2006; Hadaway, Hackett, and Miller 1984). This might also be true of social status diversity. Catholic parishes tend to be large, and their placement is regionally circumscribed, meaning that Catholics who want to attend a Catholic church have fewer options for where to attend than do most Protestants. The Catholic Church's distinctive mode of church planting should translate into relatively high levels of status diversity in Catholic parishes. In contrast to Catholic parishes, attributes of the Protestant community suggest that Protestant congregations are not very diverse (Emerson and Smith 2000). The lack of new members in most mainline Protestant denominations is producing an increasingly older, white mainline population (Roof and McKinney 1987), which could lead to low levels of status diversity in mainline congregations. Furthermore, the traditional association between lower social status and evangelical or conservative Protestantism (e.g., Demerath 1965; Niebuhr 1929) implies that there is relatively little status diversity in most evangelical congregations.

Other congregational factors that are relevant to diversity in congregations include size, age, and congregational growth. Research on racial integration in congregations, for example, suggests that size is an important indicator (e.g., Northwood 1958). More attendees could create greater possibilities of diversity because of the change in scale. The age of the congregation might also influence diversity. Newer congregations, forming in a cultural context that emphasizes diversity, might seek to appeal to a diverse group of attendees, while the hereditary nature of affiliation with older congregations might lead to a more homogenous group of attendees. Conversely, church-sect theories suggest that congregations often form in response to the needs of a specific social class (Niebuhr 1929; Stark and Finke 2000), which would make newer congregations less status diverse than older congregations. Diversity might also be negatively related to congregational growth. For instance, Wagner (1979) suggests that diversity is antithetical to congregational growth because people prefer to attend religious services with other people like themselves.

The remaining congregational factors that I explore measure the social status and racial composition of the congregations. Social status diversity in a congregation is clearly related to the social status makeup of the congregation. How social status diversity is related to the status distribution of the congregation, however,

remains a question. A larger than average proportion of attendees from the highest and lowest income and education categories could lead to greater status diversity, owing to the relatively small number of high- and low-status people. On the other hand, if low-status and high-status Americans are largely segregated into their own congregations, then greater proportions of low-status and high-status attendees will lead to less status diversity. Social status diversity might also be positively related to racial diversity (Dougherty 2003).

In addition to congregational factors, I explore three characteristics of the neighborhoods where the congregations are located that are likely to affect congregational diversity. First, social status in the United States varies considerably along the urban-rural continuum (Rodgers and Weiher 1988), and previous research suggests that urbanity positively affects racial diversity in congregations (e.g., Dougherty 2003; Dougherty and Huyser 2008; Emerson and Woo 2006), which may also be true for status diversity. The prevalence of minorities in the area is the second neighborhood factor. A high proportion of minorities in a neighborhood can lead to a racially homogenous congregation (Emerson and Woo 2006) and might also influence the social status distribution in the congregation. The third neighborhood characteristic is the geographic mobility of the residents. Geographic mobility varies by social status (Chesney, Wood, and Gombeski 1980). Thus greater geographic mobility in a neighborhood can influence status diversity in congregations.

The final potential correlate of diversity is region of the country. The western portions of the United States are generally the least racially segregated (Farley and Frey 1994), and white Americans living in the West are more likely to report attending church with African-Americans than are white Americans living in the South, East, or Midwest (Hadaway, Hackett, and Miller 1984). These regional differences in racial diversity might influence regional differences in social status diversity in congregations.

## *DATA AND METHODS*

### *Data*

I use data from the Random Attenders and Random Profile samples of the 2001 U.S. Congregational Life Survey (US CLS) to analyze social status diversity in religious congregations.<sup>1</sup> The attender responses are used primarily to construct measures of income, education, and racial diversity. The congregational profile

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<sup>1</sup> The US CLS was funded by the Lilly Endowment, Inc.; the Louisville Institute; and the Presbyterian Church (USA). The principal investigator is Cynthia Woolever. The data were provided, free of charge, by the Association of Religion Data Archives ([www.theARDA.com](http://www.theARDA.com)).

