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# Religion, Politics, and Polity Replication: Religious Differences in Preferences for Institutional Design<sup>†</sup>

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## Abstract

This article presents a theory of polity replication in which religious congregants prefer institutions in other realms of society, including the state, to be structured like their church. Polities, or systems of church governance and administration, generally take one of three forms: episcopal (hierarchical/centralized), presbyterian (collegial/regional), or congregational (autonomous/decentralized). When asked to cast a vote to shape institutions in a centralizing or decentralizing manner, voters are influenced by organizational values shaped by their respective religious traditions' polity structures. Past social scientific scholarship has neglected to explicitly connect religious affiliation, defined by polity, with members' stances on institutional design. However, previous examples of polity replication in action include the founding of the United States, the perpetuation of authoritarian regimes in Latin America, and the consolidation of the European Union. In this article, I provide original data on Roman Catholic and Southern Baptist support for city-county consolidation, an example of institutional design in metropolitan governance, in Louisville, Kentucky. Logistic regression results show that, other factors being equal, episcopal Catholics were 37 percent more likely to support consolidation in the 2000 referendum than were congregational Southern Baptists. Linear regression results show that Catholics were also more approving of the Louisville Metro government three years after its creation. In addition, Catholics who attend services more frequently were more supportive of consolidation and the consolidated regime. Perhaps owing to their polity structure, the effect of attendance for Baptists was unclear.

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Most scholarship on churches' effects on political behavior begins and ends with formal church policy positions or more informal ministerial directives issued from the pulpit or through interaction with parishioners. Using institutional theory as a basis, I propose an additional outlet for religious influence derived from divergent religious organizational forms. I call this *polity replication*. Church *polity* is the term that theologians and sociologists of religion use to describe churches' formally defined systems of governance and administration. Polities generally take episcopal (hierarchical/centralized), presbyterian (collegial/regional), or congregational (autonomous/decentralized) forms. No past or present social scientific scholarship has explicitly argued that there is a connection between religious affiliation—defined by denominations' distinctive forms of polity—and members' preferences for institutional design (e.g., the structure of the state). However, it can be argued that when asked to cast a vote to shape institutions in a centralizing or decentralizing manner, voters are influenced not only by economic self-interest but also by organizational values shaped by their respective religious traditions.

In this article, I theorize that congregants come to prefer institutions in other realms of society to be structured similarly to their church polity. The founding of the United States of America on Congregationalist principles, Catholic support for authoritarian regimes in Latin America, urban political machines in the United States, and the European Union consolidation can all be seen as examples of polity replication in action (Cairns 1981; Gill 2004; Merton 1972; Nelsen, Guth, and Fraser 2001). After discussing the details of past work and my theory, I present an analysis of original data on support for city-county consolidation in a referendum in Louisville, Kentucky, in 2000. Regression results show that when all else is held equal, episcopal Catholics were 37 percent more likely to support consolidation than were congregational Southern Baptists, and Catholics were more supportive of the postconsolidation regime. In addition, Catholics who attend services more frequently were more supportive of consolidation and the regime. On the other hand, perhaps owing to their polity structure, the effect of attendance for Baptists was unclear. Finally, I discuss implications of this theory and the findings for academic study, politics and policy, and religious life.

### *EXPLORING INSTITUTIONS*

In the mid-twentieth century, political science—and much of social science in general—left behind the study of institutions in favor of the study of individual actors, encouraged by the dominant approaches of behavioralism and rational choice (Peters 1999). Beginning in the 1980s, a “counterreformation” under the banner of new institutionalism returned to examining the importance of formal and informal institutions in constraining individual action (Goodin 1996).

Scholars are divided over the definition of the term *institution*. Elinor Ostrom (1999: 37) writes that some casually refer to institutions simply as organizational entities, while others, including herself, define them as “rules, norms, and strategies adopted by individuals operating within or across organizations.” In simple terms, institutions are ideas about how something should be done, structured, or otherwise constituted. Ostrom’s view is representative of the most widely accepted definition in institutional theory. Institutional design, then, is “the process of crafting a configuration of rules . . . aimed at reducing the severity of the trade-offs among multiple values by shaping incentives in ways that encourage desirable behaviors” (Oakerson 2004: 20). Meyer, Boli, and Thomas (1987: 36–37) define the process of institutionalization as the “processes that make such sets of rules seem natural and taken for granted while eliminating alternative interpretations and regulations. In the Western tradition, rules become institutionalized as they are linked more closely to moral authority and lawful order in nature.”

McMullen (1994) links neoinstitutionalism to Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) influential ideas about the social construction of reality, meaning that individuals and organizations interact to form socially approved representations of each other’s actions that, through habituation, become institutionalized and thus understood as objective reality. New institutionalists emphasize how individuals “learn . . . taken-for-granted scripts, habits, routines, rules, and conventional menus and categories of action.” In other words, “The views, interests, and beliefs of individuals themselves are constituted by institutions” (McMullen 1994: 710–711).

While institutions do extend beyond organizational entities, organizations and their structures, as Elinor Ostrom (1999) suggests, are typically important components of institutional arrangements. Organizations, simply defined, are “social unit[s] with some particular purposes” (Shafritz and Ott 1996: 1). In considering the differences between organizations and institutions, Powelson (2003) writes, “An organization is an administrative and functional structure, clearly bounded, while an institution is a significant practice within a culture, such as the institution of marriage.” In this sense, American religion and metropolitan governance are both institutions; individual denominations and congregations are organizations with administrative and functional structures. Metropolitan governments are organizations that reflect preferences for how an institution should be structured. Institutional environments shape organizational structures and culture. According to Rainey (2003: 18), organizational structures “are the relatively stable, observable assignments and divisions of responsibility within [an] organization, achieved through such means as hierarchies of authority, rules and regulations, and specialization of individuals, groups, and subunits.”

Elinor Ostrom (1999: 46) states that in the absence of empirical research based on an appropriate framework, “recommendations of [institutional] reform may be based on naïve ideas about which kinds of institutions are ‘good’ or ‘bad’

and not on an analysis of performance.” This may affect nonexperts’ choices or preferences for institutional design. Ostrom challenges the *Homo economicus* view of human activity that is dominant in neoclassical economics and substitutes an understanding of bounded rationality. In this view, information gathering is costly, processing capabilities are limited, and decisions are therefore made on the basis of “incomplete knowledge of all possible alternatives and their likely outcomes.” People can make mistakes (see Vincent Ostrom 1986); for example, they can vote in favor of governmental consolidation and later perhaps recognize that such a vote was not in their individual interests.

### *INSTITUTIONAL DESIGN IN THE CHURCH*

One novel connection between government and religion is this study of institutional design. No work has directly linked internal denominational structures to preferences for similar structures in society, such as monocentric or polycentric urban governance. All Christian denominations accept some form of religious authority. Offices of authority can take the forms of pope, archbishop, bishop, priest, minister, pastor, deacon, or elder. These offices are situated at various levels and roughly correspond with equivalent ranks of secular political authority at the international, national, regional, and local levels. While most religious bodies have varying levels of authority, one often predominates. It is usually clear to members and even to outside observers which level is most emphasized in church governance (Davidson, Schlangen, and D’Antonio 1969; McMullen 1994). Determining which level of authority *should* predominate is still a highly controversial issue in twenty-first century churches. This is made obvious by the growth of independent, nondenominational, and interdenominational churches in the United States and around the world, which essentially opt out of denominational hierarchy in favor of local, congregational control (Smidt et al. 1996).

Scholars of religious governance refer to denominations’ forms of polity (Davidson, Schlangen, and D’Antonio 1969; Harrison 1959; McMullen 1994; Moberg 1962; Takayama 1974). Citing Harrison, Takayama (1974: 10–11) defines polity as “formally (or theologically) defined aspects of church government and administration, including the relation between individual and groups within a denomination.” McMullen understands religious polity as a form of institutionalized myth and ritual. He writes, “Polities are the rules of ecclesiastical authority and dictate the rituals by which church government operates” (McMullen 1994: 712).

