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The Ecology of Religious Resources,
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Abstract

A great deal of interest has surrounded the topic of religious pluralism and the effects of the frequently used pluralism index on outcomes such as religious participation rates. But surprisingly little work has tried to understand the sources of pluralism or what the pluralism index is actually measuring. In an attempt to reframe the debate, we treat pluralism as an outcome variable. Drawing on ideas in the organizational ecology literature and data from previous studies on pluralism and participation, we show that the pluralism of religious suppliers is a product of the pluralism of religious preferences and the number of potential adherents within an environment. This pluralism of suppliers, in turn, produces a pluralism of religious consumers. We then distinguish between expected pluralism and observed pluralism, and we argue that a relationship between pluralism and participation will be expected only when a meaningful gap between these two measures exists. We close by examining the previous research to show how this reframing of the pluralism and participation question sheds light on that literature.

Few recent topics in the study of religion have generated more interest and controversy than the role of pluralism. Particularly controversial has been the proposition that religious pluralism generates higher levels of religious participation within a population. The secularization theory of religious change has long held that pluralism shatters the sacred canopy and undermines religion (Berger 1967). In contrast, the religious economy model proposed that pluralism fosters religious activity by increasing competition and choice (Finke, Guest, and Stark 1996; Finke and Stark 1988). This theoretical flashpoint has resulted in a heated and prolonged discussion on the outcomes of pluralism, yet few clear answers have emerged concerning the relationship between pluralism and participation.

Much of this discussion has been mired in debates over a single measure of religious pluralism, a Gini index of religious diversity, and its relationship with religious participation.¹ Initially, debates centered on conflicting results across time and space (Chaves and Gorski 2001; Stark and Finke 2000: 226–227). More recently, the charge has been that the relationship between religious pluralism and religious participation, whether negative or positive, is the result of a statistical artifact and fails to support either side of the debate (Voas, Olson, and Crockett 2002). At this point, many people seem disillusioned with the entire topic (Smith 2008). Despite this sense of frustration, we are convinced that several steps can be taken to clarify the confusion. One step, proposed by Voas, Olson, and Crockett (2002), is looking at alternative outcomes. They suggested that using measures of involvement that are independent of the participation measures used to construct the Gini index would reduce or eliminate the statistical problems of employing the religious pluralism index as a predictor.

We agree that alternative outcomes of religious pluralism should be explored, but our goal is to take a step back in the theoretical model and examine religious pluralism as outcomes. Through all of the debates, there has been surprisingly little exploration of the sources or dynamics of religious pluralism or what the measures that are used to assess pluralism really mean. With attention focused on variation in participation, understanding and explaining religious pluralism have been lost. Beyond being an important stand-alone question, this is central to understanding the relationship between pluralism and participation. We cannot hope to understand a theoretical relationship until we fully understand both the concepts involved and the indicators that are used to measure them. Our goal is to reframe the theoretical arguments and to provide some reconciliation of previous, often contradictory, research.

¹ The Gini index is a probability equation that is frequently used to measure diversity or inequality. When applied to membership in religious denominations, it measures the probability that any two residents are members of the same denomination. A related measure called the Herfindahl index is often applied as a measure of market concentration (Bailey and Boyle 1971).

REVISITING PLURALISM

Peter Berger, one of the most respected contributors of writings on secularization, was one of the first to point out that religious pluralism forces religions to compete.² He explained that the “pluralistic situation multiplies the number of plausibility structures competing with each other.” For Berger, this pluralistic competition resulted in a “crisis of faith” (Berger 1967: 151). The religious economy model agreed that pluralism resulted in competition but offered an opposing prediction. Rather than describing pluralism and competition as a “crisis,” Finke and Stark (1988: 42) viewed competition as a “stimulus for religious growth and not an avenue for its demise” (Finke and Stark 1988: 42).

The debates over the effects of religious pluralism have been extensive. The *American Sociological Review* alone has published seven articles directly testing the relationship between pluralism and participation, along with several additional articles addressing related issues, comments in response to articles, and responses to those comments. An *Annual Review of Sociology* article was devoted to evaluating past findings (Chaves and Gorski 2001), and multiple books and edited volumes have addressed the topic (Jelen 2002; Young 1997). Moreover, the debates have spilled over into political science (Gill 2001), economics (Iannaccone 1995; Zaleski and Zech 1995), religious studies (Tweed 1997), and history (Chesnut 2003). Despite all of this discussion of pluralism, attention has centered on one question: How does religious pluralism affect religious participation in society? Indeed, much of the discussion has been even narrower, focusing on the relationship between a single religious pluralism index and religious participation.