surveys are used to identify the religious tradition of the congregations and other potential congregational correlates of diversity. Respondents from the 2000 General Social Survey (a nationally representative, random sample of noninstitutionalized American adults) who reported attending a religious congregation at least once in the previous year were asked to name their primary place of worship. This sampling technique produced a nationally representative random sample of congregations. For the Random Attender survey, questionnaires were administered to all attendees over the age of 15 years in each of the participating congregations during the last weekend of April 2001. Thirty-six percent of the 1,214 congregations that were originally contacted returned survey responses from attendees. The resulting data consist of 122,404 survey responses from attendees of 436 religious congregations, though only 412 congregations have both valid congregational and attendee data. The sample size per congregation varies from 3 to 2,847 respondents. For the Random Profile survey, a key informant in each congregation completed a questionnaire about the congregation's services, programs, facilities, and so forth. Owing to sampling procedures, large congregations are overrepresented in the US CLS data. All analyses are weighted to adjust for both congregational size and congregational nonresponse. (For more information on the US CLS data and sampling, see Woolever and Bruce 2002, 2004.)

I use a limited sample from the US CLS data to ensure enough respondents per congregation to compute reliable diversity measures for each congregation. The reliability of the diversity measures is augmented by the large number of congregations, since diversity measures based on small samples are more precise when there are a large number of samples (i.e., congregations) (Smith and Grassle 1977).<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, multilevel analysis research suggests that each congregation should have at least thirty respondents without missing data on income, education, and race (Maas and Hox 2004). Therefore the US CLS data are limited to congregations with thirty or more respondents with valid responses on income, education, and race measures.<sup>3</sup> Fifty-six congregations and 1,338 respondents

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<sup>2</sup> As the number of groups increases, the number of respondents needed from each group for a reliable analysis decreases. For example, Cohen (1992) demonstrates that large ANOVA effects can be detected at the .05 level with twenty-one people in each group when there are two groups or only thirteen people in each group when there are seven groups.

<sup>3</sup> Fifteen percent of cases (18,572) are missing data on income, fewer than 6 percent of cases (6,803) are missing data on education, and fewer than 7 percent of cases (7,914) are missing data on race. Cases that are missing data are removed only from the calculation of the measure that is related to the missing data (e.g., income diversity and missing income data); cases that are missing data on income, education, or race may still be used in the calculation of the other measures.

were removed from the sample to ensure at least thirty respondents per congregation, resulting in a sample of 356 congregations.<sup>4</sup>

The deletion of congregations from the sample because of missing data or because there were too few respondents results in two relevant changes to the data. Most noticeably, the deleted cases are not evenly distributed across religious traditions. Almost 18 percent of evangelical Protestant congregations, 15 percent of “other religion” congregations, and more than 10 percent of mainline congregations are deleted from the sample, compared to just over 4 percent of Catholic parishes and no congregations associated with traditionally black Protestant denominations.<sup>5</sup> Smaller congregations are also more likely to be deleted from the sample, predominantly because of limiting the sample to congregations that had thirty or more respondents. For instance, the mean size of the deleted congregations is eighty congregants, while the mean size of the congregations included in the sample is 335 congregants.<sup>6</sup> These two patterns appear to be related, since evangelical Protestant and “other religion” congregations are, on average, smaller than mainline Protestant, black Protestant, and especially Catholic congregations.

#### *Measurement of Congregational and Neighborhood/Regional Factors*

Social status and race-related congregational measures come from the US CLS attendee survey. Attendees’ responses on the survey place them in income groups, education groups, and race groups as follows (percentage of total US CLS in parentheses): total household income less than \$10,000 (9 percent), \$10,000 to \$24,999 (17 percent), \$25,000 to \$49,999 (16 percent), \$50,000 to \$74,999 (21 percent), \$75,000 to \$99,999 (12 percent), and \$100,000 or more (15 percent); less than high school (13 percent), completed high school (33 percent), associate’s degree or trade certificate (17 percent), bachelor’s degree (23 percent), and master’s or other graduate degree (14 percent); and white (78 percent), Latino (13 percent), African-American (5 percent), and other race (7 percent).<sup>7</sup> The proportion of congregation attendees in each income, education, and race group is used to explore the relationship between status diversity and the presence of high-status, low-status, and minority attendees.

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<sup>4</sup> Fourteen of these congregations fail to have the minimum number of respondents, owing to missing data on income, education, or race. The other forty-two congregations do not have thirty respondents, regardless of missing data.

<sup>5</sup> These are unweighted percentages.

<sup>6</sup> This is based on the congregation size variable described below, in the section entitled “Measurement of Congregational and Neighborhood/Regional Factors.” Means are weighted to adjust for oversampling of large congregations.

<sup>7</sup> Percentages might not sum to 100, owing to rounding.