Takayama describes three main types of church polity: episcopal, presbyterian, and congregational. In the episcopal type, “formal hierarchy is most explicit . . . the church itself being sometimes finally defined by and restricted to the clerical bureaucracy.” He lists the Roman Catholic Church as being “strictly

hierarchical,” while other examples such as the Protestant Episcopal Church and the United Methodist Church are somewhat more “balance[ed].” On the other end of the spectrum, “Congregationalism places the maximum power in the local group both with respect to the choice of the minister and the control of organizational affairs” (Takayama 1974: 11). Prime examples are the variety of Baptist groups. Takayama (1974: 29) writes:

Baptists believe that local congregations bear the marks of the true Church and theologically they do not accept any higher human authority and organization. They believe that their national conventions are merely functional associations of local churches formed for their mutual support and a channel for their cooperative efforts, but have no binding authority over local churches.

While Takayama notes that Protestant denominations in the contemporary United States have tended to resemble one another, many taking the congregational form, the Roman Catholic Church is distinct as the only major body to retain a truly hierarchical/centralized polity. Thus a comparison of governance structures (polity) in the Catholic Church and, for example, a prominent Baptist tradition such as the Southern Baptist Convention should be striking—theoretically, theologically, and in practice.

Cairns (1981: 79) argues that the church is simultaneously an “eternal, invisible, biblical *organism*” and a “temporal, historical, visible, human, institutional *organization* [emphasis in original].” He identifies these as the respective end and means of the church. In essence, the end shapes the means chosen by a particular church. Sommerfeld (1968) attributes denominations’ social structures to their theology of the Divine Person or Godhead, which he labels “the Ultimate.” While not exactly corresponding with the three historical polities, Sommerfeld’s typology does exhibit striking similarities, confirming Cairns’s idea that the end (the Ultimate) shapes the means (polity). Sommerfeld defines three conceptions of the Ultimate: familial, democratic, and dominical. The familial type emphasizes the body corporate, that is, the church and its hierarchy (e.g., Catholics); the democratic type emphasizes the individual and individual congregations (e.g., Baptists).

In many ways, the whole of the Reformation and later Protestant schisms were due primarily to disputes over church governance systems (Barnett 1999; Cairns 1981; Sullins 2004). Protestant reformers such as the Puritans opposed the “un-Christian episcopal hierarchy” of Catholicism and “considered their presbyterianism outlook [on polity] the same as that of the church polity practiced by the apostles” (Barnett 1999: 17–18). Despite Vatican II’s liberal reforms and the demands by lower-level clergy and laity for greater roles in church decisions, the Catholic Church remains committed to its episcopal form of polity and has

offered only minimal concessions to Catholic “congregationalists” (D’Antonio et al. 1989; Kohmescher 1980; White 1972).

I do not emphasize the presbyterian-type denominations for several reasons: (1) There exists a varying degree of reliance on regional institutions in these churches, which prevents broad generalizations; (2) Takayama (1974) suggests that a move to congregational polity is at work in many presbyterian denominations, thus making regional institutions largely into “fifth wheels”; and (3) past studies comparing church polities have also sought to compare examples representing the poles of church polity rather than all three types (McMullen 1994).

Research has found that congregants generally perceive the actual structure implied by the polity typology of both their own denomination and others’ denominations (Davidson et al. 1969; McMullen 1994). For example, Catholics recognize a hierarchical structure in their own churches, although Protestants tend to see the Catholic Church in slightly more hierarchical terms than do its own members (Davidson et al. 1969).

No scholarship has examined whether churches intentionally (or implicitly) encourage their followers to prefer or replicate these organizational structures outside the walls of the church, including the state. Some scholars speak of “cue perceptions,” the explicit or implicit instruction provided by religious leaders on political matters (Leege 1992; Welch et al. 1993). If conceptions of the Ultimate influence denominations’ own organizational and social forms, as Sommerfeld (1968) and Cairns (1981) assert, then might not cues involve replicating a denomination’s own organizational form? In other words, if political issues concern the organization of government, it makes sense that religious believers would prefer their own theologically derived organizational forms based in their idea of the Ultimate. To use Schattschneider’s (1960/1975) famous terminology, organizations are defined by the “mobilization of bias.” In this sense, religious organizations may be some of the most biased of all. Clergy and laity spread the message of the Gospel, distilled through their particular religious tradition, and their own conception of what constitutes the “true Church” and how this body should be governed is a key component of such a Gospel.

#### *INSTITUTIONAL DESIGN AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE*

Political institutions at the national level in the United States are set by constitutional prerogative. The roles of Congress (legislature), President (executive), and Court (judiciary) have remained relatively unchanged since ratification of the Constitution, despite shifts in importance in one direction or another. On the other hand, there is much variation in institutional design at the state and local level (Miller 2002). Just as arguments persist over the proper organizational structure of religious denominations, so do arguments continue



over the “best” form of local governance. At a basic level, these debates pit *monocentrists* against *polycentrists* (Oakerson 2004).

Monocentrists, or consolidationists, prefer a single, centralized government that has authority over the whole of a metropolitan area and power to regulate behavior and development. Polycentrists favor having many localized governments covering the metropolitan region, “a pattern of governance that emerges from the interactions of multiple independent centers of authority” (Oakerson 2004: 21). While typically emphasizing the benefits of interjurisdictional competition, based on the work of Tiebout (1956), polycentrists also embrace institutions that are meant to encourage collective action but without centralizing authority (see Feiock 2004). Monocentrists and polycentrists derive their commitments from both empirical observation (such as the effect of one form of governance on economic development outcomes compared to the effect of another) and normative values (such as beliefs about government or the market’s abilities to direct society). Visser (2002) terms the two camps’ models “reform-consolidation” and “market-public choice,” respectively. The terms *monocentric* and *polycentric* are also used to describe historical stages of evolution of urban governance in the United States, with reform-minded monocentrism dominating the early twentieth century and polycentrism achieving relevance in the mid-century wake of suburbanization and Tiebout’s thesis (Schechter 1996; Wallis 1994). Visser (2002) describes a later wave of reform that encouraged greater consolidation in the 1960s and 1970s and again in the 1990s, together culminating in several large-scale city-county consolidations: Nashville–Davidson County, Tennessee, in 1962; Jacksonville–Duval County, Florida, in 1967; Indianapolis–Marion County, Indiana, in 1969; and Louisville–Jefferson County, Kentucky, in 2003 (Morgan, England, and Pelissero, 2007).<sup>1</sup>

Is religious fervor, gained through religious participation, responsible, at least in part, for passionate views on the structure of urban institutions? Elinor Ostrom (2000) alleges that academic monocentrists’ rely on self-evident truths. She makes the case that scholars and policy practitioners often act as if their diagnosis and ensuing policy prescriptions are dictated by common sense and therefore should be obvious to all. The demonization of metropolitan fragmentation is one of her two chief examples. She admits that the “sheer complexity of . . . [local] government service delivery arrangements” bewilders most analysts and laypeople alike. Many perfunctorily presume that having “large numbers of small governmental units” servicing a single metropolitan area obviously leads to “inadequate, inefficient, and inequitable services” (Elinor Ostrom 2000: 33). The

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<sup>1</sup> The terms *monocentric* and *polycentric* are also used in urban economics and geography to describe theories or observations of the urban spatial form. The political and economic versions of monocentrism and polycentrism are not interchangeable. In this study, I use the terms in the political-institutional sense.

inverse—the idea that large, centralized, consolidated governments are more professional, efficient, and equitable—became conventional wisdom. Often without recourse to scientific evidence, advocates of monocentrism push to consolidate metropolitan regions under a single governmental entity.<sup>2</sup> Elinor Ostrom cites monocentric theorists' claims such as “A diagnosis of the metropolitan malady is comparatively easy and its logic is too compelling to admit disagreement . . . Nothing, it would seem, could be more obvious or more rational [than consolidation]” (Hawley and Zimmer 1970: 3). Modern-day advocates make similar claims, ignoring evidence such as Ostrom's comparative study of police agencies in eighty metropolitan areas across the United States.<sup>3</sup> Religionists often make public reference to their truth's self-evidence and are encouraged by philosophers and theologians to instead base their policy recommendations on rational argument and commonly held values and norms in pluralistic societies (e.g., Stout 2004). Perhaps it is only natural that those who favor hierarchical church governance or localized, congregational governance would see these structural forms as best for all organizations in society.