What is interesting about all of this literature is that it has taken the existence of pluralism as a secondary phenomenon. Finke and Stark (1988: 42) argued, in the opening salvo of this debate, that “to the degree a religious market is unregulated, pluralism will thrive.”³ The assumption is that as regulations are lifted and religions are free to compete, religious pluralism is a given. We agree that lifting regulations allows more religions to compete and pluralism to thrive, but this does not explain the variations across regions or local markets that exist under similar levels of regulation. Why is one area more pluralistic than another when they have similar levels of regulation? Moreover, how is this increase in pluralism related to the frequently used Gini index, and is this index a measure of religious competition, as past research has assumed?

We propose to address this question on religious pluralism and other issues related to the larger debate in three ways. First, we provide a theoretical

² Although Berger (1997) has since recanted his arguments on secularization, his writings continue to be some of the most influential in the area.

³ This proposition was based on earlier work by Stark and Bainbridge (1987).

foundation for explaining pluralism in both religious suppliers and religious consumers. We propose that in an unregulated environment, pluralism in religious suppliers, or the number of different religious groups in an environment, is a product of two forces: the underlying pluralism of religious preferences and the number of potential adherents within an environment. This pluralism of suppliers, in turn, produces a pluralism of religious consumers. In short, when facing few external constraints, religious pluralism at the supplier and consumer levels reflects the social and cultural diversity of the area.⁴ Second, using a data source that has been drawn on for the previous debates, we test our theoretical model. For these tests, we move pluralism to the other side of the equation and try to understand the sources of religious pluralism instead of using pluralism as a predictor. Once again, we distinguish between two forms of pluralism: the number of religious groups (supplier pluralism) and the distribution of individuals across the religious groups (consumer pluralism). Third, we propose a reframing of the pluralism and participation relationship, drawing attention to a distinction between observed and expected consumer pluralism. We then examine how our suggestions help to clarify previous research.

RESOURCE DISTRIBUTIONS AND ORGANIZATIONAL PLURALISM

Although it has not been directly applied to this debate, the theoretical basis for understanding variation in religious pluralism exists within the religious economies literature. Stark and Finke (2000: 197) propose that the variety of religious groups is directly related to a distribution of religious “niches.” The idea is simply that a religious supplier will not survive or be created in the first place if there are no individuals in the group’s particular niche. For example, the probability of a historically African-American denomination existing in an area with no African-Americans is low. The same idea can be applied to any population of organizations. High-end car dealerships typically do not thrive in low-income areas. Large numbers of liberal newspapers do not exist in conservative areas. In short, the more diverse the resources, the more diverse the population of suppliers that feed off those resources will be.⁵ The foundation for these findings can be found earlier in the work of Peter Blau. He argued that

⁴ When constraints do exist, pluralism at the supplier level will be lower, as some or all suppliers are prevented from fulfilling their potential market niche. In turn, pluralism at the consumer level will be lower, as consumers are concentrated in fewer suppliers, owing to decreased choice.

⁵ Organizational ecologists have found support for these propositions. In their study of Dutch newspapers, Boone, Carroll, and van Witteloostuijn (2002) found that the more homogenous an area is on dimensions of age, religion, political affiliation, and education, the more concentrated is the readership among large “generalist” newspapers. As the resources become more spread out among these demographic dimensions, so do the suppliers of newspapers.

people are organized in society around various “structural parameters,” such as age, race, gender, religion, income, and other social variables (Blau 1977: 30). These structural parameters provide roles and define relationships within society. People typically associate more frequently within their parameters than between parameters (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001). A key property of a structural parameter is how resources are distributed across values within the characteristic, or how heterogeneous the parameter is (Blau 1977: 31). The more values a parameter has (e.g., how many different races are present) and the more evenly people are distributed across those values, the more heterogeneous the social structure will be.

Organizational ecologists have built on these ideas to explain organizational pluralism.⁶ Consider each value on a structural parameter as representing a particular “taste” or preference for organizational products. Individuals with different incomes may prefer different types of magazines, different restaurants, and so forth. Individuals with different religious affiliations may prefer different styles of worship, beliefs, or social groups. As a result, suppliers of these goods and services tend to form around these different taste dimensions or niches (Hannan, Carroll, and Polos 2003). Organizational pluralism, therefore, is a product of resource diversity. “[O]ne can show that when growth in population is constrained only by resource availability, the number of distinct resources sets an upper bound on diversity in the system” (Hannan and Freeman 1977: 944).