Other than the status and race-related measures, congregational measures are from the US CLS congregational profile surveys. Congregations are divided among five religious traditions on the basis of each congregation's denominational affiliation: evangelical Protestant, mainline Protestant, black Protestant, Catholic, and "other religion."<sup>8</sup> Congregation size is based on each key informant's estimate of the number of people who regularly participate in the congregation, regardless of official membership. The square root of congregation size is used in the analyses to adjust for the skewed distribution of the original variable. Similarly, the square root of the year the congregation was founded is the measure of congregation age. Congregational growth is measured with three dummy variables: a variable for congregations that grew more than 20 percent from 1996 to 2000, a variable for congregations that declined by more than 20 percent from 1996 to 2000, and a variable for congregations that remained relatively stable (either grew or declined by 20 percent or less or remained stable from 1996 to 2000).<sup>9</sup>

The neighborhood factors are measured with data from the 2000 U.S. Census ([www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)).<sup>10</sup> Neighborhood measures associated with each congregation are based on the census tracts within a three-mile radius of the congregation. I employ three neighborhood measures: proportion urban,<sup>11</sup> proportion recently moved (age five years or older and not living in the same house as in 1995), and proportion minority (groups other than non-Latino white).<sup>12</sup> The regional divisions reflect the U.S. Census Bureau's region coding of Northeast, South, Midwest, and West. (For more information on applying census data to the US CLS, see Woolever and Bruce 2008.)

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<sup>8</sup> When possible, denominations are coded into religious traditions according to the template created by Steensland and colleagues (2000). In cases in which Steensland and colleagues divide a denomination into two categories depending on whether the respondent was African-American or not, I divide the congregations on the basis of whether at least half of the congregation is African-American. For denominations that Steensland and colleagues did not address, I coded the denominations on the basis of descriptions in Gordon Melton's *Encyclopedia of American Religions* (2003).

<sup>9</sup> These are based on key informants' estimates of weekly attendance in 2000 (the last full year before the survey) and 1996 (the first year for which it was asked).

<sup>10</sup> Cynthia Woolever, US CLS principal investigator, provided access to the neighborhood and region measures for this project.

<sup>11</sup> Urban areas are large, dense areas (1,000 or more people per square mile) and adjacent dense areas (500 or more people per square mile) that have at least 2,500 people for urban clusters and 50,000 people for urbanized areas.

<sup>12</sup> Preliminary analyses explored possible curvilinear effects of proportion minority in the neighborhood. The results showed that the square of proportion minority does not meaningfully influence diversity and therefore is not included in the analyses.

*Measurement of Diversity*

Peter Blau (1977a: 10) defines status diversity as “the probability that two randomly chosen persons do not have the same status or do not belong to the same stratum.” The more even the spread of people among income, education, or race groups, the more diversity there is in a congregation. While there are many measures of diversity to choose from, the Theil entropy index provides a well-established measure of diversity (White 1986) and one that has been previously used to measure racial diversity in congregations (Dougherty 2003). The Theil entropy index “can be seen as measures of the ‘diversity’ of a population since [it is] equal to zero if and only if all individuals are members of a single group (‘no diversity’) and [it is] maximized if and only if individuals are evenly distributed among the  $M$  groups” (Reardon and Firebaugh 2002: 36–37). The Theil entropy index has a lower bound of 0 for no diversity, but the upper bound varies with the number of groups (i.e., the number of income, education, or race categories). The standardized Theil entropy index, with a lower bound of 0 and an upper bound of 1, is achieved by dividing the Theil entropy index by the natural log of the number of groups (Deutsch and Silber 1995). Entropy indices for each congregation are derived by using the categorical income, education, and race variables for all respondents from the congregation (see above for income, education, and race coding). While attendee surveys are used to construct the diversity measures, congregations are the unit of analysis. The formula for the standardized Theil entropy index is<sup>13</sup>

$$T = \sum_{m=1}^M \pi_m \ln \left( \frac{1}{\pi_m} \right) / \ln n$$

where  $\pi_m$  is the proportion in group  $m$ , such as the proportion in the congregation who have family incomes above \$100,000, the proportion who have less than a high school education, or the proportion who are Latino, and  $n$  is the number of groups.