Catholics and evangelicals (of whom Southern Baptists constitute the largest component in both Louisville and the nation) have the strongest penchant for following ministerial cues (Leege 1992). Therefore one would expect these denominations to be prime candidates for manifesting polity replication. Past research on elite and public Catholic support for urban political machines in the United States and for integration into the European Union (EU) in Europe, where Catholic support was significantly higher than that among Protestants, leads one to hypothesize that Catholics will exhibit greater support for city-county consolidation (Merton 1972; Nelsen, Guth, and Fraser 2001).

### *QUESTIONING CAUSALITY*

What of the direction of causality? Leege (1992: 200) writes that “religion is both a shaper and mirror of culture and social life.” Are religious denominations shaping attitudes about the proper design of political institutions or simply mirroring the societal debate and preexisting preferences of outsiders? While mirroring no doubt occurs, shaping is much more important and likely in the contemporary United States and elsewhere. Cross-national studies indicate, or at least theorize, that countries with Catholic majorities exhibit centrist/corporatist forms of government, while Protestant nations are more democratic and participatory (e.g.,

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<sup>2</sup> See Martin and Schiff (2011) for a concise evaluation of how city-county consolidations have performed in enhancing efficiency, economic development, and equity.

<sup>3</sup> Ostrom and her colleagues concluded that small and medium-sized departments are more effective in producing direct services and that police performance is enhanced in metropolitan areas that have larger numbers of departments. Both findings contradict monocentrists' claims.

Gill 2004).<sup>4</sup> A nation's religious identity (in most, if not all, cases) predates the contemporary governance structure and even the existence of the modern state. Christendom was inspired by Christianity's universalism, and Catholic support for EU integration continues to draw its inspiration from the church's social and political teachings (Nelsen, Guth, and Fraser 2001). As Max Weber suggested, it is religion that affects "other forms of social and political behavior" first—and then the culture itself may begin to reshape religion (Gill 2004: 2).

The roots of the Baptist movement lie in separatist Congregationalism, which argued against the state church and was active in England in the late 1500s. Early Congregationalist Robert Browne "argued that believers were to be united to Christ and to one another by a voluntary covenant, that officers were to be chosen by the [church] members, and that no congregation was to have authority over another" (Cairns 1981: 337). Congregationalists were among the first settlers of North America who "applied [this] covenant idea to political life by entering into the Mayflower Compact before landing at Plymouth" (Cairns: 338). This is a past example of congregants' vision of church polity, already established, shaping other societal and governmental institutions.<sup>5</sup> The first English Baptist church emerged from this movement in the late 1500s, and the first Baptist church in North America was established in the 1600s.

### *POLITY REPLICATION MECHANISMS*

A theory of polity replication should emphasize two mechanisms: ideological and participatory. Figure 1 illustrates these two forms of polity replication as a path diagram that resembles a logic model, a method that program evaluators use to understand the theoretical connections between inputs and outcomes (McLaughlin and Jordan 1999). The arrows represent directions of causality or feedback loops. On one hand, attendance at church worship and religious education shape a congregant's views about God and spirituality, state, society, and organizational culture and values. Presumably, those who are in the pews more often will receive more cues and therefore will be more likely to vote on political issues, such as

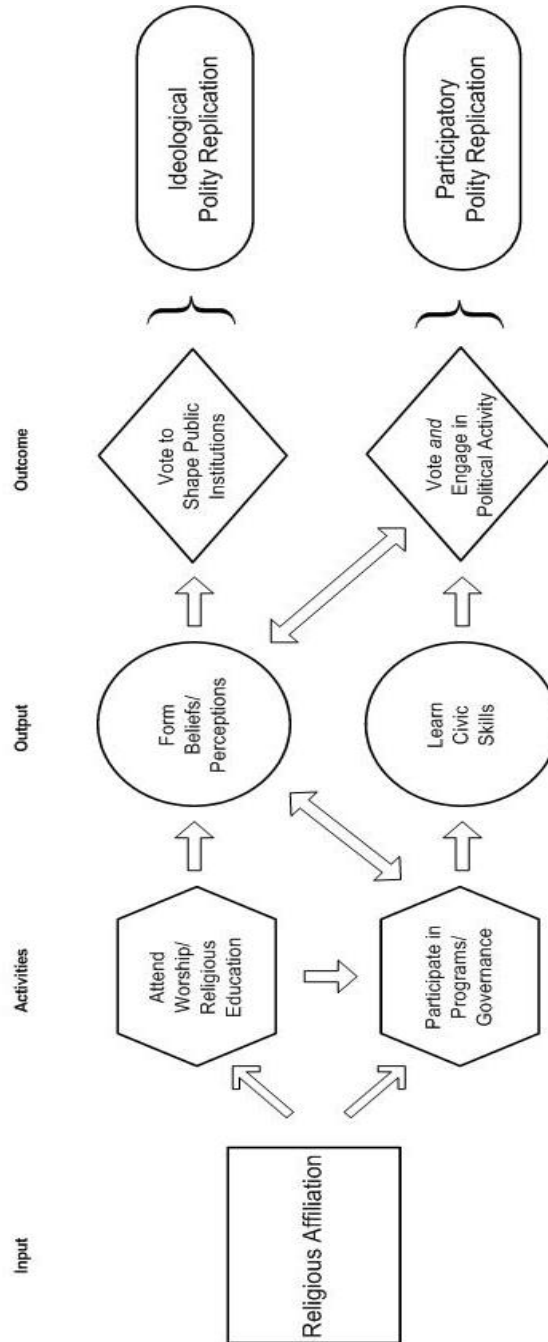
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<sup>4</sup> For example, Gill (2004: 2) writes that in Latin America, "Catholic leaders and their devout followers often had strong preferences for centrist and corporatist forms of government. During the nineteenth century, the Church fervently resisted the advance of European liberalism and fuelled the preference of practicing Catholics for more corporatist forms of social organization." While the Latin American case has colonial baggage, it does seem that the introduction of Protestantism and increases in individual religiosity are advancing democratic ideals, local self-governance, and civic participation. Comparison of European countries, past and present, reveals similar patterns.

<sup>5</sup> Other scholars argue that churches' organizational structures can reflect their environments. For example, many American churches' congregational polities may result from national emphases on democracy and self-reliance. White (1972: 100) writes, "we find churches in the free-church tradition modeling their ecclesiastical organizations after the political structures of society."

consolidation and morality-based referenda, most likely making choices that reflect their church's official or unofficial positions.

**Figure 1: Path Diagram of the Polity Replication Process**



On the other hand, individuals who participate in church programs and governance, where they may also learn civic skills (see Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), likely develop intense preferences for similar governance structures. While participants in corporate or government bureaucracies may come to loathe such structures, monetary constraints may prohibit them from leaving. The religious sector, however, is entirely voluntary; therefore participants can generally self-select the church that best fits their preferences (McMullen 1994). Because many religious adults were raised as religious children, their preferences for a religious tradition are shaped early in life through socialization, and their preferences for organizational structure will develop later, on the basis of both values and positive or negative experiences. Catholics who become disillusioned with church ritual or hierarchy may join a mainline or evangelical Protestant congregation following a conversion experience. However, this should not be seen as the norm (Hadaway and Marler 1993). Most congregants are likely to believe that their church structure is the best or ideal form.

Although the present study does not explicitly test which form of polity replication is at work in consolidation referenda, I posit that both are present. However, the effects of each cannot be distinguished from one another, owing to limitations of the data.