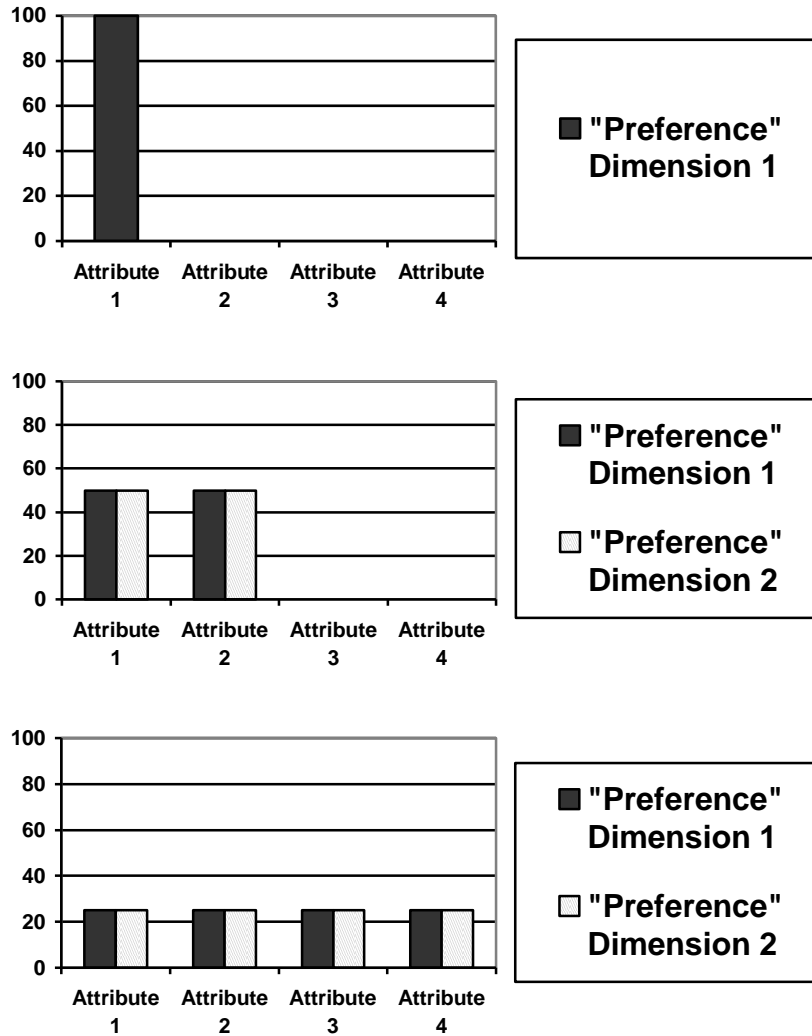
One may ask why the same organization or supplier cannot serve multiple tastes or values on a structural parameter. Indeed, there are “generalists” that appeal to a wide range of individuals across different taste dimensions, but it is inefficient for all suppliers in an environment to attempt covering all potential tastes. In a competitive environment, there is pressure for many suppliers to find a smaller resource space to utilize. Furthermore, in environments in which resources are fairly stable, there are competitive advantages to being more of a specialist (Hannan and Freeman 1977: 947–949). In religious congregations, in particular, conflicts often occur in attempting to integrate a diverse population (Christerson and Emerson 2003).

The more heterogeneous the social structure, then, the more opportunities there are for suppliers to specialize and find different niches. This can be illustrated by looking at Figure 1. Consider a population of organizations. Let us assume that there is only one relevant preference dimension on which these organizations can distinguish themselves. These “preference dimensions” are similar to Blau’s structural parameters. In this environment, resource niches are determined entirely by political affiliation. In other words, individuals of one

⁶ We draw most heavily on organizational ecology theory, but similar points could be made using theoretical work from economics. Montgomery, for example, has noted that even the Herfindahl index “depends mathematically on the ‘demand side’” (2003: 787).

political affiliation will patronize one type of organization, while other individuals with different affiliations will patronize different organizations.

Figure 1: Preference Dimensions and Resource Distributions



In the first graph of Figure 1, all resources fall within one value of the preference dimension, such as Republican if the relevant dimension is political affiliation. A few very similar organizations could exhaust the resources within this environment; even a single organization could do so if the absolute amount of resources is small. Now let us add a different dimension on which organizations can differentiate, such as gender. The second graph in Figure 1 adds this dimension and splits the distribution of the resources between two values or

attributes on each dimension. Half the individuals in this environment are Republican, and the other half are Democrats. Similarly, half are male, and half are female. This diversification of resources creates opportunities for different types of organizations to appear in this environment. Organizations that specialize in serving female Republicans or female Democrats can now appear alongside more generalist organizations that appeal to all Democrats or all Republicans. The third graph shows how opportunities for organizational pluralism increase as resources become even more diversified. As relevant preference dimensions increase (e.g., age, religion, race, income) and resources become distributed along these dimensions, the opportunities for pluralism increase (Peli and Nooteboom 1999: 1141).