*Analysis Technique*

The results section is divided into four parts. First, I report the means, ranges, and distributions of the standardized Theil entropy index for income, education, and race in religious congregations. This descriptive part of the results section establishes the level of income and education diversity in congregations and compares social status diversity with racial diversity in congregations. Second, I

<sup>13</sup> Following Reardon and Firebaugh (2002), I define  $0 * \ln(1/0) = \lim_{\pi \rightarrow 0} (\pi * \ln(1/\pi)) = 0$ .

report bivariate correlations between the entropy indices for income and education and a variety of congregational, neighborhood, and regional measures, identifying various factors associated with congregational status diversity. Third, I present results from Tobit models with the income and education entropy indices as dependent variables, demonstrating the relative importance of congregational and regional/neighborhood factors in predicting status diversity. Tobit models are designed specifically for analysis of limited dependent variables (Tobin 1958), such as entropy indices that have an upper limit of 1 (Dougherty and Huyser 2008). Finally, I present the mean level of income and education diversity in congregations that have different racial distributions. This differences-in-means analysis addresses the possibility that status diversity differs among predominantly white congregations, majority minority congregations, and mixed-race congregations.

## *RESULTS*

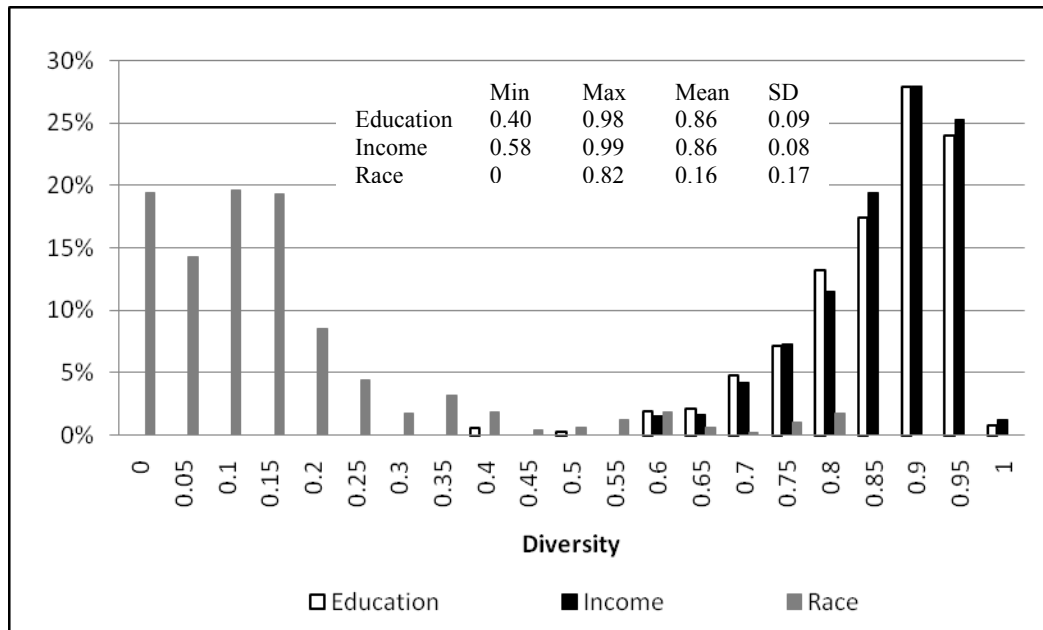
### *Means and Distributions of Congregational Social Status and Racial Diversity*

Figure 1 reports descriptive statistics and proportional distributions for the standardized Theil entropy index for income, education, and race. Of central importance is that the mean levels of both income diversity and education diversity are far higher than the mean level of racial diversity. The average congregation has an income and education entropy score of .86, indicating a high degree of income and education diversity in most congregations. The mean race entropy, on the other hand, is only .16. As previous research suggests, there is little racial diversity in most congregations. Contrary to what many social scientists assume, however, most religious congregations are highly status diverse. Additional analyses with a larger sample of congregations, those with at least twenty respondents rather than at least thirty respondents, yield similar results (not shown).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The mean income, education, and race entropy scores are almost identical when the sample is limited to congregations with twenty or more respondents instead of thirty or more respondents; at the hundredths place, only education entropy differs (by .01). The standard deviations for all three entropy indices, though, are noticeably larger when the data are limited to congregations with at least twenty respondents rather than those with at least thirty respondents. There is also a slightly larger proportion of congregations that have no racial diversity (i.e., zero race entropy) when the sample is limited to congregations with at least twenty respondents instead of those with at least thirty respondents (22 percent and 19 percent, respectively).