#### *CITY-COUNTY CONSOLIDATION*

City-county consolidation is one form of contemporary metropolitan reform that has profound influence on the life and governance of a city. Consolidation involves the dissolution of city and county and the creation of a new government encompassing the territory of both. Questions remain as to whether the new government is a “city without suburbs” or, in cases with powerful suburban interests, “suburbs without a city” (Rusk 2003; Savitch and Vogel 2004). Consolidation is “a radical form of organizational change because it is so complete and often difficult to reverse” and is thus perhaps the most drastic form of institutional redesign available to local governments in the United States (Savitch and Vogel 2004: 760). Consolidation is almost universally supported by chambers of commerce, which recognize this form of government as more corporate in its structure.

Morgan, England, and Pelissero (2007: 52) summarize the consensus view of who typically supports city-county consolidation and who does not:

The central-city business elite, civic organizations, big-city newspapers, and reform groups often support reorganization, while suburban newspapers, mayors and employees of small towns, fringe-area business people, and central-city blacks often lead the opposition.

If this is the case, a regression analysis would show individual beliefs about consolidation to be positively correlated with socioeconomic indicators such as income and education, though this would be tempered by distance from the city center, and negatively correlated with suburban residency and African American status (Erie, Kirlin, and Rabinovitz 1972; Harrigan 1993; Lyons 1972; Temple 1972). Temple (1972) and Horan and Taylor (1977) find that sociodemographic variables are important predictors of attitudes toward consolidation. However, Edwards and Bohland (1991) find that except for residence, sociodemographic factors are weak or insignificant predictors of consolidation support. Urban residents are more likely than suburban residents to support consolidation, while suburban residents are more likely than rural residents to support consolidation. This suggests a decline in support as one moves farther out from the city center to fringe areas.

Debates over city-county consolidation often center on preferences for institutional design, redistribution from suburb to city, political power and trust, and views of consolidation elites, which may be reflected in individuals' opinions. In other words, one's opinion about consolidation or a consolidated government may be a proxy for one's ideas about institutional design (in general terms such as the role of government in society), redistribution, political power, or prominent personalities.

Research on religious actors and city-county consolidation is sparse. Carr and Feiock (2002) do find that religious organizations exert a modest impact on both stages of the consolidation process: agenda-setting and referendum. Their comparative study is based on data collected through a national survey of county officials in communities that held referenda on city-county consolidation over a ten-year period. According to Carr and Feiock (2002: 84), "Religious groups apparently had a very minimal role in the issue; in fact, most respondents (62 percent) felt these groups had no effect whatsoever." Their data show that only 9 percent of the responding county officials believed that religious actors had a significant involvement in the agenda-setting or referendum stages of consolidation.

Savitch and Vogel (2004) suggest that churches may have played a role in influencing public opinion about consolidation in Louisville: The coalition that opposed consolidation, Citizens Organized in Search of the Truth (CO\$T), held meetings or rallies in local churches. It is unknown, from Savitch and Vogel's research, to what extent religious organizations themselves took stances on the issue.

Much research on consolidation emphasizes elites' or entrepreneurs' attitudes about consolidation and/or their roles in placing the issue on the agenda and bankrolling electoral support (e.g., Durning and Edwards 1992). Although consolidation may be put on the agenda by elites, it is decided by the voting

public. The influence of religious commitment on voters' perceptions of consolidation and decisions in consolidation referenda has not been investigated.

Current research on private actors' involvement in the consolidation issue is rather pluralist in orientation and based on power's first face, that is, decision making (Dahl 1961/2005), or, at best, its second face, manipulating agendas (Bachrach and Baratz 1962). Consolidation scholars ignore more recent developments in power theory, such as Lukes's (2005) third face of power, manipulating people's preferences. Religious organizations exercise power's third face in addition to the first two. Church members make their own individual decisions that they believe are based on their own conclusions but are indeed shaped by the church and its leadership. This use of power is not necessarily nefarious or even conscious. While it is assumed that business, labor, and political groups shape preferences, religious organizations are often ignored. Although Carr and Feiock's (2002) respondents might not have witnessed the hand of the church in action, religious organizations affected consolidation referendum outcomes at least through their encouragement (or discouragement) of civic involvement and their impartation of civic skills (Sharp 2007; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). The building of civic skills in churches is known to vary according to the type of church polity. Hierarchical church structures such as those of Catholic churches are less conducive to learning civic skills than are the more participatory structures of Protestant congregations (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995).

Religious organizations also shape attitudes about morality and institutional design and thus affect the outcome of a consolidation referendum. Scholars have ignored the application of power's third face to the study of religion and institutional design. While churches may play minimal, if any, roles in setting metropolitan agendas and influencing the public, they certainly shape members' values and worldviews (Naugle 2002; Sire 2004).

### *LOUISVILLE CASE STUDY*

To test my thesis in a contemporary case, I investigated the impact of religious affiliation on attitudes toward city-county consolidation in Louisville–Jefferson County, Kentucky. Louisville is an interesting locale for exploration of religious affiliation and its implications for local institutional design, owing to both its rich religious history and its recent political innovation. Louisville is a midsized city bordering the southern and midwestern regions of the country; it has long been labeled the “gateway from the North to the South” (McMeekin 1946: 256). The city is historically Democratic and Roman Catholic but is located in a politically “red” state within the contemporary Bible Belt. Louisville has sizable populations of Roman Catholics, black Protestants, and white evangelical Protestants,

particularly Southern Baptists, as well as several large megachurches, two prominent seminaries (one being Southern Baptist), the offices of a Catholic archdiocese, and a Protestant denominational headquarters. Louisville is home to over 500 individual religious congregations (Barlow 2004; Gaustad and Schmidt 2004; Hartford Institute for Religious Research 2009; Jones et al. 2002).

Louisville's medium size and relative geographic isolation make it more manageable for a case study than often-studied "megacities" and other midsized cities located within megalopolis regions (Ambrosius, Gilderbloom, and Hanka 2010). Barlow (2004) argues that the Midwest is the most representative of the United States as a whole of any of the country's regions, demographically and in terms of religious affiliation. Louisville lies on the midwestern frontier, an area referred to as "Kentuckiana" because of its border with Indiana (Barlow 2004). Louisville shares many characteristics, including ethnic and cultural diversity, with nearby midwestern cities such as Cincinnati, Ohio, its "Ohio River sister city" (Williams 2004: 217). On the other hand, the U.S. Census Bureau places Louisville in the southern region, which has long been said to possess a distinct regional subculture (Ellison and Musick 1993; Salisbury 1962). Thus Louisville could be termed the Upper South or the Lower Midwest (Ownby 2005). Although research findings from Louisville are not necessarily representative of the nation as a whole, or even all other cities (see Stein 1960), a study that is conducted in Louisville is likely to uncover conditions that are more reflective of "typical" American communities and citizens than will studies of cultural and social outliers such as New York City or Los Angeles.<sup>6</sup>

While interesting for religious and geographic reasons, Louisville has also drawn attention for its recent political reforms. Residents of the City of Louisville and surrounding Jefferson County voted to consolidate their governments in a 2000 referendum, with the merger of city and county to be completed by 2003 (Savitch and Vogel 2004). This was the first large-scale consolidation in a U.S. city since Indianapolis and Marion County, Indiana, merged in 1969 (Morgan, England, and Pelissero 2007). Following consolidation, Louisville has become a magnet for scholars of urban studies, regional planning, and public administration (Brookings Institution 2002; Dreier, Mollenkopf, and Swanstrom 2004; Rusk 2003).

The central research question is: Does religious affiliation influence individuals' preferences for institutional design, manifested by vote choice in a consolidation referendum and approval of a merged city-county government? The two dominant religious affiliations in Louisville are Roman Catholics (one quarter of the population) and Southern Baptists (one sixth of the population) (Jones et al.

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<sup>6</sup> Also see Feagin, Orum, and Sjoberg (1991). A previous study with similar goals used a southern community (Atlanta, Georgia) to test general hypotheses without significant reference to the study's regional context (McMullen 1994).