The same is true for religion. As the range of preferences expands and the number of potential adherents with each preference increases, pluralism in religious suppliers rises as well. The religious environment in the United States, for example, has seen its pluralism increase as such preference dimensions have proliferated and the population has swelled. In 1776, the number of religious groups in the thirteen colonies was limited to approximately thirty to forty, and much of this diversity resided within the socially diverse and religiously tolerant Pennsylvania colony. By 1890, the Census Office found 143 different religious groups, multiple new groups arising because of racial and ethnic boundaries.⁷ With an increasingly diverse population following the turn of the 19th century, the Bureau of the Census tally rose to 213 different religious groups in 1926. Today, *Melton's Encyclopedia of American Religions* (Melton 2009) reports information on more than 2,300 different groups. Although religious freedoms help to explain the rich pluralism found in the United States, they do not explain the sharp increases over time or the variations across regional units.

The above discussion offers two propositions for explaining the pluralism of religious suppliers. First, *the more pluralistic the religious preferences are in an area, the higher is the pluralism in religious suppliers*. A diversity of preferences results in multiple market niches, each opening the door for a new group of suppliers. Second, *regardless of the pluralism in preferences, the size of the population (absolute resources) will be positively related to the pluralism of religious suppliers*. Whether we are talking about automobile companies or religious groups, few suppliers have a complete monopoly over their niche. When the resources within a niche increase, there are opportunities for multiple suppliers. Because the primary resource of any religious group is the membership, these propositions point to the importance of understanding the size and diversity of the population. How many people are available for membership? To what

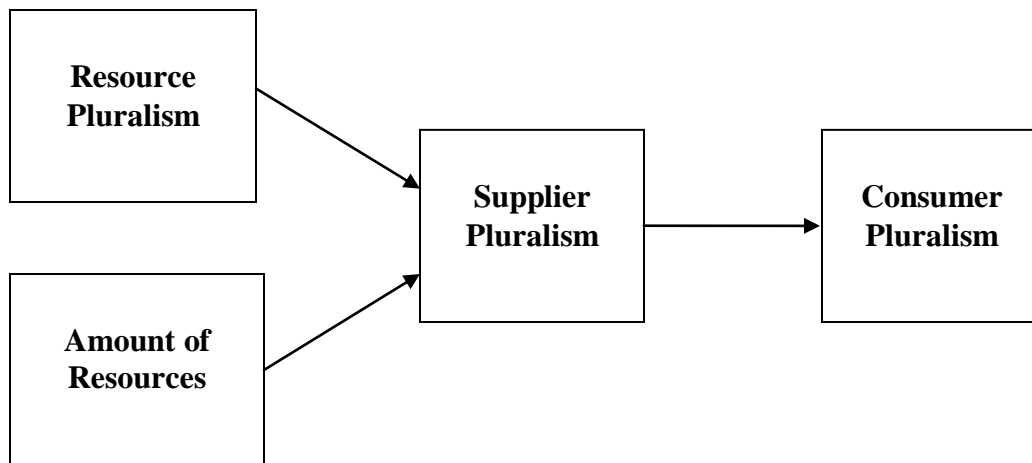
⁷ Warner (1993) noted how region, social class, and urbanism were the key niche parameters in the 19th century but country of origin and race were eventually included.

extent do the people have diverse religious preferences that represent different market niches?

This discussion also proposes that the pluralism of religious suppliers should be closely related to the pluralism of religious consumers. This latter pluralism is what has typically been referred to as religious pluralism in previous research and has been measured by a Gini index or a Herfindahl index of market concentration. Although attempting to measure religious competition, the index is in fact measuring the probability that any two congregants are members of the same religious group. In other words, it is measuring the pluralism of religious consumers.

Figure 2 illustrates the theoretical model. Both the resource pluralism (diversity of religious preferences) and the amount of resources available (population) explain the number of different religious suppliers present, and the number of suppliers has a direct effect on the pluralism of religious consumers. Notice, however, that we do not have a direct relationship between resource pluralism or amount of resources and consumer pluralism. This is because, as was noted earlier, different suppliers usually occupy the same resource niche. We expect the presence of different niches and the amount of resources to increase the number of suppliers in the geographic area. However, these variables do not necessarily have any *direct* relationship with the distribution of consumers among those suppliers.

Figure 2: Theoretical Model Explaining Supplier and Consumer Pluralism



Beyond their access to resources, religious groups also vary in their competitive advantages (e.g., time of entry into the market, historical or cultural ties to an area) and other factors. The result is that multiple religious groups in a

single niche can divide resources or membership in many different ways. They may each have an equal share, or one may dominate. All we can be sure of is that the creation of new niches and the addition of resources create opportunities for more suppliers, and the existence of more suppliers will increase consumer pluralism. The size and pluralism of the population increase the number of religious groups competing for members but do not determine their success or failure unless there is only one supplier occupying a particular niche. Quite simply, the availability of resources does not ensure success.