**Figure 1: Distribution of Congregational Diversity Measures  
(Percentage of Congregations by the Standardized Theil Entropy Index),  
2001 US CLS (N = 356)**



It is important to note that, given the unequal racial distribution in the United States, it is unlikely that many congregations could have race entropy scores that are equivalent to their income and education entropy scores. The mean entropy for income and education can come somewhat close to 1 because there is a fairly even distribution of income and education groups in the United States and apparently in most congregations too. Mean race entropy is unlikely to come close to 1 because there is not an even distribution of people in the different race groups in the United States. The entropy levels for the whole US CLS attendee survey, not divided by congregation, provide a point of comparison. Among all US CLS respondents, income entropy is .97, education entropy is .96, and race entropy is .58. The average congregation has an income and education entropy score that is about .1 lower than education and income entropy for the entire US CLS sample, suggesting a moderate amount of income and education segregation among congregations. In contrast, the average congregation has a race entropy score that is .42 lower than the race entropy score for the whole US CLS sample, which signifies a great deal of racial segregation among congregations. Even after the unequal distribution of races in the population is accounted for, congregations are far more status diverse than they are racially diverse.

In addition to the mean level of congregational diversity, it is instructive to look at the distribution of diversity among congregations. As Figure 1 demonstrates, despite the large proportion of congregations with little or no racial diversity, the distribution of racial diversity is far more diffuse than is the distribution of income and education diversity. The small standard deviations for the income (.08) and education (.09) entropy indices signify a modest amount of variation among congregations in status diversity, while the large standard deviation for race entropy (.17) indicates a high degree of variation in racial diversity. Although most congregations are not very racially diverse, the distribution of race entropy shows that some congregations are quite racially diverse. For instance, more than 5 percent of congregations have higher race entropy scores than the score for the entire US CLS sample (.58). Conversely, the limited distribution of income and education entropy indicates that most congregations are relatively status diverse. In sum, on average, congregations are far more status diverse than race diverse, but there is a higher degree of variation in racial diversity than in status diversity.

#### *Bivariate Correlates of Congregational Social Status Diversity*

Table 1 reports the bivariate correlations between the two status entropy indices and congregational, neighborhood, and regional characteristics. Many of the congregational characteristics are strongly correlated with the entropy indices. Not surprisingly, there is a strong positive correlation between income entropy and education entropy (.51). As was expected, evangelical Protestant affiliation is negatively correlated with both income and education entropy, while Catholic affiliation is positively correlated with both entropy indices. Congregation size is also positively correlated with both entropy indices. Year founded is strongly and negatively correlated with income entropy, indicating that newer congregations are less income diverse. Congregational growth is strongly and negatively correlated with income and education entropy, which lends support to Wagner's (1979) "homogeneous unit principle." A greater proportion of low-income to middle-income attendees (\$10,000 to \$49,999) is negatively correlated with both status entropy indices. Conversely, a greater proportion of attendees in the high income categories (\$50,000 or more) is positively correlated with income and education entropy. Similarly, the lower education categories (high school degree or less) are negatively correlated with status entropy, while the higher education categories (college graduate or more) are positively correlated with status entropy. The race measures are not meaningfully correlated with either status entropy index.

**Table 1: Bivariate Correlations of Congregational Status Diversity  
(Standardized Theil Entropy Index), 2001 US CLS**

	<b>Income Diversity</b>	<b>Education Diversity</b>	<b>N</b>
<i>Congregation</i>			
Income diversity	1	.51†	356
Education diversity	.51†	1	356
Evangelical Protestant	-.24†	-.17***	332
Mainline Protestant	.04	.05	332
Black Protestant	.02	-.06	332
Catholic	.14**	.18***	332
Other religion	.15**	.02	332
Congregation size (square root)	.25†	.14**	332
Year founded (square root)	-.20†	.04	332
Declining congregation size (> 20%)	.04	.03	291
Increasing congregation size (> 20%)	-.22†	-.25†	291
Stable congregation population	.18***	.22†	291
Proportion income less than \$10,000	.00	-.05	332
Proportion income \$10,000–\$24,999	-.42†	-.29†	332
Proportion income \$25,000–\$49,999	-.55†	-.26†	332
Proportion income \$50,000–\$74,999	.21†	.23†	332
Proportion income \$75,000–\$99,999	.65†	.32†	332
Proportion income \$100,000 or more	.32†	.14**	332
Proportion less than high school	-.29†	-.12*	332
Proportion high school graduate	-.29†	-.42†	332
Proportion AA/technical	-.11*	.26†	332
Proportion college graduate	.35†	.37†	332
Proportion graduate school	.31†	.12*	332
Proportion white	-.08	-.07	332
Proportion African-American	.08	.04	332
Proportion Latino	.03	.07	332
Proportion other race	.01	.07	332
<i>Neighborhood/Region</i>			
Proportion population urban	.16***	.24†	332
Proportion population recently moved	.14**	.07	332
Proportion minority population	.23†	.11*	332
Northeast	.07	-.07	332
Midwest	-.11*	.03	332
South	.11*	-.14**	332
West	-.07	.19***	332

