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Civic Engagement of Worshipers and Congregations: Predictors of Church Growth?

***Deborah Bruce & Cynthia Woolever
U.S. Congregational Life Survey
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)***

Faith requires action

- Do unto others as you would have them do unto you (Luke 6:31)
- Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)



Previous research

- Strong connection between religion and civic involvement
- Congregations enhance civic engagement:
 - ✓ Enhanced social capital
 - ✓ Motivation to activism through moral message
 - ✓ Awareness of opportunities to volunteer
 - ✓ Modeling/group norms



Previous research

- Greater involvement in the congregation is linked to increased civic engagement
(Smidt, 1999; Ammerman, 2005; Beyerlein & Hipp, 2006)
- More frequent private prayer is linked to increased civic engagement, but not increased political involvement
(Loveland et al, 2005)
- Conservative Protestants are less involved in secular organizations
(Wuthnow, 1999; Beyerlein & Hipp, 2006)



Previous research

- Individual characteristics have an influence on civic engagement. Those involved:
 - ✓ Are more educated
 - ✓ Have higher incomes
 - ✓ Are male
 - ✓ Are older
 - ✓ Are white

(Loveland et al, 2005; Woolever, 2005; Uslaner, 2002)



New research questions

- Are community demographic characteristics, which indicate need in the local community, related to civic engagement?
- Does civic engagement lead to numerical growth?



Data sources

- U.S. Congregational Life Survey (2001):
 - ✓ Random sample of congregations:
 - Wide variety of denominations and faiths
 - Large and small congregations
 - All regions and states included
 - ✓ All worshipers in participating congregations take part
 - ✓ Data aggregated to the congregational level
 - ✓ Mainline and conservative Protestants



Data sources

- U.S. Census (2000):
 - ✓ Demographic data for people living within a 3-mile radius around each congregation



Measuring civic engagement

Percentage of Worshipers:	
Involved in social service groups in congregation	26%
Involved in social service groups outside congregation	28%
Contributed to charitable group in last year	66%
Value congregation's community care	11%
Value congregation's openness to diversity	8%
Worked on community problem	21%
Voted in 2000 presidential election	71%

coefficient alpha = .81



Measuring numerical growth

- Percentage change in average worship attendance over 5 year period:
$$\frac{(2000 \text{ attendance} - 1996 \text{ attendance})}{1996 \text{ attendance}}$$
- Log of growth (due to skewness)



Study variables

- Worshiper Demographics
- Worshipers' Religious Involvement
- Community Characteristics/Need
- Congregational Factors

Consistent mean differences between mainline and conservative Protestant churches.

See Table 2.



Correlations

- With Focusing on the Community
- With Numerical Growth

Relationships vary between mainline and conservative Protestant churches.

See Table 3.



Predicting community focus

- Mainline Protestants: $R^2=.74$
 - ✓ More white; college-educated worshipers
 - ✓ Fewer high income worshipers
 - ✓ Less involvement in congregation; less frequent private devotions
 - ✓ More holding leadership positions
 - ✓ More 65+ and more kids in community
 - ✓ More foreign-born in community



Predicting community focus

- Conservative Protestants: $R^2=.58$
 - ✓ More women; more white; college-educated; high income worshipers
 - ✓ Fewer 65+ in congregation; fewer with kids
 - ✓ Frequent private devotions; attend weekly
 - ✓ Less small group participation
 - ✓ More old; less low SES in community
 - ✓ Lower community income levels
 - ✓ Larger congregations



Predicting community focus

- Factors important to both groups:
 - ✓ More white
 - ✓ More college-educated worshipers
 - ✓ Less participation in small groups
 - ✓ More holding leadership positions
 - ✓ More 65+ in community
 - ✓ More foreign-born in community



Predicting numerical growth

- Mainline Protestants: $R^2=.17$
 - ✓ More white worshipers
 - ✓ More 65+ and under 18 in community
 - ✓ More congregational involvement in service/charitable activities



Predicting numerical growth

- Conservative Protestants: $R^2=.44$
 - ✓ Fewer women worshipers
 - ✓ Lower income levels in congregation
 - ✓ Fewer involved in congregational leadership
 - ✓ Fewer older people in community
 - ✓ Larger congregations



Predicting numerical growth

- Factors important to both groups:
 - ✓ None!



Conclusions

- Greater involvement in the congregation is linked to increased civic engagement
 - ✓ Not for mainline Protestants (small groups, weekly worship attendance negative predictors)
 - ✓ Mixed for conservative Protestants (weekly worship attendance—yes; small groups—no)



Conclusions

- More frequent private prayer is linked to increased civic engagement
 - ✓ Not for mainline Protestants (frequent private devotions is a negative predictor)
 - ✓ Yes for conservative Protestants (frequent private devotions is a positive predictor)



Conclusions

- Conservative Protestants are less involved in secular organizations
 - ✓ Focus on the Community scores are lower in conservative Protestant congregations
 - ✓ Conservative Protestant congregations offer fewer service/charitable activities



Conclusions

- Individual characteristics influence civic engagement
 - ✓ Education: Yes, both MP and CP
 - ✓ Income: MP—no; CP—yes
 - ✓ Gender: MP—no; CP—more women
 - ✓ Age: MP—no; CP—yes
 - ✓ Race-ethnicity: Yes, both MP and CP



Conclusions

- Are community demographic characteristics indicating need in the local community related to civic engagement?
 - ✓ Mixed



Conclusions

- Does civic engagement lead to numerical growth?
 - ✓ No, worshipers' engagement does not
 - ✓ For MP, congregation's engagement does



Conclusions

- Mainline and conservative Protestant congregations are very different!