2002).<sup>7</sup> I hypothesized that Southern Baptists will be less likely than Catholics to support consolidation or, the converse, Catholics will be more likely to support consolidation. This effect should be exhibited in both the referendum vote and opinions about the consolidated entity. Black Protestants, who often share congregational polity, will likely view a consolidated regime with skepticism (Porter 2008; Savitch and Vogel 2004). The religiously unaffiliated often align with the liberal end of the political spectrum and the Democratic Party in U.S. politics (Leege and Kellstedt 1993). Their views of consolidation could go either way: in support of far-left critics or in alliance with the local Democratic establishment. Non-Christian religions compose such a small proportion of Louisville's population that an attempt to understand particular traditions' positions using random survey data is particularly difficult, and any collective effect is nonsensical because of the inclusion of vastly different traditions. Furthermore, I expected higher socioeconomic status (as determined by education, income, full-time employment, and single-family home residence) to translate into electoral support for consolidation. I expected black, conservative, and suburban voters to oppose consolidation. There is little literature to draw from in predicting the consolidation views of women and older and married people; therefore these relationships are unclear and perhaps not statistically significant. One might theorize, though, that all of these groups are more trusting and therefore more likely to support the consolidation entrepreneurs' efforts.

#### *DATA, VARIABLES, AND METHODS*

The data for this study were drawn from the Louisville Metropolitan Survey (LMS) conducted in spring 2006 by the University of Louisville's Urban Studies Institute in consultation with the university's Department of Sociology, whose faculty designed the questionnaire (Department of Sociology 2006). The unit of analysis is the individual. Survey respondents were chosen by random digit dialing across Jefferson County, Kentucky (Louisville Metro), a technique that resulted in a sample of 807 complete interviews with adult respondents aged 18 or over. Participants were asked for responses on political, moral, and religious issues along with basic sociodemographic characteristics. Scholars who have utilized the 2006 LMS data have noted that the respondents compare favorably with 2000 U.S. Census data and are therefore likely fairly representative of Louisville's

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<sup>7</sup> This large presence of Catholics distinguishes Kentucky from other parts of the South and is due to northern Kentucky's location at the base of the "German Triangle," with points in nearby Cincinnati, Ohio; St. Louis, Missouri; and Milwaukee, Wisconsin (Ownby 2005). A geographic analysis of the dominant religious traditions in U.S. counties finds that Louisville is the boundary between Southern Baptist territory, stretching north from the Gulf of Mexico, and German Catholic territory coming down from the central Midwest (Jones et al. 2002).

population, though these analyses examine only a subsection of respondents who were asked environmental questions (Gilderbloom, Hanka, and Ambrosius 2009; Walton 2006). In the present analysis, I found that the full sample is somewhat more female, older, and more educated than U.S. Census Bureau data for 2006. The sample also drew slightly more white respondents than the proportion in the population of Jefferson County. Consequently, I weighted the sample to reflect better the population using four criteria: sex, race, age, and education (Sapsford 1999).<sup>8</sup>

A large portion of the LMS is devoted to the 2003 merger of Jefferson County and the City of Louisville. I created two dummy variables and a factor score index for use as dependent variables in the models. First, I established whether a respondent voted in the merger referendum by using the basic question “Did you vote for the merger, against the merger, or did you not vote at all?” I summed those voting for or against the merger and coded them as 1. I then coded those who lived in Jefferson County or Louisville in 2000 but did not vote as 0. Those who were ineligible to vote, meaning that they reported living elsewhere in 2000, were coded as “system missing.” This does exclude those who lived in Jefferson County but were unregistered to vote or otherwise ineligible. According to these LMS questions, 59 percent of adults who lived in Jefferson County reported voting in the 2000 merger referendum. Second, from the same question, I established whether a voter supported consolidation. Of the 59 percent of respondents who reported a vote, roughly 70 percent supported consolidation and 30 percent opposed it.<sup>9</sup> Finally, I used the follow-up questions that were asked of all respondents, regardless of whether they voted, to create a factor score of support for the merger and subsequent merged government. In short, the items asked whether the respondent is (1) better off since the merger, (2) trusting of the merged government, (3) convinced that the merger benefits all residents, (4) convinced that the merged government does not waste taxes, (5) convinced that the merged government’s employees are honest, and (6) convinced that race relations have improved since consolidation. All items load on a single factor.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Rather than using 2000 Census data, which possibly would eliminate important demographic shifts that occurred over the six years from 2000 to 2006, I utilize three-year estimates from the American Community Survey (ACS), 2005–2007. The three-year estimates are more reliable than an ACS collected in a single year; and the LMS collection year forms the center of the ACS analysis period. The weighting process successfully weighted male, black, younger, and less-educated respondents to their approximate levels in the population.

<sup>9</sup> The actual referendum results show that 54 percent of voters approved consolidation. As in most surveys, a slightly higher percentage of respondents reported voting than the percentage that actually turned out, and more reported supporting the winning vote (in this case, consolidating the city and county). This makes the use of an approval index all the more valuable in this analysis.

<sup>10</sup> The eigenvalue is greater than 2.5, and most factor loadings are high, although the questions on whether the merger has made one better off and whether it has improved race relations load lower.

The independent variables are religious affiliation, religiosity, political ideology, socioeconomic and demographic controls, and a measure of suburbanization.<sup>11</sup> The LMS asks the basic question “What is your religious preference?” The choices are (1) Baptist, (2) other Protestant denomination, (3) Roman Catholic, (4) a Christian religion not yet mentioned, (5) a non-Christian religion, and (6) no religious preference. The dominant white American religious traditions are Roman Catholic, mainline Protestant, and evangelical Protestant (Smidt, Kellstedt, and Guth 2009). This LMS question does not allow for a division of Protestants into mainline and evangelical branches. However, for unknown reasons, the question does isolate the Baptist group. The likely reason for this is their prevalence in Louisville, largely divided into white Southern Baptists and various African-American Baptist traditions. An identification of evangelical Protestants is further hindered by their likely inclusion in several response categories: Baptist, other Protestant, a Christian religion, and even no religious preference.<sup>12</sup>

Given the constraints, the best possible classification scheme divides the LMS sample into Southern Baptists, Black Protestants, other Protestants, Roman Catholics, other Christians, other non-Christians, and the unaffiliated. Southern Baptists are identified as the white respondents who selected “Baptist.” This category likely includes a few mainline or other evangelical Baptists because the percentage of Baptists in the LMS (18.5 percent) is slightly higher than the 15.6 percent found by the 2000 Religious Congregations and Membership Study (RCMS), although the bulk of white Baptists in Louisville are indeed Southern Baptists, as is the case across the South (see Shortridge 1976). The RCMS finds 164 Southern Baptist congregations but only 28 other Baptist congregations, which together account for a mere 0.5 percent of religious adherents in Louisville (Jones et al. 2002). Black Protestants are identified as black respondents who selected “Baptist,” “other Protestant,” or “a Christian religion.” This category accounts for 18.0 percent of the LMS sample. While some of these Black Protestants may be members of largely white denominations, the vast majority likely are members of

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<sup>11</sup> A major weakness of the dataset is the lack of a political party identifier. The use of a proxy (support for President George W. Bush) in regression models found a positive effect on support for consolidation, a surprising finding. The Bush proxy was not used as a control in the final models because it was asked of only a subsection of the LMS sample.