\*  $p \leq .1$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .05$ ; \*\*\*  $p \leq .01$ ; †  $p \leq .001$  (two-tailed test).

The neighborhood and regional factors are also strongly correlated with the status entropy indices. Higher proportions of minority population and urban population are both positively correlated with income and education entropy. The proportion recently moved is positively correlated with income entropy. Income entropy is higher than average in Southern congregations and lower than average in Midwestern congregations, while education entropy is greatest in the West and lowest in the South. These bivariate correlations reveal meaningful variations in congregational income diversity and education diversity. The next section explores the relative influence of several of these indicators on social status diversity in congregations.

#### *Multivariate Analyses of Social Status Diversity*

Table 2 presents results from Tobit models of income and education entropy.<sup>15</sup> The proportion of attendees from the various income and education categories are not used as independent variables, since they comprise the components of the entropy indices. The congregational growth and decline measures are excluded from the regressions because of missing data associated with these measures. Variations in status diversity by congregational racial composition are explored in the next section.

The results in the first column of Table 2 show that congregational and neighborhood/regional factors meaningfully affect income diversity. As was hypothesized, evangelical Protestant congregations have lower levels of income entropy than Catholic parishes do. Year founded has a strong negative effect on income entropy, which means that newer congregations are less income diverse than older congregations are. The positive effect of proportion of the population urban is the only neighborhood/regional factor that is statistically significant in the income entropy model. As was expected, there is more income diversity in urban congregations than in rural congregations.

The second column in Table 2 presents the results of a Tobit regression of education entropy. As was hypothesized, evangelical Protestant congregations are less educationally diverse than are Catholic parishes. “Other” religion congregations are particularly homogeneous in terms of education. Similar to the income entropy model, the proportion urban has a positive effect on education entropy. Unlike the income entropy model, the proportion minority has a meaningful

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<sup>15</sup> Alternative models that control for the number of respondents per congregation show no meaningful differences. The number of respondents per congregation is not included in the models presented here, owing to its high collinearity with the measure of congregation size (correlation of .80).

negative effect on education entropy. Also in contrast to income entropy, location in the West has a positive effect on education entropy.

**Table 2: Tobit Models of Congregational Status Diversity  
(Standardized Theil Entropy Index), 2001 US CLS**

	<b>Income Diversity</b>	<b>Education Diversity</b>
<i>Congregation</i>		
Evangelical Protestant <sup>a</sup>	-.02* (.01)	-.03** (.01)
Mainline Protestant <sup>a</sup>	-.01 (.01)	-.01 (.01)
Black Protestant <sup>a</sup>	-.01 (.02)	.00 (.02)
Other religion <sup>a</sup>	-.02 (.02)	-.06*** (.02)
Congregation size (square root) (*100)	.02 (.03)	.02 (.03)
Year founded (square root)	-.02*** (.01)	-.00 (.01)
<i>Neighborhood/Region</i>		
Proportion population urban	.04** (.02)	.05** (.02)
Proportion population recently moved	.04 (.05)	-.05 (.05)
Proportion population minority	-.03 (.02)	-.04* (.02)
Northeast <sup>b</sup>	-.02 (.01)	-.02 (.01)
Midwest <sup>b</sup>	-.01 (.01)	-.00 (.01)
West <sup>b</sup>	-.01 (.01)	.02* (.01)
Constant	1.75	.94
Likelihood ratio chi-square	30.71***	29.53***

*Note:* Standard errors in parentheses.

*N* = 332.

<sup>a</sup> Catholic reference.

<sup>b</sup> South reference.

\*  $p \leq .1$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .05$ ; \*\*\*  $p \leq .01$  (two-tailed test).