When translated into the terminology of religious economies, this model suggests that to the extent to which religious markets are unregulated, religious supply will eventually reflect demand. Pluralism in suppliers will vary according to the pluralism of market niches and the resources available in each niche. Thus, much of the variation in consumer pluralism across markets is explained by the resource distributions within the market.

EXAMINING THE MODEL

To examine the model, we need data that will allow us to measure, within a geographic area, (1) the absolute amount of resources, (2) how pluralistic those resources are, (3) the number of different religious suppliers, and (4) the distribution of consumers among those suppliers. It would also be helpful to look at a place and time that have previously been examined in the literature on religious pluralism. To fulfill these requirements, we use 1865 Census data for New York counties (Hough, 1867). The Census includes a wide range of social, political, and economic indicators, as well as measures for fifty-three religious denominations. These data have been used several times in previous research on pluralism.⁸

The primary resource for religious organizations is people, so to measure the amount of resources in the county, we simply use the total population. To measure the number of different religious organizations in the county, or supplier pluralism, we created a sum of indicators in which 1 indicates that a denomination had at least some seating capacity in the county and 0 indicates that they had no presence in the county. This measure ranges from 2 to 22, and the mean is 13.

For the consumer pluralism, or the distribution of people across suppliers, we begin with the standard Herfindahl index of market concentration. This is

⁸ Previous research has used data for the towns of New York rather than counties. We agree that this is a more desirable unit of analysis, but the data for diversity and number of resources are available only at the county level. Portions of the data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives (<http://theARDA.com>). Summary tables from the census are available on microfiche from the New York State Library, Empire State Plaza, Albany, NY 12230, or PDFs can be downloaded from their digital collection at <http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/index.html>.

computed by taking the percentage of total attenders in a county held by a denomination and squaring it. This is done for each denomination; then all of these values are summed. The maximum potential value is 1, which represents the situation in which one organization holds all of the county's attendees. To make this a measure of pluralism, we subtract the Herfindahl index from 1, so higher numbers represent a greater spread of resources across organizations, and lower numbers represent a lower spread of resources (i.e., more concentration). The mean in these data is .80, and the range is .47 to .88. We know that much controversy has surrounded this measure, but the controversy has been focused on its use as a predictor of religious participation. We will not be conducting such an analysis, so those issues are not relevant to the analysis.

More consideration must be given for a measure of resource pluralism in the county. What preference dimensions are relevant in determining resource niches for religious suppliers? Stark and Finke (2000: 197) focus on the theological dimensions of religious niches, proposing that there is roughly a normal distribution of resources ranging from very liberal to very strict. Measuring the theological preferences for an entire population would be difficult; however, we can measure the distributions of other characteristics on which religious suppliers frequently differentiate.

It has long been recognized that social class is one attribute that distinguishes a religious group's resource niche (Demerath 1965; Niebuhr 1929). Socioeconomic status has remained a consistent predictor of the type of religious group an individual joins or is raised in (Smith and Faris 2005), although it is clear that religious groups help to reproduce these inequalities as well (Darnell and Sherkat 1997). The theoretical explanations have varied, but they often argue that more strict or conservative religions appeal to the lower classes because they offer supernatural compensation for a lack of worldly success (e.g., Iannaccone 1988: S260–S261). Ultimately, the source and causal nature of the link between socioeconomic status and religion are not important for our purposes. It is important only that religious groups were differentiated on this dimension in 19th century New York.⁹

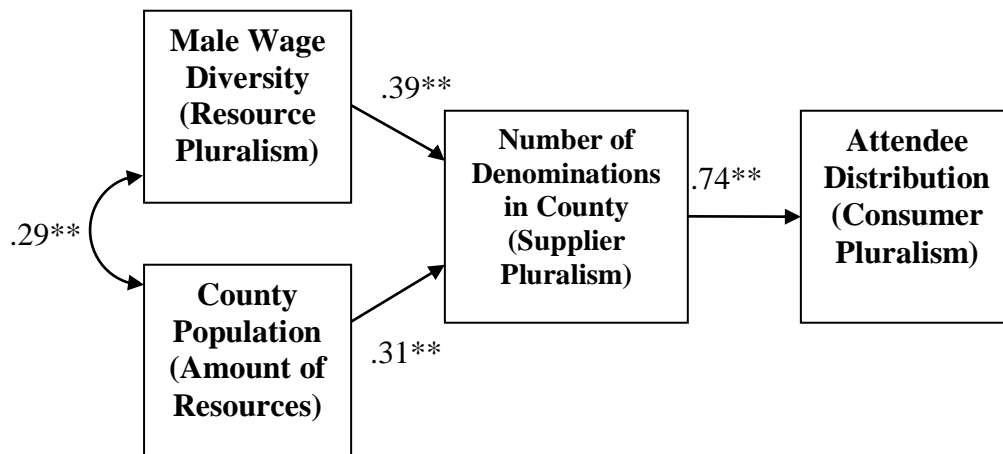
The 1865 Census contains information on monthly wages for employed males in the county. We computed a Herfindahl index based on the distribution of wages in nine categories (\$0 to \$20, \$21 to \$30, \$31 to \$40, \$41 to \$50, \$51 to \$60, \$61 to \$70, \$71 to \$80, \$81 to \$90, and \$91 to \$100). As with the distribution of religious resources, a value of 1 on this index means that the wages are concentrated entirely within one of these categories. Lower values mean that there