<sup>12</sup> Non-Baptist evangelical Protestants who are unfamiliar with the Protestant label likely answered, “A Christian religion not yet mentioned” or, for those in nondenominational or independent churches, perhaps even “No religious preference.” Many Christians, particularly evangelicals or born-again Christians, deny that their faith is comparable to other traditions and therefore feel that it should not be labeled a religion (e.g., see Ridenour 1967). It is clear that the “other Christian religion” category includes respondents beyond Eastern Orthodox and conservative nontraditionalists (e.g., Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses) that are not captured by the other categories, because the number of respondents who chose this category are greater than these traditions’ rates in the population (see Jones et al. 2002).

congregations associated with historically black denominations.<sup>13</sup> The Roman Catholic category is fairly straightforward, because it was selected by the respondents themselves; with 23.6 percent of respondents, the Roman Catholic Church is the largest religious body in Louisville. Other non-Christians, including Jews, Muslims, and Hindus, are represented by only a few respondents (3.3 percent) and, as a composite category, are unfit for stringent analysis. The other Christian categories—other Protestants (13.0 percent) and other Christians (10.4 percent)—are ambiguous and likely include a mix of mainline Protestants such as Lutherans and Methodists, evangelical Protestants including Pentecostals and self-defined fundamentalists, Eastern Orthodox traditions, and other traditions that embrace the generic “Christian” label. There is no way to subdivide these two categories into these individual traditions. The remaining category, the religiously unaffiliated, accounts for 13.2 percent of the LMS sample.

All religious categories are included in statistical analysis, but the Southern Baptist and Roman Catholic traditions are the dominant ones in Louisville and the key affiliations under study. Therefore they receive primary attention in the discussion of the findings. All traditions are constructed as dummy variables; 1 was assigned for affiliates and 0 for nonaffiliates. Catholic serves as the reference category for regression analysis to directly compare with Southern Baptist.

The LMS asks a host of questions about religious salience, behaviors, and beliefs. I constructed an index of religiosity from both datasets using factor analysis. This index sums information from three religious salience questions, two religious behavior questions (one public, one private), and one belief question. These LMS questions capture the importance of religion, desire to become more religious, closeness to God, worship/religious activity attendance, frequency of scripture reading, and belief in an afterlife. All measures load on a single factor.<sup>14</sup>

Political ideology is captured by a five-point scale of conservatism. The LMS asks the question “Do you think of yourself as a Liberal, a Conservative, or as middle-of-the-road?” It then follows up with “Do you consider yourself a strong or not very strong [liberal or conservative]?” I combined these two questions to create the following scale: (1) strong liberal, (2) weak liberal, (3) moderate, (4) weak conservative, and (5) strong conservative.

Individual socioeconomic and demographic control variables include sex, race, age, educational attainment, annual income, employment status, marital status, and dwelling type. Several of these are measured as dummy variables with values of 1 for female, black, full-time employment, married, and single-family

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<sup>13</sup> As the cliché goes, eleven o’clock Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in America (Hadaway, Hackett, and Miller 1984). Smidt, Kellstedt, and Guth (2009) argue that black Protestants as a whole exhibit similar social, political, and theological positions and therefore deserve their own category without division into evangelical and mainline.

<sup>14</sup> The eigenvalue exceeds 3.0, and the explained variance exceeds 50 percent.

home residency and 0 for all others.<sup>15</sup> Age is an interval level variable measured in years. Education (1–8) and income (1–9) are ordinal-level variables measuring categories of educational attainment and income, respectively.

The LMS allows for classification of respondents by place of residence. For confidentiality, addresses were not collected, but respondents may be coded with their distance from the central business district on the basis of their provided ZIP codes. I use a GIS (geographic information systems) tool to calculate the distance from each ZIP code's centroid to the downtown ZIP code's centroid (40202).

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for all variables drawn from the dataset.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>
City-county consolidation					
Vote dummy	710	0.59	—	0	1
Vote choice dummy	417	0.71	—	0	1
Merger support index	709	0.00	1.00	-2.14	2.09
Religious identification					
Roman Catholic dummy	805	0.24	—	0	1
Southern Baptist dummy	805	0.19	—	0	1
Black Protestant dummy	805	0.18	—	0	1
Other Protestant dummy	805	0.13	—	0	1
Other Christian dummy	805	0.10	—	0	1
Non-Christian dummy	805	0.03	—	0	1
Unaffiliated dummy	805	0.13	—	0	1
Religiosity index	805	0.00	1.00	-2.94	1.36
Conservatism	805	3.10	1.15	1	5
Sex: female dummy	805	0.51	—	0	1
Race: black dummy	795	0.21	—	0	1
Age (years)	788	48.27	17.78	18	96
Education	805	4.22	1.80	1	8
Income	699	4.93	2.70	1	9
Employed full time dummy	805	0.46	—	0	1
Married dummy	805	0.46	—	0	1
House dummy	805	0.75	—	0	1
Suburbanization (miles from central business district)	805	10.21	4.91	0.00	23.85

<sup>15</sup> The black dummy variable is excluded from these analyses, owing to excessive multicollinearity with black Protestant. Almost 95 percent of African-Americans in Louisville are black Protestants.

This study uses two multivariate modeling techniques to address the research questions: linear regression, or ordinary least squares regression, and binary logistic regression. I constructed a multiple linear regression (MLR) model predicting the merger index, and I used a binary logistic regression model (BLRM) to calculate probabilities of voting in favor of merger.

### *EMPIRICAL RESULTS*

Table 2 reports results of a BLRM predicting electoral support for city-county consolidation in Louisville. This model explains approximately 19 percent of the

**Table 2: Individual Electoral Support for Consolidation in Louisville (BLRM)**

<b>Independent Variable</b>	<b>Coefficient</b>	<b>Standard Error</b>
(Constant)	1.648	0.913
Female	-0.029	0.269
Age	-0.009	0.010
Education	0.267**	0.085
Income	0.060	0.071
Employed full time	-0.134	0.304
Married	0.133	0.315
House	-0.718	0.394
Conservatism	-0.172	0.109
Suburbanization	-0.050	0.029
Religiosity	-0.010	0.178
Southern Baptist	-0.880*	0.352
Black Protestant	0.253	0.437
Other Protestant	0.806	0.473
Other Christian	-0.163	0.439
Non-Christian	-1.166	0.692
Unaffiliated	0.203	0.578
-2 log likelihood	381.001	
Nagelkerke pseudo- $R^2$	0.190	
$N$	410	

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

Reference category is Roman Catholic.

Black is excluded, owing to multicollinearity with black Protestant.

variation in electoral support. The key finding is that Southern Baptists gave significantly less electoral support to consolidation than Roman Catholics did. Baptists were indeed less likely to report voting in favor of consolidating city and county in Louisville. The predicted probability, other independent variables being held constant at their means, of a Catholic voting in favor of consolidation is 0.74, whereas the predicted probability of a Southern Baptist voting in favor is 0.54. The only other significant variable in the model is education, which demonstrates a positive relationship.

Table 3 contains the results of a MLR model predicting individual approval of the consolidated government in the years since completion of the merger in 2003.

**Table 3: Individual Approval of Consolidated Louisville Metro Government (MLR)**

Independent Variable	Unstandardized Coefficient	Standard Error	Standardized Coefficient
(Constant)	0.075	0.240	—
Female	-0.057	0.080	-0.029
Age	0.004	0.002	0.073
Education	0.104***	0.025	0.187
Income	0.056**	0.020	0.153
Employed full time	-0.215*	0.087	-0.108
Married	0.024	0.090	0.012
House	-0.451***	0.097	-0.192
Conservatism	-0.075*	0.033	-0.089
Suburbanization	-0.019*	0.008	-0.095
Religiosity	0.095	0.049	0.097
Southern Baptist	-0.268*	0.115	-0.108
Black Protestant	-0.343**	0.127	-0.131
Other Protestant	0.034	0.131	0.011
Other Christian	0.073	0.142	0.022
Non-Christian	0.123	0.216	0.023
Unaffiliated	-0.051	0.154	-0.017
<i>F</i>	7.067***		
Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.136		
<i>N</i>	616		

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

Reference category is Roman Catholic.

Black is excluded, owing to multicollinearity with black Protestant.

The dependent variable is the consolidation factor score. The amount of explained variation is just below 14 percent. Again, Southern Baptists express significantly less approval of consolidation than Catholics do. If one restricts the model to respondents who identify as Catholics and Southern Baptists, the coefficient on Southern Baptist is  $-0.256$  ( $p < 0.05$ ), nearly identical to the coefficient when the full sample is analyzed. The adjusted  $R^2$  for the model limited to Catholics and Southern Baptists is 0.160, greater than that for the full sample. Several other predictors are significant, most carrying the expected signs.