*Social Status Diversity in Congregations with Different Racial Distributions*

This final analytic section explores how social status diversity in congregations varies with the racial composition of congregations. Table 3 shows the mean level of income and education entropy in predominantly white congregations (95 percent or more white), which make up more than half of the congregations in the US CLS, majority racial minority congregations (50 percent or more African-American and 50 percent or more Latino), and mixed-race congregations (all other congregations). Although there is no strict definition of what a white congregation, a minority congregation, or a mixed-race congregation consists of, I use these distinctions to demonstrate how congregational racial composition influences congregational status diversity. To test for differences in mean status diversity in comparison to predominantly white congregations, *t*-tests are used.

**Table 3: Mean Income and Education Diversity  
(Standardized Theil Entropy Index) in Racially Homogeneous  
and Heterogeneous Congregations, 2001 US CLS**

	Mean (Standard Deviation)	<i>t</i> -Test <sup>a</sup> (Degrees of Freedom)	<i>N</i>
<i>Income Diversity</i>			
95% or more white	.86 (.08)	—	217
50% or more African-American <sup>b</sup>	.88 (.05)	-2.15** (34.78)	21
50% or more Latino	.76 (.10)	2.57** (161)	15
Racially mixed congregations	.88 (.07)	-2.03** (242)	103
<i>Education Diversity</i>			
95% or more white	.84 (.09)	—	217
50% or more African-American	.87 (.11)	-1.55 (177)	21
50% or more Latino	.76 (.14)	1.78* (161)	15
Racially mixed congregations <sup>b</sup>	.89 (.08)	-4.69† (207.53)	103

<sup>a</sup> Difference in means compared to congregations that are 95 percent or more white.

<sup>b</sup> Levene's test for equality of variance reveals unequal variances ( $p \leq .05$ ); therefore a *t*-test for unequal variance is used.

\*  $p \leq .1$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .05$ ; †  $p \leq .001$  (two-tailed test).

The results in Table 3 reveal meaningful racial variations in congregational status diversity. Congregations with majority African-American attendees are moderately more status diverse than predominantly white congregations are, though this difference is statistically significant only for income diversity. On the other hand, majority Latino congregations are particularly homogenous. Congregations with at least 50 percent Latino attendees have considerably and significantly lower mean income and education entropy indices than do predominantly white congregations. Mixed-race congregations are consistently status diverse. The mixed-race congregations have significantly but only moderately higher income and education entropy indices than do the predominantly white congregations. Overall, the results in Table 3 reveal that majority Latino congregations are the least status diverse and mixed-race congregations are the most status diverse, but mostly white and majority African-American congregations are also highly status diverse.

#### *DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS*

“Birds of a feather flock together,” note McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook (2001) in their review of the homophily literature. As these authors discuss, voluntary organizations are predominantly status homogeneous. The above results, however, reveal that one form of voluntary organization—the religious congregation—is highly status diverse. Analyses of data from the 2001 U.S. Congregational Life Survey show that the mean levels of income and education diversity in congregations are quite high, while the mean level of racial diversity is fairly low. Although most Americans attend religious services with people who are predominantly of their own race, they attend religious services with people of varying social status. Religious congregations provide few opportunities for social interaction across racial lines but plenty of opportunities for social interaction across status boundaries.

The pervasiveness of social status diversity in religious congregations suggests possibilities and, in some cases, limitations. Religious congregations can benefit all attendees, since they offer a rare opportunity to create cross-status social networks. If attendees in heterogeneous congregations do not interact with attendees of different social status, however, they will not reap these benefits. In McPherson and colleagues’ (2001) terminology, this article demonstrates that congregations provide chances for Americans from different social strata to “flock together,” but it remains to be seen whether they form relationships across status boundaries or create social status cliques. While congregational status diversity provides opportunities for social interaction with people from other social strata, it might also limit opportunities for some low-status attendees. For instance, Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) propose that religious congregations are one of the

few social contexts in which lower-class citizens can learn and practice civic skills because congregations have—these authors believe—little social status diversity and therefore do not discriminate among congregants in opportunities to practice civic skills. In contrast, empirical research shows that opportunities for civic skill learning and practice in religious congregations are skewed toward higher-income congregants (e.g., Schwadel 2002). The assumption of status homogeneity, which the above analysis shows to be false, could have led Verba and his coauthors to overestimate low-status attendees' opportunities for civic skill education in religious congregations.