⁹ We focus on socioeconomic diversity, but other structural parameters could also be used, such as race and ethnicity, age, education, and family status. We limit our analysis to one parameter for parsimony. Future research might very well want to focus on the different social dimensions underlying pluralism and their differing effects.

is more diversity of wages in the county. To make this a measure of resource diversity instead of resource concentration, we subtracted the score from 1 so that higher numbers represent more resource diversity and lower numbers represent less resource diversity. The mean in these data for this measure is .64, and the range is .11 to .84.

We use AMOS 5.0 to create a structural equation model that mirrors the theoretical model presented above. The results with standardized coefficients are shown in Figure 3. The data fit the model extremely closely. The p -value for the close fit test is .211, meaning that we cannot reject the null hypothesis that the model fits the data well. Other model fit scores lead to similar conclusions (e.g., normed fit index = .960; comparative fit index = .984). The model, although simple, explains 32 percent of the variation in supplier pluralism and 54 percent of the variation in consumer pluralism.

Figure 3: Testing the Religious Pluralism and Diversity Model



** $p < .01$.

Most important, the measures are related to each other as expected. Resource pluralism, as measured by wage distributions, positively increases the number of religious suppliers in a county, as it creates opportunities for groups serving particular niches to enter the market. Similarly, the total size of the population increases the number of suppliers, as large amounts of resources provides more opportunities for the sharing of niches. In turn, an increase in the number of different religious suppliers in a county creates a wider spread of religious consumers among those suppliers. In the language of previous research, the number of religious groups increases a county's level of religious pluralism.

These results strongly support our argument that the number of religious groups is a product of diverse market niches and the resources available in these niches. As predicted, pluralism of resources and the amount of resources have strong direct effects on the number of suppliers but have no direct effects on consumer pluralism. Moreover, supplier pluralism and consumer pluralism are closely related, though not identical. To slightly rephrase the findings, the results suggest that equilibrium will develop over time. As the number of religious suppliers grows in areas of religious demand, the consumption of religion will eventually reflect demand.¹⁰

OBSERVED VERSUS EXPECTED PLURALISM

In the analysis and discussion above, we distinguished among three types of pluralism. We showed that the pluralism of religious consumers is a product of supplier pluralism, which is itself a product of pluralism in underlying religious preferences and the size of the population. But most past research has focused narrowly on the outcomes of consumer pluralism, with little attention to the source of this pluralism. The theory and analysis presented here have important implications for past discussions and future work employing pluralism as a predictor of other outcomes.

We need to begin by reassessing what pluralism is measuring and what it means for our theoretical models. For instance, two counties with the same level of pluralism may differ greatly in the pluralism that would be expected given their differences in population size and underlying pluralism in religious preferences. This can be thought of as the difference between “observed pluralism” and “expected pluralism.” A county with an observed level of religious pluralism that equals its potential pluralism is very different from one that has a large gap between the two. The former has suppliers serving most or every existing niche, while the latter has niches that are underserved.

This brings us back to the question that has caused so much debate in the literature: Does religious pluralism increase participation rates? The above discussion and analysis require that we rethink the reasoning behind this question. If observed levels of pluralism simply reflect underlying pluralism of resources (i.e., religious preferences of individuals), then there would be no reason to assume a relationship between religious pluralism and participation. Areas that

¹⁰ This is very similar to the prediction of Hawley (1968) and other population ecology theorists that the diversity of organizations is isomorphic to the diversity of the environment. The primary difference is that Hawley stresses the role of the environment in selecting organizations, and many economic arguments stress the role of organizations in adapting to the environment (see Hannan and Freeman, 1977).

are very pluralistic have an underlying pluralism of demand, and the observed level of pluralism simply reflects that demand.

However, if the observed pluralism is serving as a proxy for the extent to which the areas have reached their full potential for pluralism based on underlying religious demand, then there are reasons to expect a relationship between religious pluralism and participation. In other words, is pluralism serving as a measure of “demand fulfillment”? An example can illustrate this point. Consider three hypothetical cases (e.g., counties, cities, nations) that are of equal population size and have the same underlying level of pluralism in religious preferences. If all of these preferences are allowed to be fulfilled by the religious supply, then the three areas will have about the same level of participation, since all of the religious niches will be filled. There will be no relationship between pluralism and participation.