### *FURTHER ANALYSIS*

To test whether consolidation vote or the index serve as proxies for other variables, I constructed MLR models (not shown) for the mass public from the 2006 General Social Survey predicting individual attitudes about redistribution to central cities (ordinal variable measuring support for expanding assistance to big cities) and an index of political trust (factor score). I used equivalent (or as similar as possible) measures of religious tradition (or measures that were as similar as possible), religiosity, and sociodemographic controls. Southern Baptists and Catholics do not differ in their support for expanding assistance to central cities. Southern Baptists do possess less political trust than Catholics, although the coefficient is weak and significant only at the 0.1 level. Southern Baptists and Catholics in Louisville also exhibit nearly identical residential patterns and political ideology, findings that negate two other competing explanations for differences on consolidation.<sup>16</sup>

If a polity replication effect is present, parishioners with more exposure to church activities and cues might be expected to exhibit greater (Catholic) or lesser (Southern Baptist) levels of support for consolidation than is shown by those who are minimally involved with the tradition. Regression models that are restricted to members of either the Catholic or the Southern Baptist tradition do not find a significant effect for the religiosity index as an independent variable (models not shown). However, Figures 2 and 3 present data on the general relationship between consolidation support and religious participation and salience, respectively, for both Catholics and Southern Baptists.

Figure 2 shows that Catholics who attend church more frequently tend to offer higher levels of support for the merged government than do those who attend nominally (that is, every few months). The relationship among Southern Baptists is unclear; Southern Baptists who attend every other week offer the highest level

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<sup>16</sup> Both traditions are concentrated in the inner suburbs, the remainder of each being divided equally between the central city and the outer suburbs. There is no statistically significant difference between the traditions' means on the five-point political ideology scale; both are moderate but slightly right of center.



of support, while those who attend once a month and those who attend every week are about equally lower in their level of support. Southern Baptists who attend nominally exhibit the lowest level of support for the merger, which is also the case for Catholics. A church attendance variable is significant and positive (0.118;  $p < 0.05$ ; beta: 0.184) in a regression model that is restricted to Catholics, but it is not significant in a model that is restricted to Southern Baptists (not shown).

**Figure 2: Merger Index Means by Church Attendance for Southern Baptists and Catholics**

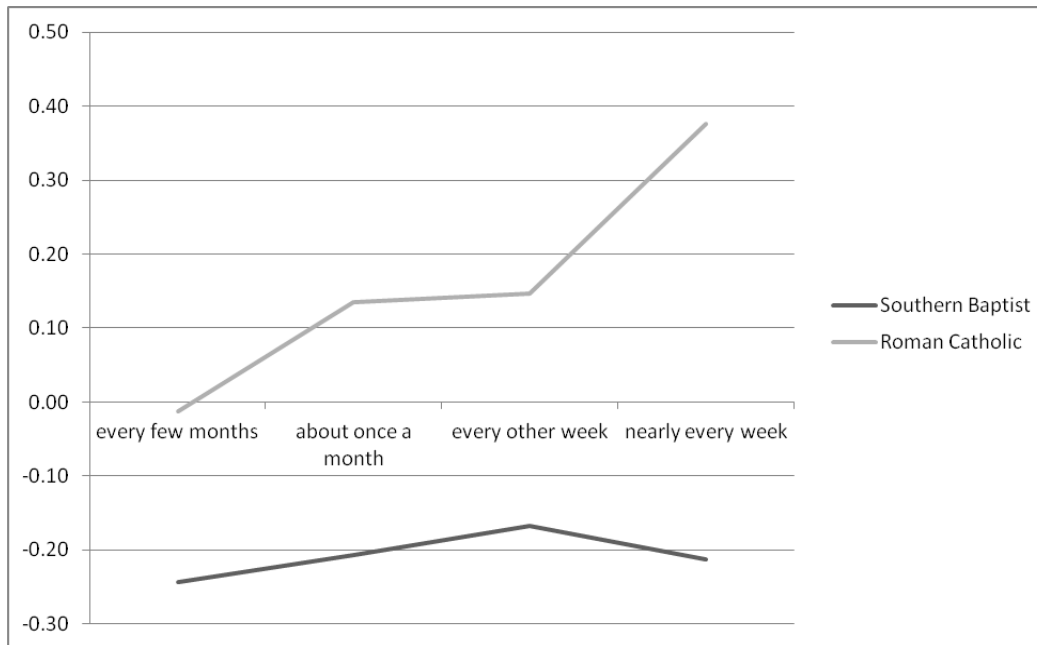
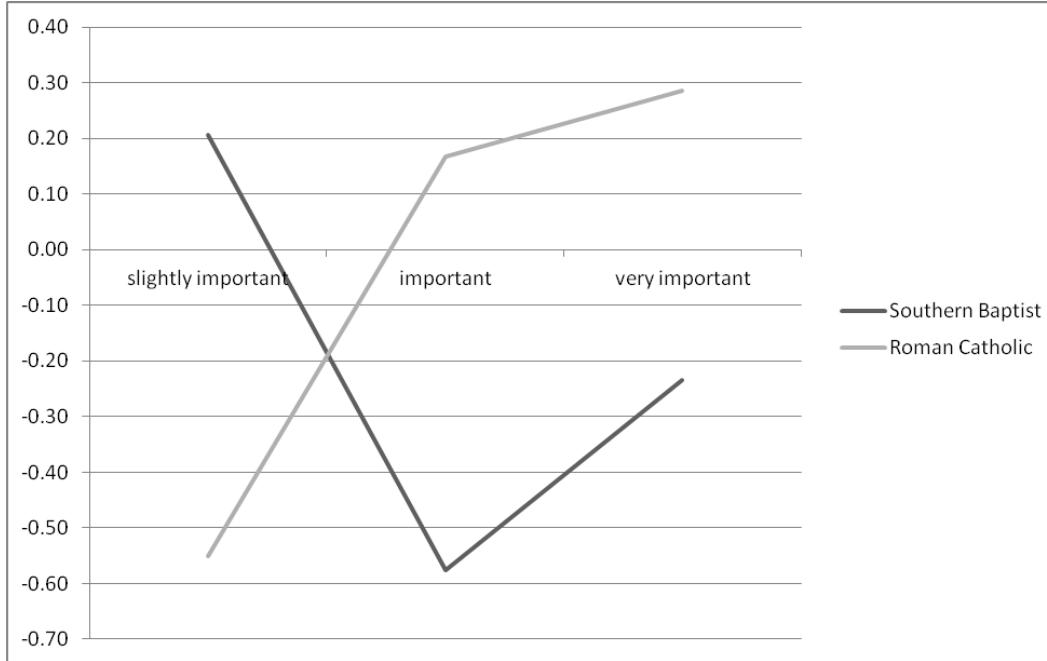


Figure 3 displays the relationship between merger support and religious salience for each tradition. Here, Catholics again demonstrate a positive relationship between, in this case, salience and support for consolidated government. The relationship for Southern Baptists is again unclear; consolidation support declines as one moves from “slightly important” to “important” but then rebounds slightly for those in the “very important” category. Importance of religion is not significant in Catholic-only and Southern Baptist-only regression models (not shown).

**Figure 3: Merger Index Means by Religious Importance for Southern Baptists and Catholics**



### *DISCUSSION*

I have argued for a theory of polity replication: that participation with religious structures conditions parishioners to prefer similar structures in other realms of society, including the state. In addition to theoretical and past evidence from the literature, I have presented original data showing that, as the theory predicts, Roman Catholics exhibit a greater preference for consolidated government than Southern Baptists do.