Several congregational factors meaningfully influence social status diversity in congregations. Evangelical congregations are less status diverse than is the average congregation, a finding that fits with traditional views of evangelicals as disproportionately lower-class (Demerath 1965; Niebuhr 1929). Catholic parishes appear to be more diverse than most congregations, but this effect is more robust in bivariate analyses than in multivariate regressions. High levels of status diversity in Catholic churches are expected because of the parish system. In addition to the effects of religious tradition, the age of the congregation strongly affects income diversity. Newer congregations have lower than average levels of income diversity. Perhaps newer congregations tend to form in response to needs from a specific segment of society, as church-sect theories suggest (e.g., Niebuhr 1929; Stark and Finke 2000). Size of the congregation has a positive effect on both income and education diversity in the bivariate analysis, but it is a weak predictor of diversity in the multivariate regressions. All else being equal, increases in scale do not necessarily lead to greater congregational diversity. Finally, congregations with relatively large increases in attendance in recent years have particularly low levels of diversity in bivariate analyses. It is possible, as Wagner (1979) suggests, that some people prefer to attend church with those of a similar social class.

Neighborhood and regional factors also influence social status diversity in congregations. Urban congregations are more status diverse than are rural congregations. It should be expected that urban congregations, with disproportionately diverse populations to draw from, should be more diverse than rural congregations. Education diversity, but not income diversity, varies by region and proportion of minority residents in the neighborhood. Congregations in the West have higher than average levels of education diversity. This could be due to regional variation in education diversity. The relatively low levels of education diversity in congregations in neighborhoods with high proportions of minority residents is likely a result of disproportionately low levels of education among minority Americans. In contrast to urban and Western congregations, which potentially have educationally diverse populations to draw from, congregations in

minority neighborhoods might have educationally homogeneous populations to draw from.

The findings in this article suggest several directions for future research. While there are opportunities for cross-status interaction in most congregations, further research is needed to assess whether attendees of different social status choose to take advantage of the opportunities they have to interact with one another or whether they form social status cliques in their congregations. Furthermore, when attendees do regularly interact across status lines, research is needed to examine what effects this has on their lives. Congregational research would also benefit from a greater understanding of the more malleable aspects of a congregation that affect status diversity. While changing regions of the country or religious traditions is unlikely, perhaps certain programs or other congregational offerings, which might be more easily changed, could increase diversity. Diversity in small congregations is another area that is in need of further inquiry. Methodological requirements necessitated that I omit congregations with few respondents from the above analysis. Consequently, small congregations are not adequately represented. Finally, future research needs to pay closer attention to the actual participants in congregations. Whereas most research on congregational diversity (predominantly racial diversity) is based on estimates of congregational compositions provided by key informants, the above analysis employs data from samples of congregation attendees. The collective assembly of the congregation might or might not match a key informant's perceptions, and these key informants' perceptions are the basis of much contemporary research on religious congregations.

The most important question, however, is why religious congregations, in contrast to other voluntary organizations, are so status diverse. And why are congregations racially homogeneous but status heterogeneous? As was discussed above, people of all social strata participate in religious activities, and denominations are becoming more status heterogeneous, which at minimum provides greater opportunities for congregations in these denominations to be status diverse. Rather than splitting over issues that run along class divisions, congregations in a single denomination might be more divided along theological and cultural lines. Recent arguments over environmental policy in the Southern Baptist Convention and over issues related to homosexuality in the Episcopal Church demonstrate the seriousness of these issues. It might be more important to contemporary congregants that they share the pews with people who agree with their views on abortion and homosexuality, for example, than with people of a similar social status.

Blau's (1977b) theory of social structure states that the possibility of social contact must precede any possibility for social interaction, and further, "some kind of interaction is necessary for integration" (Blau 1977a: 5). Homogeneity in

social institutions limits contact between people of different social status; as a result, they rarely interact, and consequently, there is relatively little social mobility and interstatus social exchange. If there is little social integration between people of different status, then all people lose out on valuable and informative contacts. Low-status Americans have the most to lose by remaining socially isolated. The prevalence of social status diversity in congregations that was found in this research suggests that congregation attendees have the possibility of contact with fellow attendees from other social strata on a frequent basis. In contrast to the high degree of homophily that is typical of most social institutions, religious congregations provide a setting where people of different social status may regularly interact with each other. Contrary to what some people say, Sunday morning is not very segregated in terms of social status.

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