If, on the other hand, these three identical areas were to vary in how much the supply of religion had succeeded in fulfilling the underlying demand, then the area(s) where there was no gap between potential and observed pluralism would be expected to have higher levels of participation. The areas where supply did not meet demand would be expected to lag in participation because certain niches would be unfilled.

Table 1: Theoretical Relationship Between Resources, Supply, and Participation

Supply Matches Demand			
	<i>Area 1</i>	<i>Area 2</i>	<i>Area 3</i>
Pluralism of preferences	10	10	10
Pluralism of supply	10	10	10
Participation	10	10	10
Supply Doesn't Match Preferences			
	<i>Area 1</i>	<i>Area 2</i>	<i>Area 3</i>
Pluralism of preferences	10	10	10
Pluralism of supply	9	5	2
Participation	9	5	2

The question is: When will supply fail to meet demand? Organizational ecologists have argued that “environmental changes that add constraints or eliminate them” can affect the observed level of organizational pluralism in an area (Hannan and Freeman 1977: 944). Such constraints do not necessarily affect underlying demand; they simply affect the ability of supply to meet that demand. In the next section, we explore when these constraints will occur in religious

markets and how these constraints contribute to our understanding of the relationship between religious pluralism and participation.

CONSTRAINING DEMAND FULFILLMENT

The literature identifies two primary sources of constraint on religious supply, although some others may exist. First, government or other institutional restraints may prevent certain groups or all groups from moving into an area. This creates a gap between demand and supply, with the suppliers in the area failing to reflect the resources. Second, there may be a significant population upheaval due to immigration, migration, or general population growth. This could produce a diverse population that is not being equaled by the supply of religious groups in the area. Given time, the imbalance could fade as new groups respond to the demand, but achieving this balance requires both time and freedom from constraints. Whether the constraint is government or other institutional restrictions or demographic changes, the result is that supply will fail to match the available resources.

Numerous historical examples illustrate the dramatic rise in supply when government constraints are removed. The best-documented case is the rise of religious pluralism in the United States. (Finke 1990; Mead 1963), but even more dramatic increases can be seen elsewhere. In Japan, the period following World War II was called the “rush hour of the gods,” and new religions were described as arising “like mushrooms after a rainfall” (quoted in McFarland, 1967: 4). Repealing all laws controlling religion, disestablishing the Shinto religion, and granting unprecedented religious freedom resulted in an immediate surge in supply (Iannaccone, Finke, and Stark, 1997; Nakano, 1987). More recently, when Taiwan’s 1989 Law on Civic Organizations allowed all religions to exist and removed multiple prohibitions, there was a well over twelvefold increase in the number of different religious groups in Taiwan (from 83 in 1990 to 1,062 in 2004), and the total number of temples and churches more than doubled (Lu 2008). A similar surge in supply was evident in post-Soviet nations when controls were briefly removed from virtually all religions (Froese 2001; Greeley 1994). And although the dramatic growth of evangelicals in Latin America surprised many people, Anthony Gill (1998), Andrew Chesnut (2003), and many others have documented that the surge was a response to the lifting of government constraints. As we would expect, this surge in supply was accompanied by an increase in religious participation. The research cited above, as well as recent large *N* cross-national research, has demonstrated a relationship between removing government regulations of religion and higher levels of participation (Fox and Tabory, 2008).

This returns us to our earlier point. The central theoretical concept affecting outcomes such as participation rates might be not absolute or realized pluralism but the gap between absolute or realized pluralism and the unit's expected or potential pluralism. With this in mind, it makes sense that studies using direct measures of regulation instead of using pluralism as a proxy for regulation would find more of a relationship between pluralism and participation. Regulation produces wide gaps between the distribution of resources and the distribution of suppliers, preventing underlying demand from being met. Studies that measure pluralism within an unregulated society are often measuring variation in resource pluralism across cities, counties, states, or some other internal unit, not the gap between resources and religious organizations.

Even when suppliers face no constraints from the government, there are other mechanisms that can produce a gap. As was mentioned earlier, significant population upheavals can produce resource diversity that is yet to be matched by the organizations existing in the area. Returning to 19th century New York offers such an example. Following rapid expansion in the western and northern frontiers, heavy immigration in eastern cities, and the Civil War, which affected all areas, religious supply often failed to meet the diversity of demand. Excluding towns with no church attendance reported, Table 2 shows that 86 of 900 New York towns reported only one religion, and another 233 towns reported minimal religious diversity. As expected, the lowest levels of church attendance were reported in towns with no diversity (the town has only one denomination), and the largest difference in attendance is between towns with no diversity and towns with some diversity. The percentage of people attending weekly more than doubles in moving between those two scenarios, illustrating the consequences of having at least some diversity in religious supply.