When examining the effects of religious participation, I conclude that greater exposure to church activities and greater levels of religious salience are more important in shaping consolidation views in Catholics than in Southern Baptists. Catholics may care more about the issue of consolidation, perhaps because of the strong Catholic educational institutions in Louisville promoting the Catholic worldview and polity replication.<sup>17</sup> Past research confirms that participation in a church's institutional structure is more important in hierarchical polities such as

<sup>17</sup> This was suggested by one Catholic member of the postconsolidation Louisville Metro Council, who is also a teacher at a Catholic high school.

the Catholic Church. McMullen (1994: 724) argues that “a congregational polity cannot mobilize individual behavior or attitudes to the same extent as an episcopal polity can . . . because of its particular myth of ecclesiastical authority embedded in its institutional structure.” He admits that this argument may seem counterintuitive, because one “might expect the more ‘democratic’ congregational polity . . . to allow for the free flow of information, facilitating members’ knowledge about organizational policy.” But he adds:

It is precisely the lack of legitimated hierarchical authority promoted by a congregational polity (i.e., a loosely structured institution) that severs the connections between the local church and national leadership. The institutional myth of local church autonomy prevents mechanisms from being socially constructed to facilitate the movement of information between institutional levels, as well as the interest and motivation for even listening to what is being said “from on high” (McMullen 1994: 724).

Concerning the Catholic Church, McMullen (1994: 724) writes:

one might expect that the greater bureaucratic maze maintained by the institutional myth of ecclesiastical authority would clog communication channels; but instead, those myths have socially constructed the motivation for parishioners to be aware of church policy, exactly because they acknowledge as legitimate the authority of the episcopal authority.

My findings offer further support for McMullen’s assertions. Socialization, political or otherwise, appears to be more effective among episcopal denominations such as the Catholic Church than among congregational traditions such as Southern Baptists. This finding lends greater credence, and another dimension, to a theory of polity replication.

#### *IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS*

This study’s theory and findings hold implications for social science, church practice, and politics and policymaking. This analysis contributes to social scientific literature in several ways. This study extends the understanding of religious polities as institutions pioneered by McMullen and others. It further shows how new institutionalism can enhance the study of institutional design in urban governance, the cornerstone of the urban politics field.<sup>18</sup> Polity replication also suggests psychological political effects of voluntary institutional association and membership. This theory opens up a new strain of research in organizational and

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<sup>18</sup> Other scholars have called for investigation of new institutionalism’s implications for urban politics (Lowndes 2001, 2009).

institutional theory with implications for the study of political science. For example, Roman Catholics may be more likely than Baptists (to use the two key traditions of this study) and other Protestants to view international organization and nation-state cooperation with favor (see Nelsen, Guth, and Fraser 2001). Furthermore, if participants in religious denominations are in fact influenced to prefer particular institutional forms outside the church, perhaps other private associations—from hierarchical corporations to community-based citizen associations—similarly encourage structural preferences (pro or con). McMullen's (1994) work was motivated partially by a desire to understand religious institutions as differentiated from other institutions because of their voluntary nature. My findings suggest the value of further exploration of the links between religious denominations' structures and individual preferences for institutional design in all realms of politics and society.

Understanding the effects of polity replication may also influence religious life. Despite their profound and long-standing differences, Roman Catholics and Baptists have engaged in a series of recent talks meant to identify common elements of their faiths and areas for future dialogue (Radano 2007). It is clear to observers that any efforts at reconciliation will face difficulty in moving past the inflammatory rhetoric of the past and the vast doctrinal and cultural divide (Freeman 2009; Truett 2001). As Monsignor John Radano (2007) notes, "Baptists will hesitate to join in a call for *structural* unity or *doctrinal* unity"—the two legs of the church: polity and conceptions of the Ultimate. These differences tend to mask a contemporary tendency toward balance in the practice of church polity. Some scholars find that the Southern Baptist Convention is no longer as decentralized as many other Protestant and evangelical denominations are. In fact, Sullins (2004) labels the Southern Baptist Convention "moderately centralized," or less decentralized than over 100 other Protestant denominations—a list that includes many Baptist denominations. Following the liberalizing reforms of Vatican II, the Catholic Church is less centralized than ever and is feeling pressure for further reforms. Although churches with presbyterian polities were once thought of as occupying a middle ground, this model is largely defunct, and these denominations are becoming more and more congregational (see Takayama 1974). This leaves the poles of polity, each of which is adopting elements of its opposite.

In the 1970s, White (1972: 107) wrote a proposition for future review: "Resolution of problems centering around social acceptance by the dominant society will tend to force the churches in the direction of conformity with constituting norms calling for *more decentralized decision-making* and *greater centralization* [emphasis added]." Thus, even more than thirty years ago, the middle ground was becoming some combination of centralized authority and decentralized decision making. While the poles of polity remain the same, they

are each, to borrow the Hegelian/Marxian triad, navigating toward a synthesis of thesis (centralized) and antithesis (decentralized). This parallels a similar move in other realms of society: from how we live (Old Urbanism versus Suburbanism to New Urbanism [Bohl 2000]) and how we organize metropolitan governance (Old Regionalism versus Polycentrism to New Regionalism [Savitch and Vogel 2009]) to how we manage our public sector organizations (Traditional Public Management versus New Public Management/Privatization to a synthesis that is in development [Norman 2009]). It would seem that somewhat centralized organizations that simultaneously adopt some decentralized elements are best suited to govern our congregations and communities. Churches of all stripes and sizes are moving in the direction of this middle ground—a balanced polity, or polity synthesis—that gleans best practices from both types. Whether centralization or decentralization will predominate has yet to be determined, as does the effect on societal institutional design at large.

This study has found that pronounced differences do exist today between followers of different religious traditions on seemingly nonspiritual issues. Leaders of religious denominations and congregations should carefully consider the cues, intentional and unintentional, they are displaying for congregants to absorb. In light of organizational change, do congregations still wish to encourage parishioners to pattern their political opinions after churches' wavering commitments to organizational structures that arose in the distant past? This is a question with which individual traditions must grapple as a new political and economic synthesis arises (see Norman 2009).

It is clear that political and religious pluralism has been positive for development of the United States as a liberal democracy. The United States typifies the so-called denominational principle, which “rests on the assumption that all churches are good, and it does not matter to which church one belongs, just so he [or she] belongs.” This ideal is distinctly American, the result of the “institutionalization of the norm of religious pluralism” (White 1972: 104). Despite recent attacks on religion by the “new atheists,” religious organizations should continue to take on the role of political participants in the public square, including local elections and referenda on issues such as consolidation. Their participation is not only healthy but also necessary for vibrant democracy (Putnam 2000). If Louisville contained a different mix of religious traditions (e.g., fewer Roman Catholics) but the same sociodemographic composition, it is possible (maybe even likely) that consolidation would not have been enacted. Religious bodies, no matter the tradition, wield power and must use this power peacefully to craft the better worlds envisioned by their tradition.

Finally, on the political front, my findings allow reformer-entrepreneurs to look beyond class and racial lines to better rally support or opposition for reforms of metropolitan government or governance. For example, lower, middle, and

upper class groupings, particularly among whites, are all divided along religious lines. Although lower strata may be more fundamentalist and upper strata might be more mainline, it is clear that each level of society has elements of many religious traditions. Emphasizing a particular economic subgroup—the poor, the middle class, or the wealthy—in a political or policy campaign is naive if one does not differentiate potential supporters among each grouping. Because of beliefs about religious and societal authority, it may be wise to target grassroots efforts at particular religious traditions that are predisposed to support one’s cause.

Republicans have rallied religious publics very well in recent elections, and Democrats are getting better at speaking the language of faith, as demonstrated by their successful 2008 bid for the White House (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2008; Smidt et al. 2010). Most observers would agree that partisan affiliation is not as significant in local elections as it is in national elections. This does not mean that political differences in party or ideology do not matter locally—far from it. But locally, voters may reach across the aisle to support a friend or family member’s bid for office or a “commonsense” policy strategy originating with the other party. After all, local politics are often more mundane politics—or “sewage without tears,” to use one metaphor (John 2009: 19)—that can elicit less passionate responses and lower electoral turnout. But if religious differences exist over seemingly mundane issues such as whether two independent governments should merge, maybe religion matters for a whole host of local issues—perhaps even sewage.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Or definitely sewage (see Gill 2010).

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