**Table 2: Church Attendance Rates in 900 New York Towns in 1865
for Various Categories of Religious Pluralism**

Religious Pluralism Index	Church Attendance Rates	Number of Towns
0	.106	86
.001–.549	.229	233
.550–.699	.299	293
.700–.799	.336	231
.800 and over	.339	57
Totals	.274	900

Source: Adapted from Stark and Finke (2000: 226).

CONCLUSION

The confusion and frustration surrounding the pluralism literature could lead many people to hope that the issue will simply be dropped from the research agenda. However, we believe that religious pluralism is an important concept that deserves attention, and the intensity of the debates surrounding it seems to reflect a shared understanding of this importance. Indeed, religious pluralism has been called one of the two greatest challenges for religion research, the other being religious extremism and violence (Eck 2007). Our goal here was to take a step back so that we can all take two steps forward.

Our step back was to understand how and why religious pluralism arises at both the supplier level and the consumer level. In part, the goal was to better understand what religious pluralism is measuring, especially the frequently used diversity index. Borrowing from the work of organizational ecologists, we predicted that the amount and the pluralism of resources will contribute to increased supplier pluralism. We found that the total population (amount of resources) and income diversity (resource pluralism) were strong predictors of the number of religious organizations (supplier pluralism) and that the number of organizations was a strong predictor of consumer distributions across those suppliers (consumer pluralism), explaining 54 percent of the total variance. This simple model reveals that religious pluralism is often a reflection of demand rather than a measure of competition. As diverse demands arise, an equally diverse supply of religious suppliers will appear. We referred to this match between supply and demand as *demand fulfillment*.

We went on to argue that demand fulfillment faces constraints. Building on previous work, we identified two of the mechanisms leading to a gap between observed and expected religious pluralism. First, government restrictions often place constraints on the supply of religion by reducing religions' ability to form new organizations or even exist. By reducing the supply, these restrictions limit demand fulfillment and result in wide gaps between observed and expected religious pluralism. A second mechanism that reduces demand fulfillment is population upheaval.

Applying these findings to previous research presents some challenges because of the methodological questions surrounding those analyses. While we do not believe that all past research has been meaningless, we are also aware that we cannot be sure of what findings should be taken as "real" or as a statistical artifact. There is one important exception to this problem, though. Montgomery's (2003) recent work avoided the statistical pitfalls outlined by Voas, Olson, and Crockett (2002) by using an alternative measure of competition to the Herfindahl index. Interestingly, Montgomery found conflicting results using the 19th century New York data and the 1990 data for U.S. counties. In the former, Montgomery

found a positive relationship between pluralism or competition and participation. In the latter, however, he did not find support for such a relationship. He concluded that the difference might be explained by demand-side variations that past models were not addressing. Our results suggest that the differences between the 19th century data and the 20th century data should be expected. We agree with Montgomery that variation in demand does occur and should be acknowledged, but rather than stressing the homogeneity or heterogeneity of demand, we focus on the gap between the pluralism of demand and the pluralism of supply. When demand fulfillment is relatively high across all cases, such as counties or states in the contemporary United States, the variation in religious pluralism is an indicator of social pluralism rather than demand fulfillment or religious competition.¹¹ In contrast, because supply was failing to meet demand in New York counties in the 19th century, the pluralism index served as a crude proxy for the extent to which counties were reaching their full potential for pluralism.

Our model of religious pluralism not only helps to reconcile findings from previous studies, but also helps to bring a conceptual clarity and balance to the larger discussions on religious pluralism. Pluralism is more than a product of unbridled competition or of inevitable secularization trends; it is a balance between supply and demand and a product of the social diversity within the market. When constraints are removed from religious markets for an adequate length of time, pluralism becomes a reflection of the demands within the market.

Finally, although most of our attention has been focused on the limitations of religious pluralism as a measure of demand fulfillment, we have noted that the measure has another inherent weakness when used to measure competition. For the measure of pluralism to increase, resources must be spread evenly across a large number of groups. We have stressed that this is often not the case because market niches vary in size and number across cases. That is, a lack of social diversity can result in a small number of large niches or a single large niche with many small niches. But competition can ensue long before resources are evenly distributed within niches, and an even distribution of resources offers no assurance of competition. A large literature in economics has established that competition can result even when one group holds a sizable segment of the resources. Once the constraints of regulation are removed and all have access to resources, competition results.

These findings suggest that there is much more coherence in previous research than is suggested at first glance. There might still be methodological issues that need to be worked out, such as the proper units of analysis and the choice of

¹¹ Likewise, when there is a gap between potential and realized pluralism but the gap is the same across cases, there would not be a reason for a relationship between pluralism and participation.

measures, but none of those debates will be productive unless the pluralism research is guided by some theoretical road map. We have tried to provide such a map.

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